

READ ABOUT TOM MERRY'S "NEW DEAL" AT ST. JIM'S!

# *The* **GEM** 2<sup>d</sup>



**TOM MERRY'S  
TRIUMPH!**

LIVELY SCENES AND AMAZING EVENTS MARK THE ELECTIONEERING FOR THE CAPTAINCY OF ST. JIM'S!

# TOM MERRY'S



"If you elect me captain of St. Jim's," said Tom Merry, "I promise to stand up for the rights of the juniors." "Hurrah!" yelled the juniors. "Fagging will be abolished—" "Bravo!" "Bullying will be put down with a firm hand—" "Hear, hear!" There was no doubt that Tom Merry's candidature was popular.

## CHAPTER 1.

### The Unexpected Happens!

"THERE'S somethin' goin' on, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's imparted that information with a sage shake of the head.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were talking footer, but they politely left off as Arthur Augustus made his remark. The swell of the Fourth Form was looking very serious indeed.

"Well, what's the news?" asked Tom Merry.

"I'm afwaid it's somethin' sewious!"

"Your tailor sent his bill in?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

"Or has the order gone forth that juniors' collars are to be limited to a height of six inches—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Nothing happened to your monoele, I hope?" asked Lowther, with an expression of real concern.

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah," said D'Arcy, with some asperity. "I wish you could be sewious at such a

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time, and on a sewious subject. It's somethin' to do with old Kildare."

"Kildare?"

The Terrible Three were interested at once. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was the idol of the Lower School. Certainly, he sometimes came down rather heavily upon the chums of the Shell, but not more than half as often as they deserved. And although he had a really "hefty" way of laying on the cane when he used it, the Terrible Three never faltered in their loyalty to old Kildare.

"What's happened?" asked Manners.

"In the first place, a telegwam awwived—"

"That's happened before, and no bones broken," Monty Lowther remarked. "I've had telegrams myself."

"Pway don't talk wot, Lowthah. Kildare looked fwihtfully wowwied when he wead the telegwam, and Levison says he heard him say, 'My poor uncle!'"

"His uncle," said Lowther reflectively. "Aha, that lets in a light on the matter! 'Oh, my prophetic soul, my uncle!' as Hamlet remarks. Kildare has been putting his Sunday topper up the spout, and that wire was from his 'uncle' to remind him that the ticket was up! Poor old Kildare!"

"You uttah ass, it could not have been that kind of uncle. Aftah that, Kildare went at once to the Head."

"What did he say to the Head?"

"How should I know, you duffer?" demanded D'Arcy.

"Didn't Levison hear anything? Couldn't he get anywhere near the keyhole?"

"I weally do not know; and, in any case, I should wefuse to listen to anythin' heard at a keyhole," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "But aftah that, Kildare huwwied like anythin' to his study and started packin'."

"Packin'?" exclaimed the Terrible Three in a breath.

"Yaas; Levison says he's packin' his bags."

"Keyhole again!" grinned Manners. "But what is he packing his bags for?" said Lowther, with a perplexed look. "Is he going somewhere where he will require a change of trousers?"

"You silly duffah!" exclaimed D'Arcy, exasperated. "When I say his bags, I do not mean his bags, I mean his bags, you ass!"

"Lucid, I must say!" commented Lowther.

"Levison says he is packin' two bags and—"

"A pair of bags?" suggested Lowther.

READ HOW TOM MERRY & CO. PROVIDE AN ELEVENTH-HOUR SENSATION TO SAVE  
THE SCHOOL FROM "GOING TO THE DOGS"!

# TRIUMPH!

By  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

"Two twavellin' bags!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Twavellin' bags, you duffah. Not twucks—twavellin' bags! That looks as if he is goin' away. That's why I say there's somethin' sewious goin' on. I suppose even you silly asses would wogard it as sewious if old Kildare cleared off."

"By Jove! I should jolly well say so!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "But why should he be going? If he's had bad news—"

"I weally think it's up to us to go to him and express our sympathy," said Arthur Augustus. "That's what I was thinkin' of. At the same time, we can ask him what's on, you know."

Jack Blake of the Fourth came down the passage with Digby and Herries—all three of them looking rather excited. "You fellows heard?" asked Blake. "They say Kildare's leaving!" said Digby.

"Levison says—" began Herries. "Yes, we've just heard from D'Arcy that he's packing his trousers!" said Lowther.

"His bags!" shrieked D'Arcy. "Same thing. I suppose when a chap starts packing his trousers it means that something serious has happened," went on Lowther imperturbably. "Let's go and ask him."

"Rather a check, don't you think?" said Blake.

Lowther nodded calmly.

"Certainly; but we're famous for our check. Come on!"

And Monty Lowther led the way towards Kildare's study. In spite of his humorous remarks, Lowther was as concerned as the others at the idea that old Kildare might have had bad news. But he could not resist the temptation to pull the aristocratic leg of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

There was a group of juniors in the passage outside Kildare's study, talking somewhat excitedly. Evidently, the news had spread. Levison was the centre of the group, and he was the object of interest. Levison, as usual, had gained information by applying to the keyhole.

"He looks awfully cut up," said Levison, "and he's shoving the things anyhow into his bags. He's going—that's a cert."

"If he goes for good, there will be a new captain wanted at St. Jim's!" remarked Gore of the Shell.

"Chance for Knox!" observed Melish.

"Or Cutts of the Fifth," said another. "Cutts came very near putting up for election last time, you know."

"Oh, rats! A Fifth Former!" sniffed Reilly of the Fourth. "We're not going to have a Fifth Form chap for captain of the school—especially Cutts!"

The next moment Reilly gave a yell as a finger and thumb closed like a vice upon his ear. Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth Form, had come down the passage just in time to hear his observation.

"What's that, Reilly?" said Cutts pleasantly as he compressed his grip upon the junior's ear. "Taking my name in vain, eh?"

"Ow!" yelled Reilly. "Leggo, you

beast! I said we wouldn't have you for captain of the school at any price, and we won't intirely! Yow-ow!"

Cutts gave his ear another twist, and smiled genially and walked on. Reilly looked after him with a sulphurous expression.

"The baste!" he said, rubbing his ear.

"The bullying baste!"

"Well, you asked for it!" grinned Levison. "Why shouldn't Cutts be captain of the school? I think it would be a pleasant change, after Kildare."

"You're a rotter!" growled Jack Blake. "You'd like another rotter to be captain of the school, of course. Shut up!"

"Look here—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake.

And Levison considered it more judicious to shut up.

"But Kildare isn't gone yet," remarked Tom Merry. "You're rather previous in settling the point. Let's speak to Kildare."

"I was wonderin' whethah we should be justified, aftah all, in wowyin' Kildare at a time like this—"

"Go on wondering, Gussy," said Monty Lowther genially, and he knocked at Kildare's door.

"Come in!"

Lowther opened the door, and the chums of the School House crowded in. There were certainly many signs of departure in Kildare's study. Two

*Who shall be captain of  
St. Jim's? It was odds on  
Gerald Cutts, the black sheep of  
the Fifth—until Tom Merry  
entered the field!*

large travelling-bags were wide open, half-packed, and all sorts of articles were strewn about on the chairs, the table, and the floor. Kildare, in his shirtsleeves, was looking red and hurried, as he jammed article after article into the bags.

"Excuse us, Kildare, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "We are wathah concerned about you. May we ventuah to inkuah whethah you have had any bad news?"

"Yes," said Kildare concisely.

"Awfully sowwy!"

"Very sorry, Kildare," said Tom Merry; "but you are not leaving?"

"My uncle in Ireland is ill," said Kildare quietly. "It may be very serious. I'm going at once; I'm catching the next train at Rylcombe."

"But you're coming back!" exclaimed Tom, in dismay.

"Yes, I'm coming back, but I don't know when. It may be a week or two—or months," said Kildare. "It all depends."

"Oh crumbs! How are we going to get on without you, Kildare?"

Kildare smiled.

"I dare say the school will run on without me, Merry. Of course, there will have to be an election for a new captain. I hope you kids will vote for the right man."

"Oh, you can rely on that!" said Blake promptly. "We'll take jolly good care that a School House chap gets in, and that it isn't left to a New House boulder!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Depend on that, Kildare!"

"I didn't mean exactly that," said Kildare, laughing. "The right man might be a New House fellow."

"Oh, imposs, deah boy!"

"It's up to the School House, of course," said Manners.

"We'll keep the rotters out!" said Blake confidently. "I'll put up for captain myself rather than let a New House rotter sneak in!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, you'll have to settle it for yourselves," said Kildare. "Buzz off now, will you? I'm rather busy."

"Can't we help you pack?" asked Blake.

"Thanks! I can manage."

And Kildare, who had not ceased packing while he spoke, turned away, as a very plain hint to the juniors that their presence was not required. Tom Merry & Co. left the study, and closed the door.

"Well, that's news, and no mistake," said Tom, with a whistle. "There's going to be some excitement now. An election for a new captain will buck things up."

"Yaas, wathah! You chaps wemem-bah that I put up for captain once—"

"We remember!" agreed Blake.

"But if you start being funny like that again, we shall take you into a quiet corner and suffocate you!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, we're going to give Kildare a send-off, and then we'll meet in committee and decide upon our candidate."

"Hear, hear!"

And when Kildare started for the station, more than half the school gathered at the gates to see him off, and sent a thunderous cheer after him.

When he was gone, one great question was debated in every corner of the old school with the keenest interest—one question that interested everybody, from the head prefect to the smallest and inkiest fag in the Lower School—the question as to who was to take old Kildare's place as captain of St. Jim's?

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Crisis!

**F**IGGINS of the Fourth rushed into his study in the New House at St. Jim's, his face blazing with excitement.

Kerr and Wynn were there, looking quite calm and sedate, as if nothing unusual was happening.

Kerr was working out some weird problem in mathematics and did not

even look up as Figgins rushed in. Kerr did that kind of thing for pleasure. He was built that way. Fatty Wynn was demolishing a bag of tarts, which was his way of taking pleasure. That was the way he was built.

"Have you heard?" gasped Figgins. No reply.

Kerr was deep in his problem, and Fatty Wynn had his mouth full of jam tart. Reply was impossible in the circumstances.

Figgins snorted.

"Wake up, you silly asses!" he shouted. "Talk about Julius Caesar fiddling while Rome was burning—"

That woke Kerr up. He looked up from his problem.

"It was Nero, you ass!" he said.

Then he looked down again, and resumed his mental labours.

"I don't care whether it was Nero or Julius Caesar!" howled Figgins. "Wake up! Put that rot away!"

And the excited and energetic Figgins jerked the paper away from the table before Kerr, and tossed it into the study fire, and then grabbed Fatty Wynn's bag of tarts, and hurled it out of the window.

Both juniors were upon their feet in a second.

"You ass!" yelled Kerr.

"You silly chump!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Collar him!"

"Bump him!"

"Shut up!" shouted Figgins. "Can't you understand? I tell you this is the chance of a lifetime for the New House to score, and here you sit eating mathematics and working out tarts—I mean, eating tarts and working out filthy mathematics!"

"What's happened?"

"Don't I keep on telling you?" howled Figgins. "It's our big chance, the chance of a giddy lifetime!"

"You haven't told us anything, so far," remarked Kerr.

"I think I'll buzz out and look for my tarts," said Fatty Wynn, making for the door. "I'll hear your news when I come in, Figgy."

Figgins grasped his fat chum by the shoulder, whirled him away from the door, and plumped him into the armchair with a concussion that shook the whole study.

"You'll hear it now, fathead!" he roared.

"Ow!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Groogh Ow!"

"Has anything happened?" asked Kerr, interested at last. It was not like Figgins to be so wildly excited over nothing.

"Anything happened!" hooted Figgins. "If you hadn't been sticking here in the study like a pair of—of Chinese mandarins you'd have heard. The New House might go to the giddy bow-bows, and the School House score all along the line, for all you'd care, so long as you had plenty of filthy tarts and disgusting mathematics."

"Those tarts were prime!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Mrs. Taggles made 'em fresh to-day, and they were twopenny ones."

"Cheese it! If you say tarts again, I'll bump you on the floor!" said the indignant Figgins.

"But those tarts— Oh! Ow! Yaroooh!"

Figgins was as good as his word. He grasped the fat Fourth Former, hauled him out of the armchair, and bumped him on the hearthrug. Fatty Wynn roared.

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"Ow, ow, ow! You silly ass! Yow-ow!"

"There!" panted Figgins. "Now perhaps you'll listen, and stop talking about tarts. I tell you this is the time of our lives, the time to get a New House chap in as captain of St. Jim's."

"What!"

"New to you, of course," snorted Figgins. "You don't know that Kildare has gone—"

"Kildare gone!" ejaculated Kerr.

"Kildare gone!" gasped Fatty Wynn, as he scrambled up. In his astonishment he forbore to rush upon Figgins and hammer him in return for the bumping on the hearthrug.

"Of course you didn't know. So long as you have plenty of filthy—"

"Oh, ring off, and tell us the news!" said Kerr. "What has Kildare gone for?"

"His aunt, or something, is ill in Ireland, or Scotland, or somewhere," said Figgins, rather vaguely. "He's gone, and he'll be a long time away. Perhaps won't come back at all."

"Sorry for that."

"Yes, yes; I'm sorry, too. But this is a time to be up and doing! Don't you see, this is where we get a New House chap in as captain of the school!" said Figgins excitedly. "It's the chance of our lives! Don't you see? We'll put up Monteith or Baker, or somebody as candidate. It doesn't matter whom, so long as the New House scores."

"Is there going to be an election?"

"Haven't I told you so fifty times?" demanded Figgins. "Of course there is. And what do you think, those School House rotters are scheming already to get a School House chap in as captain. I call it disgusting! Old Kildare hardly out of the place, and they're laying plans to get a chap of their House into his shoes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr.

Figgins glared at him.

"What are you cackling at, you image?"

"Aren't you planning to get a chap of our House into his shoes, then?" grinned Kerr.

"That's different, of course—quite different. I suppose you'll agree that the School House isn't going to have a walk-over in this election!" said Figgins hotly.

"Yes, rather!"

"New House hasn't much chance," said Fatty Wynn, with a shake of the head. "There are nearly twice as many fellows in the School House, and the rotters will stick together like glue to keep us out."

"Yes; that's like them!" growled Figgins. "Tom Merry & Co. are always up against Blake & Co.; but they'll stick together as thick as thieves to keep the election in the School House. I call it disgusting the way they do it. Still, if we all stand together over here, and vote as one man, we may pull it off. United we stand, divided we fall, you know, and every fellow must back up his own House. What are you grinning at, Kerr, you blithering ass?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Kerr blandly.

"I agree with you. We've got to get a New House candidate, and get him in. New House for ever!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn heartily. "And if there's more than one candidate on the School House side the vote will be split, and we shall have a look in."

"That's just it!" said Figgins eagerly. "I've heard already that two School House chaps are going to put

up—Knox of the Sixth and Cutts of the Fifth. They'll divide the vote in the House, while we shall vote solid for one man."

"Cutts has a good many friends in this House," Kerr remarked thoughtfully. "A lot of the New House seniors are in his set."

"If any New House chap votes against his House, he'll be ragged and hanged, drawn and quartered!" said Figgins darkly. "Senior or junior, no chap is going to be allowed to go back on his House. That's settled! Why, it's dog's ages since a New House chap was captain of St. Jim's! Those rotters over the way claim to be Cook House, because they always elect a School House chap captain. We're going to alter all that this time. This is where we come in!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. heartily.

"In fact, I was thinking that we might call on Tom Merry, and put it to him as a man and a brother," said Figgins. "Nobody wants a cad like Knox or Cutts as captain of the school. We could point out to Tom Merry that our man, Monteith, is just the man that's wanted."

"We could point it out," agreed Kerr, "but I don't feel sure that you'd get Tom Merry to see it."

"He's on fighting terms with both Knox and Cutts," said Figgins.

"That wouldn't make any difference, when it's a question of backing up his own House against this side," said Kerr sagely.

"Well, it ought to," said Figgins warmly.

"Perhaps it ought, but it won't. You'll see—"

Kerr was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Oh, come in!" rapped out Figgins. The door opened, and the Terrible Three came in. Figgins & Co. looked at them rather grimly. They had come just in time for Figgins to put it to Tom Merry as a man and a brother, as he expressed it.

## CHAPTER 3.

### A Peaceful Visit!

"AHEM!" said Tom Merry.

"Well?" demanded Figgins.

"Ahem!"

"Got a cold?" asked Kerr,

with concern.

"A cold? No!"

"Then what are you coughing about?"

"Ahem!"

"Don't hurry," said Figgins kindly. "There's lots of time—though you might get your vocal exercises over before you pay a visit. But take your time."

Tom Merry coloured a little.

"Ahem! You see, we've come to speak to you chaps on a rather important matter. The fact is, Figgy, I've come to talk sense to you."

"Rather a change—eh?" said Figgins.

"Look here—" began Tom Merry warmly; but Manners touched him on the arm, and he coughed again and became exceedingly polite. "The fact is Figgy—ahem!"

"Go it!" said Figgins encouragingly.

"Only I'm afraid you will wear out the inside of your neck at this rate. But don't mind me."

"You know Kildare has gone—"

"I saw him off."

"And we're going to have a new election for captain—"

"I suppose so."

"It's admitted on all hands," continued Tom Merry, "that the captain of

St. Jim's is always elected from the School House."

"Is it?" said Figgins grimly.

"Oh, yes! Now, I've come to talk to you like an uncle," said Tom Merry. "It occurred to me—ahem!—that you fellows might have got some wild idea into your heads of putting up a New House chap for captain."

"Barely possible, isn't it?" said Figgins sarcastically.

"My idea," went on Tom, "is that we should all stand together—all St. Jim's as one man, you know, on this question. Union is strength. United we stand, divided we come a mucker. The whole school ought to stand shoulder to shoulder at a time like this, and elect the right candidate, irrespective of the House he belongs to."

Figgins thawed visibly.

"Now you're talking hoss-sense!" he exclaimed heartily. "I agree with you all along the line. That's just what I was thinking."

"Oh, good!"

"I was only just saying to Kerr that I was going to suggest that very thing to you," said Figgins. "You've got lots of influence with the kids on the other side, and lots of them will follow your lead. You do the right thing, and we'll get the right man in in old Kildare's place."

"Figg, you're a jolly sensible chap," said Tom Merry admiringly. "I must say I never expected you to take such a sensible view of the case."

"I never expected it of you, for that matter," said Figgins. "We seem to be in agreement. The right man has got to get in, and blow what House he belongs to."

"Hear, hear!" said the Terrible Three unanimously.

"And you'll vote for our man," said Figgins.

"Eh?"

"Our candidate—"

"But you haven't got a candidate," said Lowther.

"We're going to have one."

"Not a New House chap."

"Yes, a New House chap, of course," said Figgins. "Haven't you just said that the right man has got to be elected, irrespective of his House?"

"Ye-es; but, of course, he's going to be a School House chap," said Tom Merry. "That's understood."

Figgins snorted.

"Oh, rats! There you go again! Our opinion is that it's time a New House chap was captain of the school, and we're going to get our head prefect—Monteith—to put up. What have you got to say against Monteith?"

"Oh, nothing, except—that he isn't the right man!"

"Why isn't he?" demanded Figgins.

"Ahem! We've got a lot of better fellows on our side—Darrell, or Rushden, or Langton—"

"Bosh! Monteith's the man!"

"Now, look here, Figg, this is a time for all St. Jim's to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, and—"

"And elect your man?" sniffed Figgins.

"Well, yes, I suppose it comes to that," admitted Tom Merry. "I want to put this to you as a reasonable chap."

"I was going to talk to you as a reasonable chap, but it doesn't seem much good," said Figgins. "You chaps have a weird idea in your heads that the School House is Cock House of St. Jim's—"

"Well, isn't it?" demanded the Terrible Three with one voice.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Figgins crossly. "Besides, what candidate have

you got? Knox of the Sixth, a rotten bully; and Cutts of the Fifth, a beastly blackguard. You know as well as I do that Cutts is a gambler, a pub-haunter, a regular black sheep. Nice kind of a captain for St. Jim's, I must say!"

"We don't want either Knox or Cutts," said Tom Merry promptly. "There will be a better man put up. There hasn't been time yet."

"And the better man will belong to this House," said Figgins.

"Rats!"

"If Figgins cannot take the matter seriously—" began Manners.

"It's you silly asses who are not taking it seriously!" hooted Figgins. "We won't have Knox or Cutts at any price—"

"But what about Darrell, or Langton?"

like Knox, than a really decent man from this side."

"Well, your Monteith is rather a bully, if you come to that. You've had plenty of rows with him yourself," said Lowther.

"One forgets little personal differences at a time like this," said Figgins loftily.

"Then we can forget our little personal differences with Cutts of the Fifth."

"That's different."

"How is it different?" demanded Lowther.

"No good talking sense to a silly ass!" said Figgins. "There's none so blind as those who won't see. Any silly chump could see at once that Monteith is the right man."

"That accounts for your seeing it,



The uproar made by the struggling juniors in the passage was terrific, and they did not hear the approach of Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. But they knew it the next moment as his cane came into play!

"Blow Darrell and Langton!"

"Besides, they won't put up, most likely," said Kerr. "Darrell's working for an examination now, and he won't have the time; and Langton never shoves himself forward in anything. All the good men are on our side—Monteith or Baker or Webb—"

"Rot!"

"You've got two candidates," said Figgins, "and they're the rottenest you could scrape up even in that old casual ward you call a House. You can't say that either Cutts or Knox would make a good captain of the school."

"Admitted!" said Tom Merry.

"Then you'll vote for our man?"

"No fear! Must be a School House chap!"

"I suppose I was an ass to think for a moment that you could talk sense," said Figgins disdainfully. "You'd rather have a cad like Cutts, or a bully

I suppose?" Lowther remarked reflectively.

And Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Monty Lowther, you've come to the right shop," said Figgins darkly. "In fact, if you fellows are going to play the giddy ock over this election, it wouldn't be a bad idea to start by giving you a jolly good wallop all round!"

"Might knock some sense into them," assented Kerr.

The Terrible Three looked warlike at once. They, too, were exasperated by their rivals' obstinate view of the case.

"We came here on a peaceable errand," said Tom Merry warmly. "But we're quite ready to wipe up the study with you chaps, if you come to that."

"Pile in, then!" said Figgins defiantly. "Here's the study, and here's us!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"For two pins I'd wipe up the floor with you, Figgins!" roared Tom Merry.

Figgins promptly searched on the mantelpiece, found two pins, and extended them to the captain of the Shell.

"There you are!" he snorted.

"You silly ass!"

"You burbling chump!"

No more was said. Tom Merry's left arm was embracing Figgins' neck the next moment, and his right was very busy. Both Figgins' hands were busy. And in less time than it takes to tell, as a novelist would put it, Kerr and Wynn, and Manners and Lowther, were mixed up in a wild and whirling tussle.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

"Ow, you rotter!"

"Groogh! You fathead!"

"Yow-ow! School House cad! Yow!"

"New House rotter! Groogh!"

"Chuck the cads out!" roared Figgins.

Manners went out first, and landed in the passage with a bump. But it was Figgins who followed him, chucked out of his own study. Kerr and Lowther came whirling out together, and stumbled over Figgins and Manners, and made a wild and wriggling heap in the passage. Tom Merry and Fatty Wynn staggered out after them, chucking one another out. The uproar in the passage was terrific, and the excited juniors did not hear steps upon the stairs.

Monteith of the Sixth, the head prefect of the New House, came up the stairs three at a time, with a cane in his hand.

He did not stop to talk. There was no need for words. Action was required, and the prefect's actions were prompt and emphatic.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow! Ow! Yaroooh!"

The combatants separated suddenly. Figgins & Co. bolted back into their study, and slammed the door. The Terrible Three ran for the stairs, with Monteith behind them, still lashing out with the cane.

Tom Merry and his chums were feeling decidedly ill-used by the time they escaped from the New House, and fled across the quadrangle. Monteith grinned at them from the doorway.

"And that's the rotter Figgins wants us to vote for!" growled Monty Lowther, as they dodged into the School House.

"Catch us voting for him!" sniffed Manners.

"Blessed if I wouldn't rather have Cutts!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Seems to me we've had cuts—too many of them," said Lowther.

"Oh, don't be funny now!"

And in Figgins' study in the New House the Co. were rubbing their injuries, and grumbling with emphasis.

"Monteith is rather a handy beast with the cane," Figgins remarked.

"Rotten!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "I got three."

"And I got two!" growled Kerr.

"Blessed if I haven't half a mind to vote for a School House man, after all!"

But Figgins shook his head.

"We're going to vote for Monteith, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,500.

if he skins us!" he said. "It's up to the New House."

And the Co. grunted and agreed.

## CHAPTER 4.

### A Most Important Meeting!

"THREE giddy candidates!"

Jack Blake remarked.

It was the morning.

The previous evening the St. Jim's fellows had discussed the question of the vacant captaincy in all its bearings.

The School House fellows were almost unanimously of opinion that the new captain must be a School House chap. They really felt that the stars in their courses would object to anything else. That was a rule as firmly fixed as the solar system, or the laws of the Medes and Persians.

The New House fellows, on the other hand, were perfectly unanimous in declaring that the time had come for a change, and that it was high time the New House had a look in.

A popular candidate on the School House side, standing alone, would have been assured of an easy victory, for the School House had nearly twice as many occupants as the smaller House over the way.

But it had to be admitted that neither Knox nor Cutts was popular.

Also, the candidates split the vote.

With the School House divided between the two, the New House had an excellent chance of getting their man in—especially as many School House fellows in the Senior Forms undoubtedly preferred Monteith to either Knox or Cutts.

Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth, was popular with a certain set; but he was a black sheep, and all the more thoughtful fellows were against him. Knox was a bully, and very much disliked in the Lower School.

Monteith of the New House had his faults, but he was a good footballer, a good captain of his House, and he had a great deal of influence. He was likely to make a better captain of the school than either of the others. As Tom Merry remarked, if he had only been in the School House there wouldn't have been any doubt upon the election; they'd have plumped for Monteith, and left Cutts and Knox out in the cold.

As it was, the matter was in doubt.

After morning lessons, Tom Merry called a meeting in the Junior Common-room to discuss the election. The meeting was well attended. Most of the juniors looked to Tom Merry to give them a lead.

"The question is, are we going to vote for a cad like Cutts, or a brute like Knox, or let a New House chap romp home?" said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth.

"It's wathah a difficult mattah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully. "We don't want that boundah Cutts, and we don't want that brute Knox—but, above all, we don't want a New House fellow!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Seems no way out of it," said Jack Blake; "but we can't let the New House man get in, that's a dead cert!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gentlemen——" began Tom Merry. There was a buzz of talk, and Monty Lowther rapped on the table.

"Silence for the chair!" he shouted.

"Who's the chair?" demanded Blake.

"I'm chairman of this meeting——"

"Who made you chairman?" a dozen voices inquired at once.

Rap, rap, rap!

"Order! Gentlemen, Tom Merry will now address the meeting——"

"I have some remarks to make myself, Lowthah——"

"You can go out into the passage and make them, D'Arcy. Tom Merry will now address the honourable meeting, and——"

"I wufuse to go out into the beastly passage and make my remarks——"

"Order!"

"I wufuse to ordah——"

"Chuck that heckler out!" shouted Lowther. "Boot him out!"

"You wottah——"

"Silence!" shouted Manners. "Pile in, Tommy!"

"Gentlemen! I——"

"I was goin' to say—— Ow! Yow! Leggo, Mannahs, you silly ass, or I shall stwike you!"

"Order!"

"Yes, shut up a bit, Gussy," said Blake. "You can have your whack after Tom Merry's finished."

"Wats! Let Tom Merry have his whack after I'm finished!"

"But you never are finished, you know," remarked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I considah——"

"Silence!"

The united efforts of Blake, Herries, and Digby reduced Arthur Augustus to indignant silence at last, and Tom Merry proceeded:

"Gentlemen, we have now reached an important and unequalled crisis in the history of St. Jim's——"

"Hear, hear!"

"The good old school is in danger of falling from its high estate, and, in plain English, of sliding off to the giddy bow-wows!"

"Is that plain English?" asked Blake, in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!"

"We are in danger," resumed Tom Merry, "of getting a New House chap as captain of the school. Gentlemen, that calamity must be warded off! Such a state of things must never come to pass. Every fellow must buck up and keep the New House man out. Is anyone here who would have a New House bounder as captain of the school? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Is anyone here who would give his own House the go-by and let in a rotter from over the way? If any, speak, for him have I offended."

"Hear, hear!"

"Give Shakespeare a rest, and come down to business," implored Blake.

"Gentlemen, if there are none here who would go back on their own House, and let in a bounder from the rival show, let none speak, for none have I offended," went on Tom Merry, who had prepared that speech in advance, and was naturally determined to deliver it in its entirety. "Gentlemen, I had rather be a dog and bay the moon, than such a Roman!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It is settled, therefore, gentlemen, that a School House chap must prance off with the biscuit——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And any outsider who tries to wedge in must get it where the chicken got the chopper—in the neck!" said Tom Merry, waxing more eloquent as he proceeded. "But, behold——"

"Well, that's a good word!" murmured Blake.

"Behold, at this crisis in our history, there is a split in the House! Two candidates have put up to divide the

vote. And it must be admitted that neither candidate possesses the confidence of this House."

"Vewy twee—"  
"Yes, rather; pair of rotters!"  
"I guess that's so," said Lumley-Lumley; "but any old thing is better than having a New House man."

"Yaas, wathah! That would be the howlin' limit."

"Gentlemen, there is therefore only one thing to be done—"

"Pile in!"  
"What's the wheeze?"  
"There must be another candidate found."

"Oh!" said the meeting, in surprise.  
"We must discover a candidate more acceptable to the feelings of this House," said Tom Merry firmly.  
"Some more respectable and respected person must be made to come forward, and then Knox and Cutts will get the marble eye."

"Hear, hear!"  
"Pway allow me to speak—"  
"Order! Silence! Shut up!"  
"I insist upon sayin' a word—"  
"Boot him out!"

"I wefuse to be booted out! I have a candidate to suggest."

"Members of the meeting are allowed to suggest candidates," said Tom Merry graciously. "Buck up, Gussy, and give him a name!"

"You chaps wemembah that I put up as captain once—"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally wogard myself as a wight and wpopah person to be skippah of this coll. I have the honah to wpopose myself for the sufragees of this hono'wable meetin'," said the swell of the Fourth, with dignity.

"Order!"  
"I pwotest!"  
"Kick him out!" roared the meeting.

Business was interrupted for a few moments, while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was deposited in the passage on his neck.

Kangaroo of the Shell slammed the door upon him, and his indignant voice was no longer heard.

"Now to business," said Tom Merry briskly. "Gentlemen, there are plenty of Sixth Form chaps in the School House in whom we have confidence. I may say that no person could possibly make a good captain of the school who did not possess the confidence of the juniors."

"Hear, hear!"  
"Old Kildare was the right sort."  
"Good old Kildare!" chorused the meeting.

"Unless the Lower School bucks up, I fear there will be a worse come in his place," said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, I suggest a deputation of the Lower School to wait upon a proper candidate, and make him come forward. Darrell of the Sixth is our man."

"Bravo!"  
"Darrell is hiding his light under a bushel at present. But this isn't a time for him to blush unseen and waste his sweetness on the desert air. At this crisis in our history he has got to come forward, and if he won't come, he's got to be made!"

"Hurrah!"  
"Gentlemen, I appoint myself chairman of a deputation—"

"Like your cheek!" said Blake.  
"I select Reilly, Lowther, Manners, Blake, Kangaroo, Herries, Digby, and Lumley-Lumley as members of the deputation."

"Good egg!" said all the juniors named, with hearty concurrence.  
"And as there is no time like the



present, I vote that we strike the iron while it is hot, and get to Darrell at once. He's in his study now, swotting over some filthy exam or other. Let's have him out."

"Hear, hear!"  
"At a time like this, with the fate of the old school trembling in the balance, it's no time for Darrell to think of disgusting examinations!"  
"Shame!"

"It's up to us to point out his duty to him and see that he does it. Gentlemen, the deputation will now accompany me to Darrell's study, and all the other fellows can come along and stay in the passage, and cheer when I give the signal."

"Good egg!"  
Tom Merry's proposal was carried unanimously. The captain of the Shell marched off, followed by the deputation; and the rest of the meeting marched after them like an army. And in a few minutes the Sixth Form passage was swarmed, and buzzing like a hive of bees.

## CHAPTER 5.

### No Luck!

KNOX of the Sixth looked out of his study doorway.

Knox's face was unusually amiable.

As a rule, Knox was what the juniors described as a beastly bully, and if he found a junior within reach of his hand,

that was generally sufficient reason for Knox to cuff him. That little habit of Knox's did not endear him to the Lower School.

But Knox, the bully, and Knox, the candidate for the captaincy, were two quite different persons. Knox was very keen to get in as captain of the school. And he knew that he had not the slightest chance of getting in unless he could ingratiate himself

with the juniors and obtain their votes.

So Knox twisted his unpleasant countenance into an unaccustomed grin as he looked at the juniors in the Sixth Form passage.

"Hallo, what are you kids after?" he asked.

Blake winked at his comrades. He could not resist the opportunity of pulling the leg of the unpopular prefect.

"We're a deputation," he said.

"Oh, are you?" said Knox amiably.

"About the election, I suppose?"

"That's it. We've come to see the Sixth Form candidate."

"Oh, good!" said Knox.

"We want to impress upon him that he's going to get all our votes, and that it's his duty to keep all rival candidates out," explained Blake.

Knox nodded with satisfaction.

"That's right," he said. "You back up the Sixth Form candidate. It's simply ridiculous for Cutts to put up for election. There never was a Fifth Former captain of St. Jim's that I know of!"

"That's what we all say," remarked Monty Lowther, entering into Blake's little joke. "Cutts is simply out of it!"

"Certainly!" said Knox.

"Like his cheek to put up, don't you think, Knox?"

"Decidedly!"

"Besides, he isn't the kind of captain we want."

"Of course he isn't," agreed Knox.

"What we want is a really straight, out-and-out fellow—a fellow one can rely on—a fellow who's as good as his word, and can always be depended on to play the game," said Manners.

Knox grinned a little uneasily. That description did not apply to him, and he knew it, and he was surprised to hear Manners speak like that. But it had not yet occurred to him that the deputation had come to the Sixth Form quarters to see anybody but himself.

"Ye-es, exactly!" said Knox.

"You approve of our views, Knox, I hope?" asked Manners solemnly.

"Most certainly!" said Knox.

"Then you'll come with us to ask Darrell to put up?" said Blake innocently.

Knox's jaw dropped.

"Darrell!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, we want Darrell to put up as our candidate—that's what we've come here for," Blake explained, apparently not noticing the change in the Sixth Former's face.

Knox's teeth gritted together, and his eyes gleamed with fury.

"You—you've come here to ask Darrell to put up?" he shouted.

"Yes. Didn't you know?" said Blake, with angelic innocence.

(Continued on the next page.)



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"You—you young rotter!"

"Why, just now you said you agreed with us and approved!" exclaimed Blake in astonishment. "There seems to be no pleasing you, Knox."

"You—you—I thought—I mean I—"

"Won't you come with us to ask Darrell to put up?"

"No, I won't!" roared Knox. "Get out of this passage at once! How dare you fags crowd round the senior studies like this?"

"But we've come to—"

"Clear off at once!"

There was a howl of laughter from the crowd of juniors. Knox's change of attitude, as soon as he discovered that the deputation was for Darrell, and not for himself, was very striking. But the juniors did not mean to be ordered off. They had come there to interview Darrell—and they meant to interview Darrell.

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry, with great politeness, as Knox repeated his angry order. "We're here on business, you know, and we're not going just yet."

"If you don't clear out of this passage I'll come and boot you out!" roared Knox furiously.

"Well, if you can boot fifty chaps out you're welcome to try it on," said Jack Blake, laughing. "I fancy somebody will get hurt, and I suspect that it won't be us. But come and begin the booting. Knox!"

Knox did not come and begin the booting. The juniors were rather too many for him. So Knox went back into his study and slammed the door forcibly; and the juniors chuckled with glee.

"This is where Knox takes a back seat," Blake remarked. "Now let's get on with the washing. Have old Darrell out."

Tom Merry thumped at Darrell's door and opened it. Darrell of the Sixth was seated at the table, with books and papers round him. He did not look pleased at the intrusion as the junior deputation marched into his study.

"Hallo! What do you young shavers want?" said Darrell, which was not

encouraging for a beginning. But Tom Merry did not falter.

"We want you, Darrell," he said directly.

"Eh? What's that?"

"You're wanted to put up as captain of St. Jim's in the election now pending. We're a deputation from the Lower School, and we've come to ask you."

Tom Merry made a signal to the crowd in the passage, and there was a roar of cheering at once.

"Hurrah!"

"Darrell captain! Hurrah!"

Darrell of the Sixth smiled and shook his head.

"Sorry!" he said. "I've decided not to stand."

"Yes, we know that," said Tom Merry. "But we want you to alter your decision, you see."

"Sorry!"

"You admit, Darrell, that it won't do to let in rotters like Knox and Cutts, and—"

"You mustn't talk of seniors like that, unless you're looking for a thick ear," said Darrell, frowning. "But if you're not satisfied with Knox and Cutts there's another candidate—a really good man—Monteith of the New House—"

"Oh, rats!"

"What?" exclaimed Darrell, rising.

Darrell was a Sixth Former, and a prefect, and he was not accustomed to such rejoinders to his remarks.

"Ahem! I don't mean rats!" said Tom Merry hastily. "That was a slip of the tongue. What I mean is that we can't have a New House bouncer as captain of the school."

"Monteith's just fitted for the post," said Darrell. "I'm going to vote for him myself."

"You are?" gasped the juniors.

"Certainly! I think he's the best man."

"But he's a New House chap!" howled the deputation.

"Well, what about that?"

"Well, it's up to the School House, you know."

"Nonsense!"

"What?"

"Vote for Monteith," said Darrell. "He's the right man, in my opinion. And I think it's time the New House had a show, too. The school captain has always been selected from this House. Turn about is fair play."

"Thou, too, Brutus!" said Monty Lowther tragically.

"Oh, draw it mild, Darrell!" said Tom Merry, in indignant expostulation. "Surely you can see that we simply must get a School House chap in!"

"I don't see it at all."

"You're not going back on your own House, are you?"

"Stuff!" said Darrell. "Why shouldn't a New House chap be captain? You can't expect the Sixth to take notice of your blessed fag rows."

The deputation gazed at Darrell in speechless indignation. Their great warfare with the New House described as "fag rows"! The terrific importance of getting a School House fellow elected as captain regarded as nonsense! They could scarcely believe their own ears. As Blake said afterwards, more in sorrow than in anger, he never would have believed it of old Darrell. The only possible explanation was that Darrell had been working too hard for that blessed exam, and had gone off his chump.

"Well," said Tom Merry at last, in almost tragic tones, "I never expected you to speak like this, Darrell. If you can't see the importance of having a School House chap as captain of St. Jim's there's no more to be said."

"Quite so," said Darrell. "Close the door after you, will you?"

It was dismissal with a vengeance. Tom Merry had said there was no more to be said; but he had intended to say a good deal more, all the same. But Darrell stood with his hand on the open door, and there was nothing for it but to go.

The deputation filed slowly and sorrowfully out of the study.

"Well," said Gore, in the passage, "is this where we cheer?"

"No, it isn't," snapped Tom Merry. "Shut your silly head!"

And he led his followers sorrowfully away.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Declined With Thanks!

LANGTON of the Sixth was on the footer ground, chatting with Rushden, when he noticed quite an army of juniors marching towards him.

Langton glanced at them in surprise, and Rushden whistled.

The two Sixth Formers waited for the army to come on.

Tom Merry and his chums were in the lead, and more than fifty School House juniors brought up the rear. And they were all looking very serious.

"Hallo! What is it? House on fire?" asked Langton.

"Ahem! No. We're a deputation," Tom Merry explained.

"My hat!"

"We've come to speak to you, Langton."

"Pile in!" said Langton genially. "No extra charge."

"We've talked it over," said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand towards his supporters, "and we've decided that you are not the kind of fellow to let the old school go to the dogs, if you can help it."

Langton looked astonished.

"Certainly not!" he agreed. "If I see St. Jim's on the move in the direction of the bow-wows, I will hold it

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back with both hands. Any signs of it?"

The deputation looked a little uncomfortable. It was such an awfully serious matter that they really wished old Langton wouldn't take it in this humorous way.

"The fact is," said Tom Merry, after a brief pause, "there's going to be an election for a new captain, now Kildare's hooked it."

"I believe I've heard something of it," assented Langton.

"There are three candidates—one of them a New House chap, and the other two awful rotters; the whole crowd quite impossible," Tom Merry explained. "We want you to come to the rescue, Langton."

"We want you to put up as skipper," said Blake.

Tom Merry raised his hand as a signal to his followers, and they burst into a cheer, as previously arranged.

"Langton captain! Hurrah!"

Langton stared at them. "Hold on!" he exclaimed. "You may as well save your breath. There are three candidates already, and I don't want to stand in their light. I haven't the slightest intention of putting up as captain."

"Never mind standing in their light," said Tom Merry. "That's what we want you to do. You know Knox is no good as captain."

"Well?"

"And Cutts is in the Fifth. Now you'll admit that we don't want a captain out of any Form but the top Form in the school."

"Yes, I do think that," agreed Langton.

"Good! And Monteith is a New House chap, so he's barred. You see, some other chap must put up. You're the man!"

And the crowd cheered again.

"Langton for captain! Hurrah!"

"But I'm not going to put up," said Langton calmly. "I'm not ambitious, and I think Monteith's a good man. I'm going to vote for Monteith."

"What about the prestige of the School House?" demanded Blake hotly.

"Oh, the juniors can look after that," said Langton genially. "It will be quite safe in your hands."

The deputation looked a little sheepish.

"We're not going to have the New House man at any price," said Tom Merry flatly. "We'd rather have even Cutts of the Fifth. You ought to put up, Langton."

"Thanks, no!"

"We're a deputation."

"You've told me that before."

"And we've come to put it to you, as a decent chap."

"Oh, cut off!"

"It's your duty——"

"Stuff!"

"Very well," said the chairman of the deputation, with dignity. "There are others! If you don't want to be captain of St. Jim's, Langton, there are others who do, and we can find 'em!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Find 'em, then, and give me a rest!" yawned Langton.

Tom Merry turned to Rushden, who was listening with a grin on his face. All the deputation and the crowd turned to Rushden, too, giving Langton the cold shoulder, which did not seem, however, to worry Langton much.

"Rushden," said Tom Merry, "as a member of the Sixth, and a prefect,



and a good footballer, you are just the chap to be captain of St. Jim's."

"I?" ejaculated Rushden, in surprise.

"Yes, you! We're a deputation of the Lower School——"

"My hat!"

"And we request you to stand for election."

Tom Merry raised his hand to the crowd, and they burst into a ringing cheer once more.

"Rushden for captain! Hurrah!"

Rushden burst into a roar of laughter. The situation seemed to strike him as funny. He put his hands to his sides and yelled:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry regarded him indignantly. The crowd looked restive and wrathful.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Tom.

"Well, it struck me as humorous," said Rushden. "Thanks awfully for your good opinion, and for giving me the second offer after Langton; but I'm really not looking out for glory. Declined with thanks."

"Now, look here, Rushden——"

"Nuff said!" yawned Rushden.

"Buzz off!"

And he walked away with Langton, to put an end to the interview, leaving the deputation standing where they were, and looking decidedly wrathful and very disappointed.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Monty Lowther. "All the blessed Sixth have grown very modest all of a sudden, and want to hide their giddy illumination under a bushel."

"They don't want to stand in Monteith's way," growled Blake. "That's what it is. As for the prestige of the House, they don't care twopence for it! Disgusting, I call it!"

And the disappointed deputation walked away, and the crowd broke up. Evidently there was nothing doing.

Arthur Augustus met the angry and excited deputation as they came into the School House. His eyeglass gleamed at them inquiringly.

"Well, has it gone all wight?" he asked.

"No," growled Blake.

"Won't the Sixth Form boundahs stand?"

"They won't!"

"Then you will have to come back to my proposition," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "You had better wessolve to elect me as captain of St. Jim's, and—— Yah! Ow! Yawwooh!"

The deputation was fed-up. If Langton hadn't been a Sixth Former and a prefect, they would have bumped him on the footer ground. D'Arcy wasn't either a Sixth Former or a prefect, and he had happened along just in time to provide the angry deputation with a victim. They seized the swell of St. Jim's, and, in disregard of his yells of protest, bumped him in the doorway and rolled him down the steps.

Then, somewhat relieved in their feelings, they went their way, leaving the swell of the Fourth in a dazed and dishevelled and breathless state at the foot of the School House steps.

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Sporting Offer!

GERALD CUTTS of the Fifth Form came along after lessons that day, and looked into Knox's study.

Knox of the Sixth was sitting at his table with a pencil in his hand and a paper before him. Cutts grinned as he noted that the paper contained a list of names. The Sixth Former was evidently going over the list of his possible supporters in the forthcoming election.

Knox scowled and hid the paper with his hand as he saw Cutts.

"It's a common custom to knock at a door before shoving one's self into another fellow's room," he remarked.

"Oh, we needn't stand on ceremony with one another!" said Cutts, coming into the study and closing the door after him. "We're pals, you know."

"Not much like old pals, setting up against me in this election," growled Knox. "I never expected it of you."

"It's the unexpected that always happens, you know," said Cutts pleasantly.

"It's the election I've come to speak to you about."

"Are you going to stand down, then?"

Cutts laughed.

"Not much."

"Then I don't see that there's anything to be said."

"I do. You know Monteith is putting up on the other side, and he will get a lot of support in this House. Most of the Sixth will plump for him. They don't want a Fifth Former to be captain, and they don't want you, Knox."

"They may have to have me, whether they want to or not!" snapped Knox.

"We're splitting the vote on this side," resumed Cutts. "It looks to me as if the New House man will get in if we keep it up like this."

"Stand out, then!"

"I might as well ask you to stand out."

"You can ask, if you like," said Knox grimly.

"Can't we come to some arrangement?" Cutts asked. "Look here, we're both sportsmen! Will you toss for it?"

Knox stared at him blankly.

"Toss for it!" he repeated.

"Exactly. We can't both get in as captain, that's a dead cert, and if we remain rivals for the House vote, we shall most likely both get left, and the New House candidate will romp home. I'm willing to toss for it—a single chuck or best two out of three!"

"Well, my hat! You ass!"

"I think it's a fair offer. You've as

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much chance as I have, and it would be a sporting way of settling the point," said Cutts.

Knox felt in his pocket for his double-headed penny, and, failing to find it there, he shook his head.

"I don't believe in settling things that way," he said. "I'm going to stand for the election, and get in if I can. I think I've got a pretty good chance. You're really out of it being in the Fifth. It's always understood that the fellows elect whomsoever they please as captain."

"Yes; they elected a junior once," grinned Cutts. "The Head would have interfered, though, I think, if the kid hadn't got out of his own accord."

"He can't interfere with me. He might with you."

"Oh rats! You won't come to an amicable arrangement, then?"

"I won't toss for it, if that's what you mean. I think the idea's idiotic."

"You're not a sport," said Cutts, with a shake of the head. "Now, look here, Knox, I want very much to get in as captain, and if you don't split the vote I think I shall win it hands down. What will you take to stand out?"

"What will I take?" said Knox, in wonder.

"Yes; I'm in funds now. I had good luck over my last speculation on the Turf. Will you take a tanner to stand out?"

"Keep your beastly money!" said Knox, with a laugh.

"I'll see that you become vice-captain," said Cutts, unheeding. "I'll make you my right-hand man if you back me up. We'll change everything when we get things into our hands. I'll make it easy for you to pay off your old grudges against Tom Merry and his friends, and we'll have a regular high old time. Lots of fellows have been very restive under Kildare's rule. They'll be glad of a change. In a week or two we'll make such a change that Kildare won't know the school if he comes back. I've got all sorts of plans in my head. You back me up—"

"You back me up, if you come to that," said Knox. "Go and tackle Monteith. He may be willing to stand aside to oblige you, I don't think. Offer him a ten-pound note to stand out—if you want to leave the New House on your neck."

"I don't know," said Cutts thoughtfully. "Monteith is another Kildare now, but he used to be one of the boys. We were very thick together once, and he knew what it was to go on the razzle after lights out. I think I'll go and have a little talk with him about old times. If he'd stand aside and get me the New House vote, I should beat you hollow, Knox."

"You're welcome to try!" growled Knox.

"Thanks, I will!"

Cutts of the Fifth swung out of the study. He crossed the quadrangle towards the New House with a thoughtful brow. He had a pleasant smile or a cheery nod, however, for everyone he met. He was fully alive to the value of every vote. And Cutts, blackguard as he undoubtedly was, was popular in a way. He was rich, handsome, well-dressed, and the leader of fashion in the middle school.

Many fellows were anxious to get into Cutts' "set." Not to know Cutts was to be oneself unknown, as it were. And the stories that were whispered about

Gerald Cutts made him a sort of mysterious and romantic figure in the eyes of many of the juniors.

There was something very impressive, in a way, in the whispered rumours that Cutts "kept it up" at night with a card-playing set in the village, that he gave bridge-parties in his study with the door locked, that he smoked cigars, and kept a bottle of whisky in his locker.

A fellow who ran daily the risk of being expelled from the school must possess plenty of courage and nerve, and there was no doubt that Cutts did not know the meaning of the word fear. And, reckless and dissipated as he was in the hidden portion of his life, outwardly he was frank and genial, a generous fellow with his money, and a first-class footballer and cricketer.

There were a large number of fellows, especially in the Fifth Form, who considered that Cutts would make a first-rate successor to Kildare in the captaincy of St. Jim's.

That was Cutts' great ambition, and if he succeeded there was certain to be a big change after the Kildare regime. Kildare had kept down the fast set in the Upper School with an iron hand, but under Cutts' leadership they would have everything their own way.

And to be captain of the school while still in the Fifth Form—it was a distinction that was worth a struggle.

Cutts entered the New House, and he grinned as he heard a loud buzz of voices from the Common-room at the end of the passage.

He guessed that an election meeting was going on. Both Houses were in a buzz of excitement over it. He could hear Figgins' voice addressing the juniors and he heard his own name.

"Plenty of canvassing, that's the watchword!" Figgins was saying. "We've got to point out to all the School House fellows that they simply must vote for our man, or else be landed with a bully like Knox or a blackguard like Cutts."

"Hear, hear!"

Cutts grinned and went on to Monteith's study and knocked at the door.

There was a buzz of voices in the prefect's study also. Monteith called out to the newcomer to enter, and Cutts went in.

Baker, Gray, and Webb of the Sixth, all New House fellows, were with the prefect, and they were evidently talking over the election.

"Hallo! One of the giddy rival candidates!" said Baker, as Cutts came in.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," said Cutts smoothly. "I wanted to have a few words with Monteith, but another time—"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Baker, rising. "We're only jawing over the election. Give you a look in later, Monty."

"Right!" said Monteith.

The three seniors cauntered out of the study. Monteith looked inquiringly at Cutts. He did not know what the younger School-House candidate could want with him.

"Squat down," he said. "What is it? Are you going to resign from the election?"

"Not much!"

"What is it, then?"

"You see, we're landed in a three-cornered fight," Cutts remarked, coming to business at once. "We've got an overwhelming vote on our side, but it's split."

"All the better for me," remarked Monteith.

"Yes. Though I don't think you'll get in, all the same."

Monteith shrugged his shoulders.

"Most of the Sixth are for me," he said. "Darrell and Langton and Rushden have been over to tell me that they are going to vote for me, and a lot of your fellows will follow their lead."

"I've come over to propose an arrangement," said Cutts.

"Go ahead."

"You used to be rather a sport, Monty. It's not so very long since we used to go down to the little parties at the Green Man together, and I haven't forgotten that there used to be sounds of revelry by night in your study."

The New House prefect frowned.

"That's all over," he said quietly.

"That's quite finished with. I've chucked that kind of thing for good."

"Honest Injun?"

"Yes, honest Injun."

"I wish you joy of your good resolutions," said Cutts, with a yawn. "By the way, I made thirty quid on the races last week."

"How much did you lose the week before?" asked the prefect sarcastically.

Cutts did not reply to that question.

"If you weren't so dead set on your new resolutions, I would give you a tip—"

"Will you have the kindness to remember that you're talking to a prefect, Cutts?" said Monteith, with a gleam in his eyes. "I'll treat what you've just told me as said in confidence, only don't talk like that any more. If I become captain of St. Jim's I shall put my foot down on all that kind of thing. Any senior discovered mixed up in betting will be reported to the Head and sacked."

"Satan rebuking sin!" grinned Cutts.

"You can put it how you like, but I'm going to carry on Kildare's work just where he left it off if I can. The fellows know it, and that's why they're backing me up."

"Then it's not much good my making you a sporting offer?" said Cutts.

"Oh, you can make it!"

"Will you toss up which of us withdraws from the election? Chap who loses stands out, and does his best to back up the other party."

Monteith laughed.

"I'm not likely to settle a matter of that kind on the toss of a coin," he said.

"No, I won't do anything of the kind."

"You won't get in as captain," said Cutts, between his teeth. "That's a fair and sporting offer, and if you had any of the sport in you, you'd accept."

"Then we'll take it that I haven't. Good-bye!"

"I'm not done yet. I'll make it impossible for you to get in as captain if you refuse my offer."

"And how will you do that?" asked Monteith contemptuously.

"Some of the things you have forgotten might be revived," said Cutts meaningly. "You were never so careful in covering up your tracks as I was. Bits of paper with your name on them may still be in existence."

"What!"

"If the Head knew about your little games of old, I fancy he would come down pretty heavy on your candidature."

Monteith looked fixedly at the Fifth Former.

"Do you know what you're doing?"

he asked.

"Talking business," said Cutts.

"It's what people call blackmail."

"Call it what you like. If you don't meet me fair and square you'll find me a dangerous enemy," said Cutts. "I'm willing to settle the matter like a sportsman, and you refuse. Then look out for trouble. The offer's still open."

Cutts took a coin from his waistcoat

pocket. "Now then, be a sport! Head or tail? If you guess right, I'll stand out of the election and back you up all along the line; if you're wrong, you stand out and back me up. Call!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!"

"Then look out for squalls!" said Cutts, returning the coin to his pocket.

Monteith made no reply; but he rose, crossed to the door, and threw it open.

Baker, Webb, and Gray were talking in a group in the passage, and Monteith called to them.

"Will you fellows come here a minute?"

"Certainly!" said Baker.

And the three seniors, somewhat surprised by Monteith's look, came back to the study.

Cutts had risen to his feet, looking a little alarmed.

"What are you going to do, you fool?" he muttered uneasily.

Monteith did not seem to hear him.

"Cutts has just made me an offer, and I want you fellows to hear it," said the New House prefect. "He offers to toss up which stands out of the election. If I refuse, he is going to try to rake up some old stories to disgrace me with the Head and put a stopper on my candidature. That's his programme."

"My hat!" said Baker.

"The filthy cad!" said Webb.

"Kick him out of the House!" said Gray.

The three Sixth Formers came towards Cutts, who faced them with glittering eyes. He had not expected for a moment that Monteith would have the nerve to give him away in this manner, and even the cool and astute black-guard of the Fifth was at a loss.

"You needn't trouble to kick me out," he said calmly. "I'm going. Monteith has exaggerated a little."

"I've repeated exactly what you said," said Monteith, "and I defy you to do your worst! I won't make any terms with you!"

"Shall we chuck him out, Monteith?"

asked Baker. "The cad can't come here and insult our captain and get off scot-free. He ought to go out on his neck!"

"Keep your hands off!" said Cutts disdainfully. "There isn't a fellow in the New House who could chuck me out!"

"By Jove, I'll jolly soon show you!" exclaimed Baker.

He made a spring at Cutts. Baker was a bigger fellow than the Fifth Former, but Cutts was a master of the boxer's art, and he was as quick as lightning. His left came out in a flashing upper-cut, and Baker rolled over on the floor, feeling as if his jaw had been knocked through the top of his head. Gray had advanced at the same moment—just in time to get Cutts' right in the eye, and he sat down on the floor with a gasp.

Cutts made a leap for the door, and gained the passage.

"Ta-ta!" he said, with perfect coolness.

And he walked down the passage rather quickly, and strolled into the quadrangle whistling.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Figgins Works the Oracle!

**B**EFORE half an hour had passed the affray in Monteith's study was the talk of the school.

Jameson of the Third had seen it from the passage, and he had told his chum Wally D'Arcy, and D'Arcy minor had told the School House generally.

The cause of the trouble was not known, but the trouble itself was discussed in every study with great interest and breathless excitement.

The story grew at each repetition.

Ere long, all the School House firmly believed that Cutts of the Fifth had gone over to have a friendly talk with the New House candidate, and that he had been set on by Monteith and his friends, and that he had licked four or

five of them in a stand-up fight, and then walked out of the House as cool as a cucumber, nobody daring to lay a finger on him.

Needless to say, Cutts' popularity in his own House went up with a bound, in consequence.

Even Tom Merry & Co. felt some of their opposition to Cutts melt away at that thrilling account of how he had stood up for the honour of his House in the lion's den, as it were.

"The beggar is plucky, there's no mistake about that," Tom Merry observed. "If he wasn't such a rotter, I wouldn't ask for a better captain."

"Fancy licking a whole gang of them!" chuckled Blake. "Cutts knows how to stand up for his own House, at any rate!"

"I dare say the yarn's a bit exaggerated."

"Well, I saw Gray of the Sixth, and he's got an eye as black as the ace of spades," said Monty Lowther. "No doubt about his eye!"

"And young Jameson says that Baker can't talk, his jaw's so bad," remarked Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Cutts only went over for a friendly talk, when they jumped on him," remarked Manners. "It was a rotten thing to do!"

"Well, we haven't heard Monteith's account, you know," Tom Merry remarked cautiously.

"There's no doubt there was trouble," said Blake, "and I suppose Cutts couldn't have started it of his own accord, with four or five fellows against him."

"No; that's reasonable."

"Yaas, wathah! They're up against the School House candidate, of course," Arthur Augustus remarked. "I weally think I shall give Cutts my vote, deah boys, for standin' up for the honah of the House in that wippin' way!"

"Well, I think I'd rather have Cutts



Cutts' left came out in an uppercut, and Baker rolled on the floor, feeling as if his jaw had been knocked through the top of his head. Gray advanced at the same moment—just in time to get Cutts' right in the eye!

than Monteith," confessed Tom Merry, "and certainly rather than Knox."

"Oh, yaas; Knox is out of it anyway!"

"We've got to make our choice among them," remarked Kangaroo, the Cornstalk junior. "We can't get another candidate on this side."

"We don't want any of them!" growled Blake. "But Cutts seems the best of the bunch. If we must have one of them, let it be Cutts."

The juniors assented, but there was no enthusiasm. They did not want Gerald Cutts for captain of St. Jim's.

"It's rather rotten of old Darrell!" said Tom Merry, in an exasperated tone. "He's just the man to take Kildare's place. It's not only that blessed exam he's working for, but it's his blessed modesty. He doesn't want to shove himself forward, and get into Monteith's way. Of course, Monteith isn't a bad sort. But he's New House, and that settles it!"

Tom Merry & Co. were in a dilemma, and that day and the next there might have been observed unusual clouds of thoughtfulness upon their youthful brows.

It was a peculiar and really difficult situation.

Saturday had been fixed for the election, and on that day a new captain was to be selected for St. Jim's.

The juniors had hoped to hear from Kildare that he was returning. But though news had been received from the old captain of St. Jim's, it was to the effect that his uncle was no better, and that he was going to remain with him—probably for a very considerable time. Kildare's return, therefore, being out of the question, the election would proceed.

On Saturday a new captain would come into his post—and who was it to be?

On previous similar occasions, Tom Merry & Co. had had a candidate to back up, and they had backed him up right heartily.

But the present situation was out of the common. There were three candidates, all of whom they disapproved most intensely.

They had had the keenest possible interest in the election, and yet they felt that they could not vote for any of the candidates.

To remain away from the election, and not vote at all, was one resource, but that would lead the school on its way to the "bow-wows." Suppose the New House man got in? It was quite likely—especially with the School House vote split. More than ever likely if a number of School House fellows refrained from voting at all.

And the Co. confessed that, rather than have a New House captain, they'd prefer Gerald Cutts of the Fifth, or even Knox at a pinch.

Yet it was difficult to make up their minds whether to vote for Cutts or Knox. Both the School House candidates were "rotters"—there was no denying that. Monteith had his faults, but he was better than either of them.

Tom Merry's idea of getting another School House candidate to put up had been an excellent one. It had only one drawback—that it would not work.

The School House seniors were satisfied with Monteith as a candidate, many of them really thinking that it was time the New House had a show; others backing up Monteith because it was guessed that Kildare had wished them to do so when he left.

The disastrous result of electing a

New House fellow to the captaincy did not seem at all apparent to the seniors, though the juniors never forgot it for a moment.

"We simply must get another candidate to put up!" Tom Merry declared.

"If the Sixth won't take it on, we might tackle the Fifth. If Cutts has the cheek to put himself forward, there may be other Fifth Formers with just as much nerve. Suppose we try old Lefevre? He's not a bad sort."

"Rather an ass," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, King Log is better than King Stork," said Tom. "Better an ass like Lefevre than a rotter like Cutts."

"Yes, that's true," remarked Manners. "But I hear that Lefevre is backing Cutts up. Nearly all the Fifth are for Cutts. They're as pleased as punch at the idea of a Fifth Former getting in as captain of the school."

"It's no go," said Kangaroo. "Lefevre is going round canvassing for votes for Cutts. He was jawing to me to-day. He can't go back on his own man."

"That settles it, then. Where are we going to dig up a candidate?" demanded Tom Merry, in despair. "Here's the captaincy of a good old school going begging, and nobody will take the trouble to pick it up."

"It's a rotten position," said Blake. "It looks to me as if we shall have to make our choice among the three of them."

"I have already made a suggestion, deah boys—"

"Shut up!" roared the juniors all together. They were quite fed-up with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's suggestion of himself as a possible candidate.

The study door opened, and George Figgins looked in upon the anxious conclave. Tom Merry & Co. glared at Figgins.

"Well, what do you want, you New House waster?" growled Tom Merry. "Come to tell us your man has withdrawn?"

"No fear!" said Figgins promptly. "I've come to talk to you. The election is pretty close now, and it's time you fellows made up your minds."

"We've made 'em up," grunted Tom Merry. "We're not going to let in a New House man at any price!"

Figgins nodded.

"We're solid for Monteith, over the way," he said. "And nearly all the Sixth Formers in the School House are for our man, and some of the Fifth. We've got a jolly good chance, so long as your vote is split over here."

"Oh, rats!"

"What I'm afraid of is that Knox and Cutts will come to some arrangement," said Figgins. "They're a pair of rotters!"

"Oh, cheese it! And let our candidates alone!" growled Blake, which was rather cool, considering the opinions he had himself expressed of the candidates in question.

"I want you fellows to look at it sensibly," said Figgins calmly. "This is a matter affecting the whole school. Cutts came over the other day, and made a row with our man."

"Licked half a dozen of your fellows off his own bat!" grinned Blake.

"Oh, rot! Do you know what the cause of the row was?"

"No. I suppose they started ragging him."

"They didn't," said Figgins quietly. "The row started because Cutts tried to threaten our man. First he offered to toss up with him which should re-

tire from the election, and, as Monteith refused, he threatened to rake up some old stories to discredit him with the Head."

"Oh crumbs!"

"How do you know?" asked Tom Merry.

"It's got out," said Figgins. "Monteith called in three or four seniors, and told them what Cutts had said in Cutts' presence; then the row started. It's the talk of the House now. Between ourselves, it's pretty well suspected that once upon a time Monteith wasn't quite up to the mark—like he is now. There used to be trouble between him and Kildare about it. But he's straight as a die now. All you fellows will admit that."

"Oh, he's straight enough, I believe!" admitted Tom Merry.

"And Cutts isn't," said Figgins. "What do you think of the kind of fellow who'd use such a dodge for getting a rival out of the election?"

"Rotten!"

"Caddish!"

"Just like Cutts."

"Wank outside!"

"And that's the fellow you're going to vote for," said Figgins. "You'll keep out a really decent chap like Monteith, because he belongs to our House, and you'll let in a blackmailing rotter like Cutts!"

Tom Merry shifted uneasily.

"We're not sure we're going to vote for Cutts," he said.

"Knox, then—is he any better?"

"Oh, we shan't vote for Knox at any price—he's quite outside the limit!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then it's Cutts or nobody," said Figgins. "Now, look here, I've been thinking this over. It's all very well to stand up for one's own House, but I tell you candidly, if Cutts were our man, and Monteith your man, I'd vote for your man, and blow his House."

"Honest Injun!" said Blake.

"Honour bright!" said Figgins solemnly. "What's going to become of the school with a rotten outsider for captain like Cutts?"

"But—but—"

"I think you fellows ought to vote for Monteith, the only decent candidate," said Figgins. "I'd do it in your place—honour bright!"

The juniors looked at one another. Figgins' manner was very grave and serious, and they knew that he meant what he said. And they could not help admitting that there was something in his arguments.

"Now, what do you say?" asked Figgins persuasively.

"Well, after what you've told us, we won't vote for Cutts," said Tom Merry, looking round. "I think that's agreed."

"Yes, rather."

"And—perhaps we'll vote for Monteith," said Tom, taking the plunge. "I—I think we can say that unless another School House candidate puts up in time, we'll vote for your man, and chance it."

And the meeting nodded assent.

Figgins' face brightened up.

"That's the time!" he exclaimed.

"You won't be sorry for it. You'll find that Monteith will give the School House fair play. Darrell's satisfied about that, so I think you may be. You'll vote for Monteith?"

There was a long pause. Figgins' earnestness had made a deep impression upon the juniors, and he had only voiced, too, thoughts that had been lurking in their own minds. And they felt, too, a sort of glow in making such a generous concession to the rival House.

"Yes!" said Tom Merry & Co. at last.  
 "Good egg!" said Figgins heartily.  
 "It's understood that if a decent School House candidate puts up, we vote for him," said Tom Merry, "otherwise, we back up your man."  
 "That's good enough," said Figgins.  
 And he departed, to carry the good news back to the New House. There it was received with the keenest satisfaction. There was no doubt now as to Monteith's success. For Tom Merry & Co. would carry the bulk of the School House juniors with them, and both Knox and Cutts were certain to be left out in the cold. And the New House rejoiced at the prospect.  
 When Figgins had gone, the chums of the School House looked at one another rather glumly.  
 "I suppose it's the only thing to be done," said Blake.  
 "There is really no alternative, dear boy."  
 "Oh, rats!"  
 "After all, we'll give Monteith a trial," said Tom Merry generously; "and old Figgys is a good sort, too, and he's pleased as Punch about it."  
 "But a New House chap captain of St. Jim's!" grunted Herries. "I don't like the idea."  
 "Can't be helped. Better than Knox or Cutts."  
 And the juniors admitted that that was the case. But they did not like it, and they looked forward to the election with feelings of anything but enthusiasm.

### CHAPTER 9.

#### Rogues in Council!

**L**EVISON of the Fourth came into Gerald Cutts' study with a curious expression on his face. Levison was Cutts' right-hand man in the election, and he kept the Fifth Form candidate informed of the state of feeling among the junior electors.

He formed the head of a committee of canvassers who were seeking votes for Cutts, and he had had a certain amount of success.

Cutts was taking the election very seriously, and bending all his energies to the task of getting in as captain of St. Jim's.

Cutts was looking very cheerful just now. He had been comparing notes with Knox and lists of supporters, and he had convinced the Sixth Former that he had very little chance of getting in. By standing for election, Knox would only split the House vote and jeopardise Cutts' chances. And Cutts made that clear to him, and he knew that Knox was very likely to withdraw altogether, if it was made worth his while. It was a question of making it worth his while.

"Hallo, what's happened now?" asked Cutts, noticing the expression upon the face of the cad of the Fourth at once.

"Trouble," said Levison. "I've just heard that Tom Merry & Co. have gone over to the enemy."

Cutts frowned.

"Which means—"

"They're going to vote for Monteith," said Levison. "Figgins has changed them over somehow. And two-thirds of the juniors of this House will vote the way Tom Merry votes. That's a cert. He has a lot of influence."

"I know he has, hang him!" said Cutts, gritting his teeth. "I never expected this. What about loyalty to the House?"

Levison grinned.

"They don't want you at any price," he explained.

"They'd rather have a New House chap, or any old thing."

"Don't be cheeky!" growled Cutts. "Well, I shall put a spoke in their wheel, if that's the little game. If Knox stood out, I should beat Monteith at the polls, and I can arrange it with Knox. But this news changes it all. Monteith will have to stand out now."

Levison whistled.

"But will he?" he asked.

"He will be made to. Then Knox can stay in, to keep up appearances. I don't specially want a walk-over. Monteith will get it in the neck, that's all. I've got the plan out and dried. I've made it ready, you see, in case it was necessary. And it is necessary now, and he will stand out so late before the election that his party won't have much time to replace him with another man. Besides, the School House won't vote for any fellow they put up in Monteith's place. His withdrawal will break their party right up, I think."

"Not much doubt about that," said Levison. "But how on earth are you going to get him to withdraw? I never saw a fellow so dead set on anything as Monteith is on this election. He's much keener than he was when he contested it with Kildare."

"I've got a way, and you are going to help me."

"I'll do anything I can, of course," said Levison. "I'm

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on your side, Cutts. You know how to make it worth a fellow's while to back you up."

Cutts smiled sneeringly for a second. "Exactly!" he said. "Now, you've heard the stories some of the fellows tell about Monteith; it was before your time here, but you must have heard."

"I've heard some things from Mellish," said Levison. "Monteith used to be one of the boys, I understand."

"Just so. He used to go the pace more than I did," said Cutts.

"Then he must have gone it hot!"

"He did! And he hasn't as much sense in his head as I have in my little finger!" said Cutts. "I never put anything on paper, but Monteith used to. He thought nothing of sending a note to Joliffe, the landlord of the Green Man, in his own hand. He would send notes to bookmakers about putting money on horses."

"The silly ass!" said Levison contemptuously. "I wonder they didn't blackmail him."

"He was blackmailed, and I understand it cost him a pretty penny to get some of his notes back," said Cutts. "Kildare helped him."

"Oh, I see!"

"But very likely some of those notes are still in existence," said Cutts. "Monteith can't know whether they are or not."

"No; but—"

"And if one were sent to the Head—say, a note in Monteith's hand, fixing up a meeting at the Green Man—"

"Cutts!"

"Well," said Cutts savagely, "why not?"

"That would be playing it horribly low down!" faltered Levison. "You were in the same game with Monteith at that time! Now you'd give him away!"

"Are you going to start preaching to me, you young rascal?"

"N-no. But—but how am I going to help you?" said Levison sullenly. "I don't like the scheme, and I can't see how I can help."

"You're the only fellow who can help. That note of Monteith's to Joliffe—it happens that I can't lay hands on it. I've asked Joliffe, but he says he never kept any of the papers. I think he doesn't care about betraying Monteith, or he may be speaking the truth; I don't know. But the paper's got to be found."

"Well, I can't find it," said Levison.

"Yes, you can."

"I don't understand."

"That paper," said Cutts slowly, "is worth a couple of quid to me. I'll hand over two pounds as soon as you bring it to me."

"But—but—"

"Oh, don't pretend to be a fool!" said Cutts irritably. "You make half-crowns by writing out impositions for fellows, because you can imitate handwriting so well it can't be detected. You had your knife into Brooke of the Fourth once, and nearly got him sacked from the school by writing a letter in his hand!"

Levison turned pale.

"You—you don't want me to—to—"

"I want you to bring me that note from Monteith to Joliffe, fixing up a meeting at the Green Man!" said Cutts grimly. "I don't care how or where you get it!"

"But—but suppose it came out—"

"How could it come out? Monteith couldn't possibly smell a rat. He knows that some of his old notes may still be in existence—in fact, I told him that I could lay hands on one of them. If it's

a spoof note, he won't know it. He'll think naturally that it was got from Joliffe."

"I—I suppose he would—"

"I can tell you almost word for word a note that I saw in Joliffe's place once, written to him by Monteith," said Cutts. "Joliffe chucked it into the fire after reading it, I remember; but Monteith doesn't know that. I can give you the wording. I've got a good memory."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's all in the game," he said. "I'm hard-up, and when a fellow's hard-up, he can't afford to be too particular. Is the note worth five quid to you, Cutts?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped Cutts.

"Then I'm afraid I shan't be able to find it!" said Levison coolly.

Gerald Cutts glared at him.

"If you begin haggling with me, you greedy young scoundrel—"

"I'm on the make, same as you are!" said Levison, with another shrug of his thin shoulders. "There's a certain amount of risk, and it's a dirty, caddish thing to do, anyway. I'm not going to do it for nothing. You've done very well out of the races lately. I saw several fivers in your pocket-book yesterday."

"I've a jolly good mind to—" began Cutts, laying his hand on a ruler.

Levison did not flinch.

"If you touch me with that ruler, I'll go straight to Darrell, and tell him what you've said to me!" said the junior, between his teeth.

Cutts laid down the ruler. For some moments he stared at the cad of the Fourth, Levison meeting his stare with cool effrontery.

"Well, it's a go!" said Cutts at last.

He felt that he had met his match in his precious supporter.

"Five quid?" said Levison.

"Yes," said Cutts reluctantly.

"Cash down?" said Levison.

"Look here—"

"Cash down, or it's no go!"

Cutts set his teeth hard. He opened his pocket-book, took out a crisp five-pound note, and passed it to the Fourth Former.

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Shadow of the Past!

**D**R. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, sat in his study, with a letter in his hand and a wrinkle of deep thought in his brow.

The letter—a half-sheet of impot paper, with a few lines scrawled on it—had evidently just arrived by the post.

The Head had read it several times, and then touched the bell, and sent Toby to call Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

He was waiting for the arrival of the Housemaster now.

The door opened, and Mr. Railton came in.

"You sent for me, sir?"

Monteith glanced at the letter, and for a moment the that tell-tale message in his own handwriting. The himself

The Head nodded.

"I want to ask your advice about this, Mr. Railton. Pray read it."

The Housemaster, in some surprise, took the letter and glanced at it. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"You know the writing, Mr. Railton?"

"I think I've seen it before, sir."

"Whose writing do you think it is?"

"Monteith's, sir."

"And it is signed 'J. M.,' said the Head.

"I'm afraid this was written by Monteith of the Sixth, sir; but may I ask how it came into your hands?"

"I have just received it by post," said the Head, indicating an envelope that lay on his desk. "It was sent anonymously. The envelope contained nothing but that note, and by the postmark it was posted in Rylcombe."

"Anonymously," said Mr. Railton, with a frown.

"Yes. Of an ordinary anonymous letter I should not, of course, take any notice. But this is different. Someone has recently come into possession of that note, and sent it to me to open my eyes as to Monteith's conduct."

"Perhaps this man Joliffe himself—there may have been some dispute, and he has revenged himself by betraying Monteith to you."

"It is possible."

"Or perhaps it has been done by someone desirous of injuring Monteith's chances in the pending election for captain of the school," said Mr. Railton thoughtfully. "The election takes place to-morrow, and there is a great deal of feeling on the subject."

"In that case, whoever sent it to me





ed to reel about him. His face went white as he read  
then, grave glance was upon him, and he strove to recover  
could not.

may have been actuated by a sense of duty. In the light of that letter, Monteith is certainly not a fit person to become captain of the school."

"Most decidedly not."

"I do not know the writing on the envelope," said the Head. "It appears to me to be a disguised hand. But that is of little moment. It does not matter very much who sent it to me. The question is, what to do in the matter now?"

"Monteith must be allowed to make what explanation he can."

"Undoubtedly, and the sooner the better. Will you send for him, Mr. Railton, or, better still, fetch him here. I wish you to be present."

"Very well, sir."

And Mr. Railton left the study.

Monteith was at practice on the football ground when Mr. Railton found him. A group of juniors were watching the practice, and Jack Blake was remarking, perhaps a little grudgingly, that Monteith was really in splendid form. So far as the winter game was concerned, there could be no doubt that Monteith would make a worthy successor to Kildare.

"I suppose we shall have to have him," said Blake, with a sigh. "It will be a come-down for the School House, but there you are!"

"Que faire?" said Digby sagely, in his best French.

"Oh, keep that for the Form-room!" said Blake, with a snort. "It's a rotten position, but I suppose electing Monteith is the best way out of it."

"Hallo! What does Railton want?" said Tom Merry. "He's calling Monteith, and looking as grave as a giddy judge."

"Somethin's up!" said Arthur Augustus.

Monteith had come to the ropes as Mr. Railton called to him.

"Am I wanted, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Railton; "the Head wishes to see you, Monteith."

"Anything important, sir?" asked Monteith, surprised by the gravity of the Housemaster's manner.

"Very important, Monteith."

"I'll come at once, sir."

And Monteith threw on an overcoat and muffler, and, without stopping to change, he followed the Housemaster from the field. The juniors, who had heard the remarks exchanged between the two, regarded one another curiously.

"Looks like trouble for Monteith," Lowther remarked.

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins uneasily. "Can't be anything about the election, I know the Head must look on our man as the best man for the job."

But Figgins was feeling uneasy. Until the election was over, he could not feel safe about his candidate.

Monteith was feeling uneasy, too—he hardly knew why—as he followed the Housemaster to the Head's study. Mr. Railton's gravity had a disquieting effect upon him. He did not ask the Housemaster

any questions, however, but accompanied him in silence, and they entered the Head's room.

Dr. Holmes' expression increased Monteith's inward alarm. He knew now that something untoward had happened as soon as he saw the Head's face.

"I have sent for you, Monteith, on a most unpleasant matter," began the Head.

"What is wrong, sir?"

"Read that letter!"

Monteith glanced at the letter, and for a moment the room seemed to reel about him. He understood now. For this is what he read in his own handwriting:

"Dear Joliffe,—I shall be down at eleven to-night, as usual. Get Banks there, if you can. I want to ask him about the chances of Bonny Boy for the Springwell Handicap.—Yours,

"J. M."

Monteith's face went white as a sheet. He felt the Head's stern, grave glance upon him, and he strove to recover himself, but he could not. The sudden blow had knocked him over. He could only clutch the telltale paper, which he crumpled in his hand, and stare at the floor.

There was a long silence, and the Head's deep voice broke it at last.

"Well, Monteith?"

The prefect licked his dry lips.

"I am waiting for your explanation, Monteith."

"I—I—" Monteith's voice trailed away miserably.

"That letter is in your hand, Monteith?"

"Yes, sir," groaned the prefect.

"You admit it?"

"Yes."

"Joliffe is the name of the landlord of a low public-house in Rylcombe, I believe?"

"Yes."

"You wrote that letter to him?"

"Yes."

"That is all I need to ask," said the Head dryly.

"I—I—I can explain, sir. I—I— This is an old letter, a very old letter," said Monteith. "It was written long ago—"

"How long ago?"

"I—I don't exactly know. It's not dated, but it—it was at least four terms ago, sir," muttered Monteith. "I—I used to play the giddy ox, I admit it. I was a fool. But—but it was all over long ago. I got myself into trouble, and Kildare helped me out, like the brick he was. I promised him to keep clear of that gang, and I kept my word."

"Then Kildare knew?"

"He knew, sir."

"It was his duty, as head prefect of the school, to acquaint me with your conduct," said the Head sternly.

"He would have told you, sir, only he knew I would keep my word," said Monteith miserably. "I've been a fool, but I stopped it. It's been over and past long ago. I've never had anything to do with those rotters since, on my honour."

The Head looked at him very hard.

"I am glad to believe that," he said. "But that does not alter the fact that you, a prefect, acted in the way indicated by that letter. You say it was long ago, and I believe you. You say you have led a straight life since Kildare helped you out of the matter. I believe that, too. I shall not think of punishing you, Monteith, for a wrong done so long ago, and since repented. But you must see as well as I do that you are not a fit person to become captain of the school."

Monteith bowed his head.

"That punishment, at least, cannot be spared you," said the Head. "If you are sincerely repentant for having done wrong, you will be willing to face that. You must resign from your candidature."

"Must I, sir?"

"You must!" said the Head sternly.

"Very well, sir."

"Nothing more will be said about the matter, then," said the Head. "I shall not deprive you of your prefectship. I shall not make this public."

"Thank you, sir!"

"That is all, Monteith. I shall expect you to make your resignation as a candidate for the captaincy public to-day."

A glitter shot into Monteith's eyes.

"And what about Cutts, sir?" he asked.

"Cutts!" said the Head, puzzled.

"What has Cutts to do with this?"

"Didn't Cutts give you this letter, sir?" asked Monteith, in astonishment.

"I understood—"

"Cutts did not give it to me. I have no reason to suppose that he knows anything about the matter. The letter came to me anonymously by post."

"Oh, he's very deep!" said Monteith bitterly. "It was sent to you by Cutts, sir."

"Indeed? That would make no difference, however."

"Cutts was as bad as I was, or

worse!" the prefect exclaimed. "He was in with me, with Joliffe and his gang. If I'm not fit to be captain of the school, what about Cutts? I gave up that kind of thing. Cutts keeps it up!"

"You accuse Cutts—"

"Yes, I do."

"Have you any proof to offer of your statements?" asked the Head coldly.

"Proof!" repeated the prefect.

"Yes. You can hardly expect me to take your bare statement against Cutts without proof of any kind."

"I—I haven't any proof, of course. I don't suppose Cutts ever put anything down in black and white, and if he did, I couldn't get it from Joliffe. He's up against me ever since I refused to have anything more to do with him. Of course, I can't prove it, but it's true."

"I decline to believe such a thing of Cutts, or of anyone else, without the strongest and clearest proof."

"I—I knew this was going to happen. Cutts told me the other day that if I stood for the election he would work some trick of this kind."

"Did anyone hear him say so?"

"N-no; but I told some fellows immediately afterwards, and they—"

"It all rests on your bare word, apparently," said the Head dryly. "The word of a boy who, as it now appears, has deceived me and abused my confidence. You can scarcely expect me to attach any importance to what you say on that subject, Monteith. You had better say no more. You may go!"

And Monteith went.

The Head sighed and tossed the letter into the fire. It was consumed in a moment.

"That ends the matter," he said. "You agree with me that I could take no other step, Mr. Railton?"

"Quite so, sir. There was nothing else to be done. In the light of that letter, it would have been impossible to allow Monteith to become captain of the school."

"I am sorry, too, and painfully shocked," said the Head. "I had confidence in Monteith. This is a most unpleasant surprise to me, and I do not think I have been hard upon him. His disappointment in the election will be his punishment, and it is not too heavy a punishment, I think. It is a wretched business altogether. As for his accusation against Cutts, it would be wrong to attach the slightest importance to it. I am afraid he spoke out in the bitterness of his disappointment, without stopping to think."

And Mr. Railton nodded. He took the same view. Gerald Cutts had played his cards very well indeed.

## CHAPTER 11.

### The Fight!

"HALLO, Monteith! What's the matter?"

Darrell of the Sixth asked the question in alarm, as he met Monteith, after the latter's departure from the Head's study. Monteith's face was white, and his eyes were burning. He was striding on swiftly, and almost ran into Darrell. The senior stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"What's happened, old man?"

Monteith stopped and burst into a bitter laugh. Tom Merry & Co had just come in from the footer ground.

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and they, too, looked at the New House prefect in surprise. Several other fellows had gathered round. Monteith was the centre of a crowd in a couple of minutes. He did not seem to notice it.

"What's happened?" he repeated. "Nothing. Only I'm not standing for the election to-morrow, after all."

"Not standing?" exclaimed Darrell, in amazement.

"No."

"Why not?"

"The Head's ordered me to withdraw."

"My hat! Why?"

"Cutts has worked it."

"Cutts!" exclaimed several voices.

"What rot!" said Darrell. "How could Cutts possibly make the Head order you to withdraw? You're dreaming!"

"He has let the Head know something about me—something that's old and done with, as he knows jolly well," said

House candidate now!" he exclaimed bitterly. "You can have your Cutts for captain now, and I wish you joy of him."

"We don't want Cutts!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "We had already fixed it up with Figgins to vote for you, Monteith. We'd rather have you than Cutts any day, though you're a New House bouncer—I mean, chap."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm going to see Cutts now," said Monteith, between his teeth. "He came and made a row in my study the other day. One good turn deserves another."

He strode away in the direction of the Fifth Form passage. Darrell hurried after him.

"Monteith, it's not much good making a row!"

"I'm going to lick Cutts! He's not going to get off scot-free after playing me a trick like this."

"Are you sure he—"

"Of course I'm sure! I don't think he'll have the cheek to deny it—even Cutts!"

Monteith strode on, and Darrell hesitated. The juniors followed Monteith like an army. Their sympathy was all with him. For once they forgot House rivalry. Cutts had played the game low-down, and they would have liked nothing better than to see him licked by the New House prefect.

Monteith reached Cutts' door, and threw it violently open without knocking. Cutts was in his room, with Gilmore of the Fifth, his studymate. Both of them jumped up as the white and furious prefect strode in.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" Cutts exclaimed.

Smack!

Monteith's open hand across his face was the reply.

Cutts staggered back, his cheeks going pale, with a red mark across the skin where the New House prefect's hand had fallen.

"Bwavo!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy from the passage. "Go for the wottah!"

"Now, you cad, come on!" said Monteith, throwing off his coat and muffler. "You've swindled me out of the captaincy, and now you're going to pay for it!"

"I'll come on fast enough!" said Cutts, recovering his coolness. "There isn't a fellow in the New House I can't lick. I think I showed you that the other day. But first, I'd like to have some faint idea what the trouble is about."

"You know well enough, you cad!"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"If it's the election—"

"You know it is."

"So we're to fight because we're rival candidates?" asked Cutts. "Haden't we better call Knox in, in that case, and make a three-cornered scrap of it? Knox is a candidate, too, you know."

There was a laugh from some of the fellows in the passage. Cutts' coolness tickled them.

"I don't want to bandy words with you," said Monteith, his eyes burning. "I'm here to thrash you!"

"Oh, good!" said Cutts calmly. "But isn't that rather a primitive way of settling an election? What have you got your rag out so suddenly for? Do you know, Darrell?"

Darrell looked very keenly at the Fifth Former.

"The Head has got hold of some old paper in Monteith's hand," he said. "Monteith thinks you sent it to him."

(Continued on page 18.)

### COMFORTING!



"What if the rope snaps, Garge?"  
"Why, Oi'll go doon and catch 'ee!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Gibb, 99, Rosedale Road, Dagenham, Essex.

Monteith. "A rotten old story dead and done with long ago!"

"You mean he has slandered you?"

"Yes."

"But if he's told lies, they can be disproved."

Monteith laughed bitterly.

"It doesn't happen to be lies; it happened to be the truth," he said.

"Oh!"

"An old yarn about my being mixed up in betting, and so forth," said Monteith. "You know about it—Kildare consulted you when he helped me out. You know I've been as straight as a die ever since."

"I know," said Darrell.

"But Cutts has fished out an old letter in my handwriting from somewhere, and sent it anonymously to the Head," said the New House prefect. "What do you think of that for an election dodge?"

"Rotten!"

"Shame!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Distinctly caddish, I call it!"

Monteith looked round, seeming to notice the juniors for the first time. His face was almost haggard.

"Well, you've got rid of the New

# 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.



**H**ALLO, chums! Take a look at the number on the cover. It's the fifteen hundredth issue of the GEM. Every week for fifteen hundred weeks the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. have been entertaining thousands upon thousands of readers all over the world. It's a grand record, of which any boys' paper would justifiably be proud. And we who run the GEM are proud of the fact that it is the oldest school-story paper in the world.

Actually, the GEM's history goes back further than nearly twenty-nine years. It was published for forty-eight weeks prior to its starting at No. 1 again on February 15th, 1908, when the "Magnet" first appeared.

I wonder how many readers of to-day read the first GEM when it came out on March 23rd, 1907? If there are any, I should very much like to hear from them. I have had letters from one or two readers who have taken the GEM since about 1908, but I have yet to hear from one who read the very first number.

Having looked back nearly thirty years, we will now look forward one week—that is, to issue No. 1,501. It contains the second story of the "St. Jim's captaincy" series. The yarn is entitled

## "CAPTAIN TOM MERRY!"

and deals with the hectic experiences of Tom Merry as skipper of St. Jim's.

In filling Eric Kildare's shoes, Tom has a very difficult task before him, especially as he is only a junior. The seniors refuse to acknowledge his captaincy, while the juniors naturally take many liberties. But Tom, backed up by many faithful followers, is determined to keep order, even if it means a row every five minutes! As is only to be expected, there are many clashes between the juniors and the seniors, and the former, for once in a way, are in the happy position of having authority on their side.

Never has the captaincy of St. Jim's been attended by such amazing scenes and lively excitement, and readers will revel in reading all about it next Wednesday.

## "THE STAGE-STRUCK SCHOOLBOYS!"

Having set the ball rolling by producing grand opera—more or less with success—at Greyfriars, Harry Wharton & Co. become rather struck with the stage. They turn their energies to something a little easier than opera, and set to work to present a dramatic play. But there are many snags in

arranging the cast of the play, not the least of which is the fact that nearly all the amateur actors want to be the hero, while nobody wants to be the villain of the piece.

You'll enjoy another hearty laugh when you read the next sparkling yarn of Harry Wharton & Co.'s early school-days.

## WANTED—THE FIRST "GEM."

When I was going through my mail the other morning I came across a post-card which had come through without being postmarked; neither the card nor the two halfpenny stamps on it had been post-dated. I have never known that to happen before.

The sender of the card was E. Pannell, a Portsmouth reader. He asks me whether he can obtain an issue of the first numbers of the GEM and the "Schoolboys' Own Library." I have very much doubt if an issue of the first GEM is still in existence. The only copy I have is in a bound volume. There might be some copies of the first "Schoolboys' Own Library" still about, but I am sorry I cannot help this reader to obtain one.

## TOO GOOD TO MISS!

Talking of the "Schoolboys' Own," I should like to remind readers again that three new numbers were on sale last Thursday. "Captain and Tyrant," No. 280, is a powerful story of Greyfriars, featuring Gerald Loder, the bully of the Sixth Form, as captain of the school. "St. Jim's in Revolt," No. 281, is a thrilling yarn, in which the tyranny of the irascible Mr. Ratcliff, the New House master, in the absence of the Head, goads Figgins & Co. into open rebellion. "The Mystery of St. Frank's," No. 282, deals with the nerve-rattling adventures of Nelson Lee and Nipper & Co. in London, where they find themselves up against Chinese smugglers and crooks.

I can guarantee all these grand books as being well worth the outlay of fourpence each. Try one to-day, and, like Oliver Twist, you will ask for more.

## WORK THIS OUT!

Are you good at arithmetic? Here is a problem a reader sent me the other day. A boy goes out for a cycle ride and travels fifteen miles an hour. He is tired on the return journey, and his

speed drops to ten miles an hour. If the homeward run takes two hours longer than the outward trip, how many miles does he travel altogether? The answer is at the end of this Chat.

## IN REPLY.

By the time you read this, Geoffrey Wells, New South Wales, details of Sir Malcolm Campbell's hush-hush speed-boat may have been published. It is being built for an attack on the water-speed record, at present held by America, and if I know anything of Campbell, he'll get it. No, I don't think he'll call it the Blue Fish.

What's the smallest thing in existence, Ronald Chatwode, Cork? Nobody knows. The smallest thing we know of so far is called an electron, and it's a tiny particle of matter which spins round an atom in the same way as the moon spins round the earth. Someone once said that there is as much room for a hundred thousand atoms to dance on the point of a pin, as for a hundred people to dance on the Continent of Europe. So you'll see they are pretty tiny.

The latest idea of scientists is that these electrons are built up of still smaller atoms with even more minute electrons revolving round them. Don't ask me how small they'd be!

## "THEY CALLED HIM A FUNK!"

Whatever the faults of Harry Wharton, cowardice is not one of them. But in the great cover-to-cover yarn in our companion paper, the "Magnet," Harry finds himself accused of being a funk. Vernon-Smith dares him to break bounds at night, but, to the surprise of many juniors, he refuses to do it. What is his reason? Is it cowardice? Read this sparkling story, which is another tribute to the masterly school-story writing of popular Frank Richards. The "Magnet" is on sale now, price 2d.

## TAILPIECE.

Jinks: "Did you hear about the gamekeeper?"

Binks: "No. What about him?"

Jinks: "He refused to eat poached eggs!"

Solution to problem: The boy cycled 120 miles, 60 each way.

PEN PALS COUPON  
14-11-38

THE EDITOR.  
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"Oh, I see! Quite a mistake, of course!"

"You didn't do it?"

"I hope no one here suspects me of playing such a dirty trick?" said Cutts, looking round with an expression of virtuous indignation. "If I had, Monteith would be right to be ratty about it. But I haven't!"

"Who did, then?" said Monteith.

"How should I know? If it's something you wrote to Joliffe or Banks, they may have sent it to the Head. They don't seem to like the way you chuckled them. But if you suspect that it was a rival candidate, why not suspect Knox as much as me? He knew all about your little games, you know."

"Bai Jove! There's somethin' in that."

Monteith set his lips.

"I know it was you!" he said. "You threatened me with it the other day unless I should withdraw."

Cutts shook his head.

"You misunderstood me," he said. "I merely meant to ask you whether you considered yourself a fit person to be captain of the school, considering the kind of fellow you are. I said the Head wouldn't think you a fit person if he knew. Apparently I was quite right, as it turns out. As for threatening you, that's all rot. Such a thought never even crossed my mind. I thought that in common decency you ought not to want to be captain of St. Jim's. That's all!"

"You liar!"

Monteith did not waste further words upon the Fifth Former. He rushed upon him, hitting out furiously. The other fellows cleared back to give them room. Cutts had barely time to throw

off his jacket when the Sixth Former was upon him. From all sides fellows came crowding along the passage to see the struggle. A fight between a Fifth Former and a prefect of the Sixth was naturally very rare, and it caused tremendous excitement.

A throng of fellows—seniors and juniors—cramped themselves into the passage, struggling towards the doorway.

But Tom Merry & Co. held front seats, so to speak. They were wedged in the doorway, and refused to budge. They had what Lowther described afterwards as a splendid view of the fun.

But it was not fun for the combatants.

Both the seniors were powerful fellows, both good boxers, and both plucky. At any other time Cutts, with his imperturbable coolness, would probably have got the better of the fight. But Monteith was so furious that he did not care for the punishment he received. He took without heed the most terrific drives, and came on without a pause, and all the time his fists were hammering on Cutts.

Darrell walked away. He could not stop the fight, as Monteith was a prefect, but he felt that he ought not to witness it. But nobody else was unwilling to witness it. There was a struggle for places, in fact, while the two seniors were tramping to and fro in the study, hammering one another furiously.

There were no rounds in that fight. The two savagely angry foes fought on to a finish, and it was Cutts who finished first. He was fairly knocked out by the fierce onslaught of the indignant prefect of the New House.

Crash!

The Fifth Former went down at last.

Crash!

The Fifth Former went down at last.

and lay on the study carpet, gasping. His eyes were half-closed, his nose seemed swollen to double its usual size, his mouth was cut and bleeding. He was evidently "done." Gilmore of the Fifth bent over him.

"You can't go on," he muttered.

Cutts shook his head feebly.

Monteith glared down at the Fifth Former, his anger still unappeased. He was showing severe signs of the conflict himself.

"You're done, you cad!"

"Look like it, doesn't it?" said Cutts, cool still, in spite of his exhausted state. "You have knocked me out. I'll try you again another time."

"Well, you've had your punishment, and if the fellows are rotten enough to make you captain of St. Jim's, why, they deserve to have such a captain as you'll make!" said Monteith bitterly.

And he strode from the study and returned to his own House.

## CHAPTER 12.

### A Really Stunning Idea!

THERE was a meeting in Tom Merry's study after the row.

The juniors were in a state of perplexity.

The late happening had knocked all their plans to the winds. They had settled on Monteith at last as their candidate, and that solution of the problem, though far from satisfactory, had, at all events, settled the question. Now it was all unsettled again. There was a notice on the board in the hall that Monteith's candidature had been withdrawn.

That finished Monteith.

The contest of the captaincy remained now between Cutts and Knox, unless a fresh candidate should come forward at the eleventh hour.

"And Cutts is quite impossible!" said Tom Merry firmly. "He can deny it till he's black in the face, but we all know that he played that rotten trick on Monteith."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"After that, we can't stand him," said Blake.

"Impossible!"

"Some other New House chap may take Monteith's place," said Kangaroo. "We're not bound to vote for him, though. We gave in about Monteith, but we shan't do the same again for another of them."

"No fear!"

"Not much chance of that, either," said Monty Lowther. "The New House are awfully indignant about Monteith's being ordered to withdraw his name. Nobody else will take his place. They won't hear of it. I heard it from Figgins. Baker, and Webb, and Gray have all refused to stand, though Monteith asked them."

"Right enough, too," said Tom Merry. "I dare say most of the New House fellows won't vote at all. And Cutts has a big majority on his side. I reckon he'll get a third more than Knox, at least."

"Then Cutts is going to be captain," said Blake gloomily, "after playing that caddish trick. It's rotten!"

"Disgustin', denh boys! I'm afraid you'll have to come back to my proposition, a-fah all," said D'Arcy, with a wise shake of the head.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Most of the seniors will be for Knox, and a crowd of juniors for Cutts," said Tom Merry. "If there were a pin to choose between them we could turn the scale. But—"

"They're a pair of rotters!" growled Manners.

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"Bump him!" yelled Blake. "Let me go!" shrieked Knox. Bump, bump, bump! Knox roared as he bumped on the floor—hard! But next moment Darrell came out of his study with a cane in his hand.

"Monteith was the man, after all, but he's out of it now. Hallo, Figgy!"

Figgins came into the study, looking very glum. The School House juniors gave him sympathetic glances. They knew what a blow it was to Figgins, the fact that Monteith had been "done" out of his chance.

"What are you fellows going to do?" asked Figgins. "About the election, I mean?"

"Blessed if I know. Your man's out of it."

"He is," said Figgins bitterly, "and that cad Cutts has done him out of it. I think you ought to be ashamed of yourselves to let Cutts become captain of the school, after that!"

"What can we do?" said Digby. "We don't want Cutts, but there's only Knox up against him now. And I don't think Knox has an earthly."

"I've got an idea," said Figgins quietly. "I've been talking it over with Kerr and Wynn, and they agree with me."

"Go ahead, Figgy!"

"You were going to back our man up, and one good turn deserves another," said Figgins. "We're ready to back up the School House now, as there isn't a New House candidate. Anybody but Cutts."

"But none of the Sixth—"

"Blow the Sixth!" said Figgins. "I'm fed-up with the Sixth!"

"But none of the Fifth will stand against Cutts. They're all backing him up to a man," said Lowther.

"Blow the Fifth!"

"Then what—"

"What price the Shell?" said Figgins.

"What!"

"My hat!"

"If a Fifth Former can become captain of the school, why not a junior?" said Figgins steadily. "The Shell is only one Form below the Fifth, anyway. That's my idea. If Tom Merry chooses to put up for captain, I'll answer for all the New House junior votes."

"I?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement.

"Yes, you!"

"Great Scott! I captain of St. Jim's!"

"You'd make a better captain than Cutts, any day!"

"Well, that wouldn't be hard," admitted Tom Merry. "I couldn't make a worse one, that's a dead cert. But—"

"The Head would never allow it," said Manners.

"He can't interfere. You remember once there was an election and D'Arcy put up. He was elected all right."

"Yaas, wathah! And I considah—"

"But that was only a lark," said Monty Lowther.

"Yes; but the Head didn't interfere. And he won't interfere this time. You put your name up, Tom Merry, and we'll plump for you. Every chap in the New House will vote for you, if only to get even with Cutts!" said Figgins savagely.

"What we want to do is to keep Cutts of the Fifth out."

"I see," said Tom Merry slowly. "All your friends will back you up, and most of the juniors will follow suit. They will be awfully taken with the idea of having a junior captain of the school," said Figgins easily.

"You will simply romp home. I shouldn't wonder if you poll four or five times as many votes as Knox and Cutts put together."

"I considah—"

"Bravo!" said Blake. "It's the only way, Tommy. Of course, the captain ought really to be selected from the Fourth Form—"

"Yaas, wathah; and I considah—"

"And I should make a jolly good captain, too," continued Blake. "But I waive my claims. Who says Tom Merry for captain?"

There was a shout from the meeting at once. As soon as they recovered from their astonishment at Figgy's audacious suggestion, they received the idea with enthusiasm. It was the very thing. Cutts would be defeated, and good old Tom Merry would be captain of the school. There wouldn't be a New House captain, and St. Jim's would be saved from all danger of going to the "bow-wows."

There was a ringing cheer that echoed the whole length of the Shell passage.

"Hurrah!"

"Tom Merry captain! Hurrah!"

Tom Merry hesitated. The suggestion had taken him completely by surprise, and he had his doubts. But the idea of being captain of the school, even for a time, was, naturally, a very attractive one. His eyes began to sparkle.

"Well, if you fellows think so—"

"We do—we does!"

"I considah—"

"Hurrah! Tom Merry captain! Hurrah!"

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus, in a burst of generosity. "Yaas, and I will back you up, deah boy. I weally considah that I have a bettah claim, especially as the captain of the school wequiah to be a fellow of tact and

judgment. But I withdraw my claims, and I will back you up like anythin'."

"Then we'll put it to the fellows," said Tom Merry. "Let's get down to the Common-room, and see how they take it."

And the meeting adjourned to the Common-room.

### CHAPTER 13.

#### The New Candidate!

"GENTLEMEN—"

"Pile in!"

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry stood on the table in the Junior Common-room in the School House. The room was crowded with the Shell, the Fourth, and the Third. News of the meeting had gone round, and the fellows had swarmed in to attend it. Figgins & Co. were there, too, with a crowd of New House juniors.

"Gentlemen," resumed Tom Merry. "Monteith has withdrawn his candidature. We are all sorry to hear it."

"Hear, hear!" from the New House contingent.

"Two candidates are left—Knox and Cutts."

Groans.

"Knox is a rotten bully, and we don't want him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Cutts played a dirty trick in giving Monteith away to the Head, for we all know he did it, whatever he says."

Groans for Cutts.

"It is necessary, therefore, to put up a new man to save the good old school from going to the dogs!"

"Bravo!"

"Figgins of the New House has suggested me."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gentlemen, why shouldn't a junior be captain of St. Jim's?"

"Echo answers why," said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, echo would answah St. Jim's to that wemark," said Arthur Augustus. "Echo always answahs the last word, you know."

"We've got to show Cutts what we think of his knavish tricks," said Tom Merry. "And I really think I should make a pretty decent captain of the school."

"Blessed is he that bloweth his own trumpet!" grinned Gore.

"Order!"

"Under my rule," said Tom Merry, growing enthusiastic, "St. Jim's would

flourish like the bay-tree under running water. There will be liberty, equality, fraternity—freedom for all, combined with respect to authority; every chap will do just as he likes, and discipline will be firmly enforced!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It will be my aim to carry on the good work commenced by the lamented Kildare."

"Good old Kildare!"

"I shall do my best to keep up the football and cricket traditions of the old school—more especially by a judicious mixture of juniors among the seniors in the first eleven—"

Francie cheering.

"I shall use my influence with the Head to get a certain number of juniors made into prefects, to keep the Sixth in order—"

Wild applause.

"In a word, everything will go ripingly if you decide to elect me captain of St. Jim's. I promise to stand up for the rights of the juniors."

"Hurrah!"

"If the Sixth cut up rusty they'll get it in the neck."

"Down with the Sixth!"

"Fagging will be abolished—"

"Bravo!"

"Bullying will be put down with a firm hand—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And—and all will be calm and bright," said Tom Merry, in conclusion. "Gentlemen, hands up for myself as captain of St. Jim's."

A forest of hands went up.

There was no doubt that the candidature of Tom Merry of the Shell was popular in the extreme—at least, with the Lower School.

Tom Merry glanced with sparkling eyes over the crowded and enthusiastic meeting. There were enough fellows present to elect him, if it came to that.

"Gentlemen I thank you—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I will now proceed to put a notice on the board announcing my candidature. All of you can come with me."

"What-ho!"

Tom Merry jumped down off the table and led his excited and enthusiastic followers to the notice-board in the hall. Monty Lowther found a pencil, and Manners a sheet of paper torn from a pocket-book, and Tom Merry wrote out the notice and pinned it on the board. It ran:

"Thomas Merry of the Shell Form

has the honour of announcing himself as a candidate for the captaincy of St. Jim's, now vacant. He appeals for the votes of all St. Jim's fellows, School House and New House alike. Roll up!"

"Hurrah!" roared the crowd.

"What's all that noise about?" asked Knox of the Sixth, pushing his way angrily through the crowd. "What rot are you putting on the board, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry looked defiantly at the bully of the Sixth.

"I'm putting up my election notice," he said calmly.

"Your what?" ejaculated Knox, staggered.

"My election notice."

"What do you mean, you young idiot?" said the senior harshly.

"I'm standing for captain of St. Jim's."

"You!"

"Me—I mean I," said Tom Merry coolly. "And I fancy I'm going to pull it off, Knox. I'm backed up by both Houses."

"You silly young ass!" exclaimed Knox furiously. "Take that idiotic notice down at once! Do you hear?"

"I hear," said Tom, with a nod.

"Take it down!"

"Rats!"

"What!" yelled Knox.

"Getting deaf?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly. "I said—rats! Rats—rats! However, I'll say it again if you didn't quite catch it. Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats, Knox, deah boy! You run off. You have no wight to intahfere with the free and independent electahs of St. Jim's."

"If you don't take that paper down, I'll take it down and lick you!" shouted Knox.

"You've no right to touch it, and you won't be allowed to."

The senior gave a snort of fury and made a grasp at the paper on the board, but the juniors were ready for him. They weren't afraid of Knox. Hands grasped the unpopular bully of the Sixth on all sides, and he was whirled away from the notice-board before he knew what was happening.

"Bump him!" yelled Blake.

"Hurrah! Bump him!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Knox, hitting out wildly.

"Yow-ow! My nose! Ow—"

(Continued on the next page.)

## PEN PALS

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Miss Irene Ewans, Heredia, 1636, Belgrano, Buenos Aires, Argentine; girl correspondents; stamps; age 15-17.

"Great Scott! My eye!"

Bump, bump, bump!

Knox roared as he was bumped on the floor—hard. Darrell came out of his study with a cane in his hand.

"It's all right, Darrell," said Tom Merry reassuringly. "We're only bumping Knox. He wanted to take down the notice of a rival candidate. That's not allowed."

"Certainly not," said Darrell.

Knox tore himself free, looking very dishevelled. His collar was torn out, and his jacket was split at the back.

"That young hound Merry is setting up as a candidate!" he hooted. "Are we going to have the election turned into a silly joke?"

Darrell started.

"Merry, you're not such an ass—"

"I'm standing for captain!" said Tom Merry sturdily. "A respectable and influential party of electors have done me the honour to select me as their candidate—"

"Tom Merry, captain! Hurrah!"

"You young duffer!" said Darrell, and he went back to his study laughing. Knox tramped off, gritting his teeth. He made no further attempt to remove the notice from the board. The electors were evidently not to be trifled with.

"Darrell seems to take it as a joke," said Tom Merry a little uncomfortably. "I don't see anything to laugh at myself."

"He laughs best who laughs last," said Blake sagely. "The Sixth won't laugh when you romp home at the election as captain of St. Jim's."

"Wathah not!"

## CHAPTER 14.

### Foiled at the Finish!

**E**LECTION day!

There was almost breathless excitement in the old school.

Had the contest remained among Cutts, Knox, and Monteith, the excitement would have been nothing like it.

But a junior was standing for the captaincy, and that made all the difference.

Of four candidates one, Monteith, had withdrawn, and the other three were going to the poll—at all events, it was supposed so. But Knox and Cutts had had a talk together, and doubtless the Fifth Former had made it worth Knox's while to give him a free run, for on Saturday afternoon it was known that the Sixth Form candidate had followed Monteith's example, and withdrawn.

Knox had realised, undoubtedly, that he had no chance. Cutts' followers far outnumbered his, to say nothing of the crowd that supported Tom Merry. If both the seniors had stood, both would have been hopelessly beaten; but with one withdrawn, the other still had a chance.

Knox and his friends were supporting Cutts now, and Gerald Cutts hoped to pull it off.

The juniors were determined that he shouldn't. Canvassing had been going on briskly on both sides.

In the New House, Figgins & Co. were indefatigable in Tom Merry's cause. Tom's generous backing of Monteith had touched their hearts. And, besides that, they were eager to get even with Cutts.

Not a fellow in the New House would dream of voting for Cutts. Even some of the seniors intended to vote for Tom Merry, to mark their displeasure at the exclusion of their own candidate.

Some of them, indeed, were of

opinion that, if a junior were elected to the captaincy, the Head would rescind his order, and allow Monteith to take the post, after all. For a junior captain was really unthinkable as a permanency—to senior minds, at least.

The juniors saw nothing unthinkable about it.

The contest rested now between Tom Merry and Cutts, and though the Fifth Former still had hopes, Tom Merry had ample confidence.

A large number of the seniors did not mean to vote at all, but the juniors intended to roll up in great force for their man. And almost all the juniors of both Houses were for Tom Merry.

The election was fixed for four o'clock in the afternoon in Big Hall of the School House.

Long before four o'clock the Hall was crowded.

Tom Merry's backers whipped in the voters from all quarters, from the gym and the footer ground, and the quad and the studies. Not a fellow who possessed a vote was allowed to be anywhere but in Big Hall.

Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom were tellers on the important occasion, and a little before four o'clock they came in.

Both of them were looking very grave. They did not like Cutts or his candidature, but they hoped sincerely that he would be elected. A junior as captain of the school was a new departure, of which the masters were not likely to approve.

Cheers greeted the appearance of the two masters.

"Now we shan't be long, deah boys!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, we'll have a celebration when we've elected Tom Mewwy captain! I still considah that I should weally make a bettah captain, you know, but I'm backin' up old Tommy."

"It will be a giddy walk-over!" said Monty Lowther. "Look at Cutts! He doesn't look very jolly, does he?"

"Wathah not!"

"He knows he's going to get it in the neck," said Tom Merry. "Now, who's going to propose me?"

"Bettah leave it to me, deah boy. I will put it vewy nicely."

"Right-ho! Pile in!"

Four o'clock struck. Mr. Railton raised his hand for silence, and the buzz of voices died away in the crowded Hall.

"My boys," said the Housemaster, in his deep voice, "you are met to elect a new captain for the school, in the place of Kildare, whose departure we all regret."

Mr. Railton was interrupted by cheers for Kildare. Then he resumed: "I understand that there are two candidates. I trust that the boys of St. Jim's will make a wise selection, and not commit themselves to a reckless innovation."

"That's up against you, Tom Merry," whispered Levison.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "Railton means that we're to vote for the right candidate, and the right candidate is Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Knox is up!" grinned Kangaroo. "Go it, Knox!"

Knox rose to propose his friend, Gerald Cutts of the Fifth Form at St. Jim's. There were cheers from a section of the assembly.

Tom Merry & Co. looked round them, and they were satisfied that not

more than a third of the fellows present were cheering for Cutts.

Over fifty fellows were absent from the Hall, those fellows who would not vote for a junior, and who did not choose to vote for Cutts.

"Now, Gussy!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus came gracefully forward.

"Gentlemen of St. Jim's—"

"Hurrah!" came a roar, which completely put in the shade the late cheering for Cutts. "Go it, Gussy!"

"Gentlemen, I have the honah to pwpose my esteemed fwriend, Tom Mewwy, for the post of captain of St. Jim's!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I need not dilate upon the eminent qualities of my fwriend, Tom Mewwy! You all know him!"

Cheers!

"You know him for a good man and twee—kindest fwriend and noblest foe—a chap who's as stwaight as a die, and always plays the game."

"Hurrah!"

"Mr. Wailton, the majowity of votes bein' evidently in favah of my fwriend, Tom Mewwy, I claim to have my fwriend, Tom Mewwy, declared captain of St. Jim's!"

"I demand a show of hands!" said Cutts, between his teeth. Cutts was pale with rage; he had little hope left now.

He had played his cards well—too well, perhaps. Cunning as he had been, his schemes had toppled over at last like a house of cards; he was foiled at the finish. The unexpected had happened, for the candidature of a junior was certainly one of the most unexpected things that could have been forecast.

And Cutts of the Fifth saw his castles in the air fading away.

"Hands up for Cutts of the Fifth!" said Mr. Railton.

Hands went up on all sides, and they were carefully counted, and then Mr. Railton and the Fourth Form master compared notes on the total.

A note was made of the number, and then a show of hands for Tom Merry was called for.

To the most casual glance it was evident that the number was far greater.

But the counting was gone through carefully.

Then there was a hush of silence as Mr. Railton stood up to make the announcement of the result.

The excitement was breathless.

"Votes for Cutts of the Fifth—forty-one!"

"Oh!"

"Votes for Tom Merry of the Shell—one hundred and nine!"

"Hurrah!"

"Tom Merry of the Shell is declared to be duly elected captain of the school," said Mr. Railton, with quite a queer expression on his face.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Cutts of the Fifth drove his hands deep into his pockets, and strode from the Hall, his face white with rage. But few regarded Cutts of the Fifth. A wildly excited and enthusiastic crowd surrounded Tom Merry, and raised him shoulder-high, and bore him round Big Hall in triumph, and the old rafters rang with cheers for Tom Merry, captain of St. Jim's.

(Next Wednesday: "CAPTAIN TOM MERRY!" Look out for this great yarn telling how Tom fared as skipper of the school. Don't forget to order your GEM early.)

**BILLY BUNTER AS THE TOREADOR "BRINGS DOWN THE HOUSE" WHEN THE WHARTON OPERATIC COMPANY PRESENT—**

# GRAND OPERA AT GREYFRIARS!

## WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

Returning from a visit to London, Harry Wharton tells his chums of the Remove at Greyfriars that he has thought of a new wheeze—giving a representation of the famous opera, "Carmen." Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh are keen on the idea, and the Wharton Operatic Company soon got to business, arranging the cast and rehearsing.

But they meet with opposition from Temple, Dabney & Co., their rivals of the Upper Fourth, who are jealous of the enterprising Remove. So it is that when the costumes arrive for Harry Wharton & Co., Temple and Dabney capture them and carry them off to their study. The Remove promptly go on the warpath, smash open Temple's door, rag the two Upper Fourth fellows, and recapture the costumes.

(Now read on.)

## Full Dress!

**H**ARRY WHARTON and his chums carried off the recaptured costumes in triumph to Study No. 1. Hazeldene was waiting for them there with Bunter.

"Marjorie is coming to the rehearsal in Mr. Quelch's room after tea," he said. "I say, what ripping costumes! It is to be a dress rehearsal this time, I suppose?"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes; we may as well get into the things after tea. Let's take just a snack and get it over."

"I say, Wharton—"

"Well, what's the trouble now, Bunter?"

"It's all very well for you to talk about having a snack, but I'm jolly hungry. This operatic business is all very well in its way, but it oughtn't to be allowed to interfere with more important matters, such as meals."

"You can feed in a corner all on your lonesome, Bunter," laughed Harry. "We're going to allow five minutes for tea, and not a second more."

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "Buck up with that tea, Bunter!"

"Oh, very well!"

A hasty tea was partaken of, and then the table was cleared back. Billy Bunter took advantage of Harry's permission, however, and went on having tea by himself in the corner. The others unpacked the costumes.

"We want a glass here to dress by," Bob Cherry observed. "While Mr. Lowndes is away, we may as well borrow the big glass out of his bed-room. He won't be back for a few days."

"Good!" said Wharton. "Get it here, some of you."

Bob Cherry and Nugent soon had the glass there. It was big enough for the juniors to see themselves full-length, and was a great advantage, of course, in dressing for the stage.

The costumes were examined eagerly. The chief difficulty was in the matter of size. Most of them were too big, and would need taking in and altering. But, as Hazeldene remarked, Marjorie was very clever with needlework, and

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## By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

she would come to the rescue in helping them to get a fit.

Harry Wharton's tall figure was set off to great advantage in the costume of Don Jose. If the costume would not have been passed as absolutely correct by an operatic stage manager, it was quite good enough for Greyfriars. It was, at all events, a Spanish costume, and as Carmen's hero was a Spaniard, that was near enough.

Bob Cherry, in the garb of Escamillo, was a really imposing Toreador, only Bunter looking on him with an unfavourable eye.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, having by this time finished his tea, "I think I ought to point out to you—"

"What is it, Bunter? Anything wrong with the costume?"

*When the moment came for the curtain to rise on the Wharton Operatic Company's great show, the "leading lady" was absent, the accompanist was missing, and the vocal score had vanished!*

"No; only with the chap who's wearing it. I think I ought to be the Toreador."

"Rats!"

"I know there's a lot of jealousy in a thing of this kind," said Bunter, shaking his head. "But I don't think any feeling of that sort ought to be allowed to interfere with the success of the show."

"Cheese it, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "You can take the part of Remendado, or scoot!"

"Oh, really, Wharton!" said Bunter. "I'll take the part, but if the whole thing turns out to be a ghastly frost, mind, I warned you that I ought to have had the part of the Toreador."

"We'll mind, Bunter—we'll mind anything, if you'll only shut up. Get into your things, and let's see how we look tout ensemble."

Harry as Don Jose, Bob Cherry as Escamillo, Nugent as Le Dancaïro, and Bunter as Remendado, were soon complete.

They had the copies of the parts in their hands as they stood in a row, and really looked very businesslike.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "You'll do! Sing up!"

The quartet sang up. Each was singing his own part, and as each part had no reference to the others, the result, to a musical ear, could not be called pleasing. But, as Wharton said, it was only an experiment to see how

they went together, and they went very well.

"Goodful!" said the nabob. "The excellentness of the singing is only equalled by its terrific noisefulness!"

There was a knock at the door. A curly-headed, smooth-cheeked Irish junior looked in. It was Micky Desmond, who had undertaken the part of the immortal heroine of Bizet's famous opera.

"Hullo, Carmen!" said Bob Cherry. "Here are your togs, and you're late."

"Sure, and I'm sorry," said Desmond. "Faith, and ye all look ripping!"

"You'll have to leave the 'faiths' and the 'sures' out of Carmen's part."

"Sure, I shall be talking in French entirely, and that will be all right," said Micky Desmond confidently. "I've been practising the 'Habanera.' How does this go?"

And the junior started in a high and really somewhat agreeable voice:

*"L'amour est enfant Bohème,  
Il ne m'a jamais, jamais connu de loi.  
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime,  
Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!"*

"Ripping!" exclaimed Harry Wharton heartily. "You'll do, Micky. I say, I think it's near time we got along to the rehearsal, so bundle into your clothes. There's a lovely wig for you to wear as Carmen. You get into Zuniga's duds, Hazeldene, and you into Morales' things, Inky. Buck up!"

The juniors were soon ready. And then Harry Wharton turned down the light in the study, and they sallied forth to Mr. Quelch's room.

## The Rehearsal!

**W**HY—what—how— Bless my soul!"

Dr. Locke, the respected Head of Greyfriars, gasped in amazement. He was coming along the passage in the dusk when six Spanish smugglers bore down upon him.

Spanish smugglers were rare in the corridors of Greyfriars, and it was no wonder that the Head was surprised.

"What the—how—"

Dr. Locke stared blankly at the smugglers.

"I hope we did not startle you, sir?" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, it is Wharton! What do you mean by going about in this ridiculous garb, Wharton?" asked the Head.

"I am Don Jose, sir, the hero in 'Carmen.'"

"The hero in 'Carmen'?" What do you know about 'Carmen'?" asked the Head, who was a great opera-goer when he had the opportunities of visiting town.

"We're going to give a performance in the Remove-room, sir," said Harry demurely—"a grand opera performance of the original by the Wharton Operatic Company."

The Head gasped.

"Dear me! That is really a very ambitious project, Wharton."

"Yes, sir. But we hope to make a great success of it."

"I—I hope you will, my boy. I certainly have no objection to your making

## A SPARKLING STORY OF FUN AND EXCITEMENT AT GREYFRIARS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHUMS OF THE REMOVE.

the attempt, though I cannot help thinking that the task will be somewhat beyond your powers."

"I hope not, sir."

"And these boys are—"

"I'm Nugent, sir, as Le Dancaïro," said Nugent.

"I'm the Toreador," said Bob Cherry.

"And I'm Remendado, sir," said Billy Bunter. "I ought to have been the Toreador, but there is a lot of jealousy in this sort of thing."

"Oh, cheese it, Bunter!"

"Really, Wharton—"

"I hope you will come and see the performance, sir," said Harry Wharton respectfully. "We should give you the best seat, and there is no charge for admission."

The Head smiled.

"Well, I will see, Wharton," he said. And, with this non-committal reply, the Head of Greyfriars rustled on down the passage.

"Hallo! There's Huffy!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Hoffman, the German junior, was coming along, and he stopped to stare at the Spanish smugglers as they approached Mr. Quelch's room. He grinned affably.

"Is rum of you Wharton?" he asked.

"Here I am," said Harry.

"Goot! I was tinkin' tat I should offer you mein services for te presentation of te 'Carters.'"

"The what?"

"The 'Carters.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"He means 'Carmen.'"

"Ach! Vat is te difference between 'Carters' and 'Carmen'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I not see why for you cackle. But I tink tat I offer mein services. I tink tat I do te Toreador first-rate, ain't it? Would you care to see me do it before?"

"Toreador is booked," said Harry Wharton. "Bob Cherry represents Escamillo."

"Tat is all very well; but you would rarder the opera vas a success, ain't it? I am quite villing to sing as Escamillo."

"Yes," growled Bob Cherry; "and a jolly thing you would make of it with your double Dutch accent!"

"I sings te French almost as vell as I speaks te English."

"Then your French must be simply ripping!"

"Ach! I can sing te Toreador song first-rate, and I soon learns te rest of te part. I vill give you specimen."

"Oh, don't! As you are strong, be merciful!"

"Ach! I sings him finely before!"

And Hoffman opened his mouth, which was of a good size, and started upon the famous song of the Toreador in French, with a strong German accent:

"Votro doast, je peux fous le rendre, Zenors, zenors, gar avec les zoldats, Oûi, les Doreros—"

But the chums of the Remove had fled. Fritz Hoffman gazed after them indignantly.

"Ach! Tey vas fools, and know not vat is goot ting ven tey see him!" he murmured. "I vill not sing te Toreador part for dem now if dey go down on knees and peg of me!"

The Spanish smugglers reached the Form-master's sitting-room. It was a rather large room, and there was a piano in one corner, and there was



"Go it, Bunter!" yelled the audience. "On the bawl!" Billy Bunter opened his mouth and shut it several times. Then suddenly taking his courage in both hands, he plunged into the solo, the "Toreador" song from the second act of "Carmen."

plenty of room for the rehearsal. Mr. Quelch, who was of musical tastes himself, was glad to encourage a similar taste in his Form, and he had given Harry permission to use his piano whenever he was not using the room.

Marjorie Hazeldene had just arrived there, and she smiled as she saw the characters in "Carmen" come in in their stage attire. The sight of Le Remendado in spectacles seemed comical to her. Billy Bunter noticed the smile, and he hastened to explain.

"I can see what you are thinking, Miss Hazeldene," he remarked.

"Can you?" said the girl, starting a little.

"Oh, yes, of course! You think, as I do, that Bob Cherry is not much class as the Toreador."

"Nothing of the sort."

"Oh, yes! You say that to spare Cherry's feelings. As a matter of fact, I ought to have had the part of the Toreador, which is specially suitable to my baritone voice. But, really—"

"Oh, cheese it, Bunter!" said Nugent.

"You're stopping the procession! Is the ivory-puncher coming over this evening, Wharton?"

Harry nodded.

"Yes, I think so. I asked them to send him to rehearse with us, if possible. If he can't come I will play for you chaps, and Marjorie will play for me."

"With pleasure!" said Marjorie.

"Now I think we're ready."

There was a tap at the door.

"Oh, come in!" said Harry Wharton resignedly.

The door opened, and Temple of the Upper Fourth looked in. Temple was

grinning. There was another figure behind him—that of a very slim young man, with a head of hair that would have done credit to an "after-using" hair restorer advertisement.

"Hallo!" said Temple. "Thought I should find you here. I see it's a full-dress rehearsal this time. Regular Guy Fawkes show."

"Oh, clear out, Temple!"

"I've brought this merchant to you. He came in inquiring for Master Wharton, so I kindly brought him along," said Temple. "I thought he belonged to you."

"Oh, I suppose it's the accompanist!" said Nugent.

Temple chuckled.

"Yes, rather! I say, may I stay and see the show?"

"No; you mayn't!"

"Oh, very well! I should like to, as a good laugh does you good. This is the monkey show, Mr. Slymm. Come in, and if you're good they'll give you sixpence to get your hair cut."

Mr. Slymm, the musical young man, stared at Temple, who went chuckling down the passage. Then he entered the room.

"You're the chap from the music shop?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I am the accompanist," said Mr. Slymm. "I understand that I am required for a rehearsal this evening?"

"Yes; we're all ready."

"There's the piano," said Bob Cherry. "There's the score on the desk. Thump away!"

"Really—"

Harry Wharton led the young man

to the piano. Mr. Slymm ran his fingers through his long hair and sat down. He struck a few chords on the piano, and then dashed off into a medley of sounds.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What are you up to?"

Wharton shook the musical young man by the shoulder.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

Mr. Slymm seemed to start out of a reverie.

"Ah, I am sorry! It was a moment's forgetfulness. That was a small thing of my own," he said. "A mere trifle dashed off in an idle moment."

"Well, you can keep it for another idle moment. You're going to thump out 'Carmen' now for us to rehearse to," said Bob Cherry.

"Ah, I'm ready!"

The musical young man opened the score, and dashed off into the stirring prelude of Bizet's opera. He played very well, and the prelude to "Carmen" sounded as well as it was possible to sound on a single instrument. But the juniors had no time to spare. They were there for business, not to hear the musical young man give a pianoforte recital. Bob Cherry poked him in the ribs.

"Here, chuck it!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Slymm broke off with a crash of keys.

"What is the matter?"

"Come to business!" said Harry Wharton. "We want you to begin here." He turned the leaves of the score. "We haven't time for more than practising our parts. You can buzz off the prelude on the night of the performance."

"Ah," murmured the musical young man, and he smote his forehead. "Barbarians! I might have expected it. Barbarians!"

"Eh—what's that?"

"Nothing. I am ready."

"Off his dot, I suppose," whispered Nugent to Bob Cherry.

"Here you are," said Harry, pointing to the score. "The soldiers are on guard. Morales—that's you, Inky—stands here."

The Nabob of Bhanipur came forward. His face was not made up, and the dusky countenance looked very curious against the Spanish military uniform.

"Now Micaela is going to enter. Are you ready, Miss Marjorie?"

"Quite!" said Marjorie, with a smile.

"Now, then, Inky, you are talking to yourself as Morales—that is to say, you are singing. Now start."

Hurree Singh looked at his part and started.

"At the esteemed gate of the guard-house, I smoke the respectable cigar to kill time—"

"Ass! Make it French!"

"I beg your honourable pardon. It was the absence of the brain—I mean, the mind. 'A la porte du corps de garde—'"

"Sing it, ass!"

"It was again the momentary forgetfulness."

And Hurree Singh sang the opening remarks of Morales in a passable voice, and in passable French.

"We must leave out the chorus now," said Harry Wharton. "They come in later. This is where Micaela enters. All you fellows stand back. You're dead in this act."

Marjorie Hazeldene, as Micaela, entered.

"Now then, Inky, you go on."

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"The go-onfulness is immediate."

And the nabob sang again.

"Que cherchez-vous?" (What seek you?)

"Moi, je cherche un brigadier," sang Marjorie. (I seek a brigadier.)

Harry Wharton rubbed his hands like a satisfied stage manager.

"Good!"

The scene continued very well. Marjorie's part was excellent, but the nabob made many a little mistake. But as he remarked, it was no use to expect a rehearsing person to be "letterfully perfect at so early a stagefulness."

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### Bunter Is Not Satisfied!

THE rehearsal proceeded. The stage manager had made merciless cuts in the opera, to make it short enough for representation in the Remove-room, and so the rehearsers were soon in the midst of the action. The chorus of boys was "understood," and then the chorus of cigarette girls had to be understood, also, and the musical young man at the piano had to be gently restrained from playing the music to them.

Mr. Slymm evidently believed, like many accompanists, that an accompanist's duty was to give a pianoforte selection with a voice obligato. But the stage manager of the Wharton Operatic Company was as firm as a rock, and Mr. Slymm's little excursions up and down the keyboard were restrained with a ruthless hand.

"Now then, Micky Desmond, are you ready," said Wharton, when the time came for the entrance of Carmen on the scene.

"Sure, and I am!"

"Go ahead, then. The chorus has welcomed you—"

"Faith, and it hasn't done anything of the kind!"

"Ass! That's understood!"

"Howly smoke! There seems to be a lot understood in this rehearsal!"

"Oh, don't waste time! So long as you understand your part you will be all right. Now the chorus has finished—that's understood—and you've got to reply to them. They ask you when you will love them."

"Sure, they're very polite!"

"Ass! Get on with your part!"

"Now then, you ivory-thumper!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, tapping Mr. Slymm on the shoulder.

The musical young man had gone off into a reverie. Mr. Slymm started.

"Did you speak to me?"

"Yes, rather. It's time for you to thump the keys."

"Oh, certainly!"

And Mr. Slymm's long fingers began to perform gymnastics up and down the keyboard, while the musical young man cast his eyes up towards the ceiling, and appeared to be lost in ecstasy. Harry Wharton glared at him.

"That isn't the music!" he exclaimed.

"Give Carmen his note—I mean, give Desmond her note. What the dickens are you up to?"

Bob Cherry shook the musical young man. Mr. Slymm came back to earth.

"Ah, what is it?"

"What are you playing, you ass?"

"I'm sorry! It was a moment's forgetfulness. That was a small thing of my own. A mere trifle dashed off in an idle moment."

"You'll get dashed off in an idle moment if you don't attend to business!" said Harry Wharton. "Give us the start now."

"Oh, certainly! I will play the music for the Chorus of Cigarette-girls—"

"Shut up! We haven't got an evening to spend listening to you thumping the piano! Begin at the 'Habanera.'"

"Oh, very well!" murmured the musical young man.

He thumped his fingers down on the keys.

"Now then, Desmond, that's your note."

"Oh, sure, I'm all right!"

"Get on with the washing, then!"

Micky Desmond started upon Carmen's famous song:

"L'amour est un oiseau rebelle,

Que nul ne peut apprivoiser.

Et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle  
S'il lui convient de refuser."

Micky's French had an Irish accent, but he sang passably well, and he ploughed on right through the "Habanera," gasping a little at the finish. He took a flower from his corsage and threw it to Don Jose, and it caught Harry Wharton in the eye. Harry gave a yell.

"What the dickens did you do that for, Desmond?"

"Sure, and I had to throw ye the flower!"

"Ass! Carmen doesn't chuck a flower in Don Jose's eye!"

"Well, that was an accident."

"Don't I come on in this scene?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Of course you don't!" said Harry Wharton. "Dancairo and Remendado don't appear till the scene in the hostelry of Lillas Pastia."

"That's all very well, Wharton, but a fellow like me ought not to be given a small part like that."

"Now then, it's—"

"Wait a minute, Wharton; I'm speaking to you. Don't you think that, upon the whole, it would be better for you to resign the part of Don Jose to me?"

"Oh, ring off, Bunter! You make me tired!"

"That's all very well—"

"Cheese it! Micaela enters here."

Marjorie re-entered. There was a slight colour on the girl's face. In this scene Micaela renders Don Jose a kiss from his mother. Harry Wharton had considerably cut that part of the scene; but the song had not been altered, that being impossible without spoiling the whole thing.

Marjorie sang the part of Micaela very well, and Harry Wharton sustained that of Don Jose creditably, and there was a murmur of applause as they finished.

"Jolly good!" said Bob Cherry. "This will knock the Upper Fourth, and no mistake!"

"Rather!" said Nugent heartily. "I don't know what we should do without Miss Marjorie, though!"

"Oh, you may be sure I shall not fail you!" said the girl, laughing.

There was a knock on the door, and Mr. Quelch came in.

He nodded to the curiously garbed juniors with a smile.

"I am sorry if I interrupt!" he said. "Time is up, I think."

"Yes, sir," said Harry. "We've had a jolly good rehearsal, sir. Thank you!"

"I say, Wharton—"

"Let's be off," said Harry.

"But I say, Wharton—"

"Oh dear! What is it, Bunter?"

"I haven't done any rehearsing yet."

"We haven't got to your part."

"That's all very well, but I don't see why I should be left out of it like this. I think that the more valuable members



As the Removites looked into the study they burst into an irresistible roar of laughter. Perched on three large volumes, Billy Bunter was admiring himself in the glass on the wall. Left alone with the costumes, he had been unable to resist the temptation to don that of the Toreador!

of an operatic company ought to have more consideration shown them."

"You'd better rewrite the opera!" granted Bob Cherry. "Hallo, there's the ivory-merchant started again!"

The rehearsal being over, it was time for Mr. Slymm to leave the piano-stool. But he showed no desire to do so. His long fingers were rambling over the keys again, producing music that sounded like a mixture of a Chopin polonaise with a Liszt Hungarian rhapsody.

Mr. Quelch tapped him on the shoulder.

"I am afraid it is impossible for you to practise here," he remarked. "Nor should I, as a musician, recommend you to practise scales and presto exercises at one and the same time."

The musical young man looked at him dreamily, the sarcasm evidently lost on him. He rose slowly from the music-stool.

"Ah, I beg your pardon!" he murmured. "It was a moment's forgetfulness. A small thing of my own, dashed off in an idle moment."

And he ran his fingers through his long hair, and drifted out of the room. In the passage he put on a wide-brimmed Homburg hat.

"I say, ivory-merchant!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Can I lend you sixpence?"

"Thank you, but I'm not requiring any small loans," said the musical young man, looking at him in surprise. "Quite sure?"

"Yes, certainly! What do you mean?"

"Oh, then I suppose it's due to a moment's forgetfulness that you haven't got your hair cut for the past few years!" said Bob Cherry.

"Cheese it, Bob!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "It's only a joke, Mr. Slymm. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Mr. Slymm. Gosing the porter came along the passage.

"The car for Miss Hazeldene, sir!" Marjorie looked at her watch.

"It is time I was gone. I must go and get my things."

And the girl hurried away to the Head's house.

"Come and get these things off, you chaps," said Harry Wharton. "We can't go into the Close to see Miss Marjorie off in this rig."

"Ha, ha! I suppose not."

The juniors made a record in quick changing. They were in their ordinary attire in time to see Marjorie get into the car, and they all stood, caps in hand, as the girl was driven off. Then they returned to Study No. 1, in a mood of great satisfaction, further to learn up their parts.

The rehearsal, so far, had been a success, and they were looking forward to a really imposing representation of "Carmen" on the improvised stage to be put up in the Remove-room. If there was one in the number who was not quite satisfied, it was Billy Bunter. He still thought that he ought to have been selected as the Toreador.

### The Plotters!

**I**T'S rotten!" Temple of the Upper Fourth delivered that opinion, with a decidedly gloomy expression on his face.

Temple, Dabney, and Fry were standing before the notice-board in the Hall at Greyfriars. They were reading a notice put up there in the handwriting of Harry Wharton of the Remove, general manager of the Wharton Operatic Company.

### "NOTICE!"

"The date of the representation of Bizet's opera, 'Carmen,' by the Wharton Operatic Company, is now definitely fixed. The performance will take place on Wednesday evening, in the Remove-room, Greyfriars, commencing at seven precisely. The school is invited to

attend. Upper Fourth fellows will be expected to behave themselves.

"HARRY WHARTON,  
"General Manager."

"So it's coming off!" said Dabney. "It's coming on, you mean," remarked Fry, who was rather given to making feeble jokes.

"They're in dead earnest," said Dabney.

"Well, I said so all along," Temple remarked. "And we're getting chipped without end now."

"Grand opera in the original is, of course, a bit above anything the Upper Fourth Musical Society has ever done," said Dabney.

Temple nodded gloomily.

"Yes, it will take the shine out of us, and no mistake. The Remove will never let us hear the end of it if it is a success."

"Well, you see, the audience won't be too exacting for a schoolboy performance, and there is no denying that Wharton sings his part well, and Cherry is getting on fine as the giddy Toreador."

"Nugent is pretty good, too."

"That's so; and even young Desmond, in a girl's part, plays up fairly well. It looks to me as if it will be a success."

"Then they're going to have Marjorie Hazeldene to help them. That's not quite cricket you know, as we shan't be able to hiss them when there's a girl on the stage."

"Oh, I dare say the rotters have counted on that."

And the Upper Fourth trio looked at one another glumly. A party of Removites came by, and spotted them as they stood before the notice-board.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "I hear that you chaps are giving up the musical society in the Upper Fourth, and have taken up fretwork instead."

"Rats!" gasped Temple.

"Isn't it a fact? Well, if you haven't, it's time you did, that's all. The

Remove is the coming force in the musical line."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I suppose you're coming to the opera?" said Bob Cherry. "We are letting youngsters in for nothing, for the sake of improving them."

"That's our object," said Nugent. "We want to improve the infants, and spread the knowledge of music in the lower Forms. That's really why we've taken up grand opera in the original."

"The improvement which would make the Upper Fourth sabhis really musical would be tremendous," purred Hurree Singh. "The singfulness I have heard proceeding from the study of the respected Temple was really in the manner of the expiring cat!"

"But I'll tell you what," said Nugent. "If you like to come into the chorus, and learn your parts up quick, we'll make room for you."

"Oh, get off!"

"It's a liberal offer. You'll have speaking, or, rather, singing parts, if you can only learn to sing in tune."

Temple, Dabney & Co. made restive movements. The Removites, chuckling, passed on, and left the Upper Fourth fellows glowering.

"That's the sort of chipping we've got to stand," said Temple.

"And if they pull the thing off, and it's a great success, we shall have a heap more of it, and worse," said Dabney.

Fry sniffed.

"You two chaps call yourselves the leaders of the Upper Fourth," he remarked disparagingly; "yet you can't think of a way to put those cheeky youngsters in their places. Yah!"

"I don't see what we can do."

"Bust up the performance."

"We would if we could, and be jolly glad to," said Temple. "But how are we to do it?"

"What's the matter with going there in a mob and taking whistles and squeakers and things, and making such a fearful row that they can't hear themselves sing?" demanded Fry.

Temple shrugged his shoulders.

"Only—the masters will be present," he replied. "They'd jolly soon stop that sort of thing, Fry. Wharton is too jolly deep to give the performance without at least one master in the room, or, at least, some of the prefects."

"Well, that's right, I suppose. But we're free to kiss if we want to, aren't we? No law against that, if the Head himself were present."

"Bad form. They would say we were jealous."

"Let 'em!"

"Besides, we can't hiss with a girl on the stage," said Dabney decidedly. "We don't want the Remove to crow over us, but we're not going to act like cads to stop 'em!"

"Quite right," said Temple. "If any fellow in my Form hisses Miss Hazeldene, he will get a prize thick ear, so bear that in mind, Fry."

"Suppose Miss Hazeldene didn't turn up?"

"She's bound to turn up; she's promised."

"She might be stopped. Look here," said Fry determinedly, "this giddy opera is going to be busted up somehow. We may as well sink at once into a position equal to the Third Form if we're going to let the Lower Fourth bring off a success like this. They busted up our debating society meeting once, and so it would only be tit for tat. We've got to put our heads together and bust up this performance."

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Temple wrinkled his brow thoughtfully.

"You're quite right there, Fry, if it can possibly be done. Come up to the study and talk it over."

The three adjourned to Temple's study, and the chief of the Upper Fourth closed the door. Then Fry was called upon to explain himself.

"How could Miss Hazeldene be prevented from turning up for the performance, without any rudeness of any kind?" demanded Temple.

"Easily enough," said Fry promptly. "Suppose Wharton decided for some reason at the last minute that the performance couldn't be given—"

"But he won't."

"Ass! Suppose he did. If somebody were ill or something, and it had to be put off, what would he do—wire to Miss Hazeldene, of course."

"I suppose so."

"Well, then, the wire can go in any case."

"My hat! A wire in Wharton's name, do you mean?"

"No; he would probably only put his initials—'H. W.'—to the wire. Well, young Herbert Williams, of our Form, could send the wire and put his initials on it. They're the same as Wharton's, and if Miss Hazeldene supposed that Wharton had sent her the wire, that wouldn't be our fault."

Temple and Dabney grinned.

"By Jove, you're jolly smart, Fry!" said Temple. "Lemme see, how would this do?—'Very sorry. Opera unavoidably postponed. Don't come this evening.—H. W.'"

Fry chuckled.

"Yes, something like that—that's what I mean. Now, without Marjorie Hazeldene to take Micaela's part, they would be short of their heroine, and that alone would be pretty nearly enough to bust up the performance."

"Good!"

"But that isn't all," went on the astute Fry. "There's the ivory-thumper from Friardale who is coming over to grind out the music. Now, it would be the easiest thing in the world for one of us to meet him en route, and stuff him up with some yarn that would keep him away."

"Of course, we couldn't tell any lies."

"Who's proposing to?" demanded Fry. "If we bust up the show, the opera will be postponed. Therefore, if we tell him that the opera is postponed, we shall be telling the solid truth."

"Quite right," said Temple.

"We can tell him the same as we wire to Miss Hazeldene. Now, if the music-grinder is absent, how are they to turn on the music?"

"Wharton is a good pianist."

"Yes, I know he is; but he can't play Don Jose in 'Carmen' and act the giddy orchestra at the same time, can he?"

"Well, no, I suppose not."

"They'll have to cut the part of Micaela, and then the part of Don Jose, and 'Carmen' without Micaela and Don Jose would be like 'Hamlet' with the Prince of Denmark left out."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"And then," pursued Fry, growing more brilliant as he proceeded, "I don't see why we shouldn't make a raid and collar all the parts? You know what amateur performers are; if they can't keep on nosing into their parts they forget their lines."

Temple thumped him on the back.

"Good lad! We'll have them on the hop this time."

Fry grinned.

"Well, I think we shall bust up the show," he said. "Of course, if they postpone it, and announce a new date, that won't save their face. All Greyfriars will say that they had bitten off more than they could chew, and they would be chipped to death about it."

"Quite right. If we bust up this performance, they're done in," said Temple. "And we're going to bust it, or bust something trying."

And Dabney and Fry chimed in cordially:

"Hear, hear!"

### The Great Night!

HARRY WHARTON looked round the Remove-room with an anxious eye. It was the evening of the great performance.

Half-past five had struck, and the performance was timed to start at seven o'clock, and so the operatic company had still an hour and a half.

But in that space of time there was much to be done.

The Remove-master had willingly given permission for the representation to be given in the Form-room, and he had promised to be present himself among the audience. Mr. Quelch knew very well the rivalry that existed between Upper and Lower Fourth, and he knew that the presence of a master might be necessary to keep order.

Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, and several of the prefects, had also accepted invitations to attend. As for the Middle School and the Lower Forms, they were likely to cram themselves into the room to the verge of suffocation.

The operatic company were now arranging the room.

An improvised stage had been erected on the dais at the upper end, draped with dark curtains. The forms were arranged in rows for the audience, and were eked out with chairs and benches borrowed from all quarters. The room was a very large one, and there was seating accommodation for a large audience, and it was pretty certain that a very large audience would turn up.

The piano was placed in front of the stage, just where the orchestra would have been if there had been one. Owing to lack of scenery, one scene had to suffice for the whole opera, but, as Harry observed, it was always best to leave something to the imagination of the audience. They liked it.

"I think that looks all right now," said Harry, with a final glance round the room.

"The rightfulness is great," said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "Having spent a whole half-holiday on the work, it was boundful to turn out in the manner of satisfaction."

"It's all sereno," said Bob Cherry. "I only hope the thing will go off all right. I'm getting rather nervous now that it's close at hand."

"Well, there's really nothing to be nervous about. We all know our parts well."

"And we shall have the parts behind the scene, to consult whenever we go off," said Nugent.

"I don't see that anything could be seen to that we haven't taken care of," Hazeldene remarked.

"Oh, I say, Vaseline—"

"What's worrying you, Bunter?"

"I don't want to throw cold water on the matter, you know, and I should

be sincerely sorry to discourage anybody, but I must say that one important point has been overlooked."

"What is that, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton anxiously. As stage-manager he had many anxieties on his shoulders.

"Why it's about the Toreador's part. I don't deny that Cherry has improved, but the part of Escamillo ought really to have been allotted to me, and—"

"Oh, rats!" said Harry. "Let's go and snatch some tea now, you chaps. I don't feel much like eating, but it wouldn't do to get hungry in the middle of the performance."

"Not much!" said Bunter emphatically. "Now you're talking. You can't do better than have a solid meal before undertaking anything. I feel rather in a flutter myself, but I must say it hasn't affected my appetite. I'm jolly hungry."

The juniors went up to the study, where a solid meal was soon in progress. Bunter had told the truth when he declared that stage fright could not affect his appetite. He distinguished himself on that occasion as upon all other similar ones, and consumed as much as all the others put together.

"Hallo, there goes six!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as the school clock boomed out the hour. "Your sister was coming at six, Hazeldene."

"Yes, she may be here any minute now. She's going to dress in Mrs. Locke's room."

"Good! It's getting near time for us to change, too. May as well go down to the door, though, and meet Miss Hazeldene."

"Yes, rather!" agreed the Removites.

The juniors descended, leaving Billy Bunter to finish off his tea, which meant finishing all the eatables left on the table. But there was no sign of the Hazeldene car in the Close. The juniors hurried down to the gates. On the long, white road which ran past Greyfriars no car was visible.

The quarter past six chimed out from the clock tower. Harry Wharton's brow was wrinkled with a puzzled expression.

"Miss Marjorie is late, Hazeldene." Hazeldene looked puzzled, too.

"Yes, and I can't understand it. She is never late for an appointment. I hope nothing has happened."

Two figures came in sight up the road from the village. They were Temple and Dabney, and they stopped at the gate to look at the Removites.

"Hallo! Looking for anything?" asked Temple.

"We were expecting my sister," said Hazeldene. "She hasn't come."

"That will rather muck up your opera, won't it?"

Harry Wharton looked at him quickly and suspiciously. The Upper Fourth captain's derisive look roused a curious suspicion in his mind.

"Is it possible that Temple has had anything to do with Miss Marjorie staying away?" he said, in a low voice, as Temple and Dabney walked in at the gate. Hazeldene stared.

"How could he have anything to do with it, Wharton?"

"I don't know, but—"

"It's curious," said Bob Cherry. "It's twenty past six, and the car's not in sight. They were grinning like a couple of Cheshire cats."

"There may be some trick in it."

"I don't see how," said Hazeldene. "But I think I'll get out my bike and ride over to home and see whether anything's the matter."

"But you'd never get back in time for the performance."

"If the car's on the road I shall pass it. If Marjorie hasn't started, there's something the matter, though I can't understand why they haven't wired." Hazeldene was looking troubled. His affection for his sister was well known to the Remove, and they understood his feelings at that moment. "I think I had better go."

In five minutes the junior was scorching away on his bicycle.

The others watched him disappear down the road. They turned back gloomily into the Close and entered the house.

"We shall be in a fix if Marjorie doesn't come," said Wharton. "The worst of it is that she's in the first scene. Of course, nothing can have happened, or they'd have let us know. But—"

"I wonder if the ivory thumper has come yet?" asked Bob Cherry. "He was to be here at six, to go over the music a bit first. We haven't seen him come in."

"He hasn't come," said Harry. "Confound the fellow! He'd better not worry us by being late, or there will be a row."

"We may as well go and get changed into our things," said Nugent. "If anybody's missing when the show opens, we'd better have as many ready as possible."

"Ratherfully!" said the nabob. "We have to dress and make up the faces greasepaintfully, and it will take up timefulness. It is only forty minutes now to the commencement of the operatic show."

"Come on," said Harry Wharton. "Look! The audience are already going into the Remove-room. If we're not on time there will be a row. Temple is packing the room with Upper Fourth fellows on purpose."

"I wonder if Temple is at the bottom of this? It looks queer."

"Well, it's not much good wondering now. Let's get into our things."

They hurried up to the study. As he looked in at the door, Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo, Harry, what's up now?" Wharton, in spite of his anxiety, was grinning.

"Look there!"

The Removites looked into the study and burst into an irresistible roar.

#### A Change in the Programme!

**B**ILLY BUNTER was the cause of the merriment of the Wharton Operatic Company

The Owl of the Remove, left alone with the costumes, had been unable to resist the temptation to don that of the Toreador. He was clad now in the garb of Escamillo, with the addition of spectacles. He had placed three large volumes on the table, and was standing on them to get a full view of himself in the glass on the wall.

The Owl was evidently well pleased with himself. He turned slowly round to see the effect of the clothes from all points of view. A back view was not easy to obtain, and Bunter's position was rather precarious as he squirmed round, looking over his shoulder. Bunter did his best to obtain a good view, and he was giving utterance to a murmur of admiration, when the laughter of the Removites fell upon his ears.

Billy Bunter was startled. He gave a jump, and one of the volumes slid from under his feet, and he sat down on the table with a heavy bump.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter

Bob Cherry caught him and jerked him to the floor with another bump that made him yelp.

"Ow! What did you do that for, Cherry?"

"Why, you were going to fall off the table; I saved you just in time."

"You—you—"

"What are you doing in my clothes, you young Owl?" demanded Bob Cherry. "The opera is booked to begin in thirty-five minutes, and here you are wasting time."

Bunter adjusted his spectacles.

"I thought that, perhaps, when Wharton saw me in the Toreador's costume he would change his mind about giving you the part," he explained. "Look at me, Wharton."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm looking."

"Well, what do you think now?"

"I think that if we were giving a comic music hall sketch you would do ripingly, Bunter, but it's hardly the thing for grand opera."

"Well, I think you're an ass! If you—"

"No time for jaw, old chap. Get those things off and get into your own. We've only got half an hour."

"Oh, very well!"

"I wish the piano-puncher would come!" exclaimed Bob Cherry anxiously. "I did want to have a squint at my part again, but there won't be time now."

"Perhaps he's stopping to have his hair cut," remarked Nugent. "It's queer, anyway, about his being so late."

"Where are the parts?" asked Harry Wharton, looking round. "I left the music on the desk here. Have you moved it, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, Wharton!"

"Then where is it?"

"I really don't know. Perhaps Bulstrode moved it when he came into the study."

"Eh? Has Bulstrode been in here?"

"I think it was Bulstrode. I couldn't see, because I had taken my glasses off to fit the black wig on, and—"

"Did he go near the desk, whoever he was?"

"Yes; and I heard something rustle, but I didn't pay much attention as I was busy. I just asked him to lend me a hand with the tunic, and he only laughed and went out."

Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"Somebody's raided the music, you chaps. All our separate parts are gone, and the piano score too. If the accompanist comes he won't be able to play without music, unless we can find out where it's gone and get it back."

"My hat! Do you really think it was Bulstrode?"

"No, it wasn't," said Nugent. "Bulstrode went out for the afternoon with Skinner, and he's not in yet."

"Bunter, you ass, who was it?"

"I tell you I had my glasses off, Wharton; and if it wasn't Bulstrode, I'm blessed if I know who it was. It was a big chap, anyway."

"It's clear enough!" exclaimed Wharton. "It was one of the Upper Fourth—Temple, or Dabney, or one of that set. They've done it to muck up the opera."

"Let's go and get it back."

"No good!" Harry Wharton shook his head. "Temple and Dabney are in the Remove-room now with the audience."

"By Jove, you're right! We should look a lot of asses going there at the last moment and making a row. And it stands to reason that they wouldn't give

it up if we did. What on earth's to be done?"

The operatic company looked at one another in dismay. Micky Desmond came into the study.

"Faith, and I'm ready to fess! And what are ye looking down in the mouth for?"

"The Upper Fourth have raided the music."

"Howly smoke!"

"The accompanist has been kept away by some trick, and so has Miss Hazeldene," said Harry Wharton. "We're in a hole!"

"Begorra!"

"What's to be done?" said Bob Cherry desperately. "It would be idiotic to have an opera without music. And, besides, we could never keep in tune with the piano. What do you say to going on and speaking the parts?"

"We should be laughed off the stage."

"Well, what's to be done?"

"Blessed if I know!"

The silence of dismay fell upon Study No. 1. Billy Bunter blinked through his glasses, an idea working in his brain.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Oh, don't bother now."

"But I've got an idea. You chaps probably wouldn't have made much of a show, anyway. Suppose I go on and give a series of solos as the Toreador?"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"I don't see it. I could—"

"If I might make the suggestful-ness—"

"What is it, Inky?"

"The performfulness of the operatic show seems to be mucked up. Suppose, instead of a musical and operatic 'Carmen,' we give a comic entertainment? If our esteemed Bunterful chum went on as the Toreador, it would be screaming—"

"Oh, really, Inky—"

Harry Wharton's face brightened.

"There's something in that!" he exclaimed. "The opera's mucked up; but if we don't give something we shall be chipped to death. As a matter of fact, most of the fellows would prefer a comic entertainment. We'll go off in costumes and give some comic scenes. Billy Bunter can sing the Toreador song, and if that doesn't make the audience shriek—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I'll go on and make an announcement. Then I can play some comic music to accompany you; and we may wriggle out of this, after all, without looking like asses. If we give a good show we score, anyway."

"Good!"

Harry Wharton was greeted with a cheer when he appeared on the stage in the Remove-room, entering from behind the scenes. The room was crammed

with juniors, and there were a good many seniors present. The Head, Mr. Quelch, Wingate, and the prefects sat in a group, well to the front. Harry Wharton raised his hand for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!" roared Temple, Dabney & Co. derisively. They guessed that Wharton had come forward to announce a postponement of the performance, and they were joyful at the success of their plot.

"Silence!" said Mr. Quelch, looking round.

The ironical cheering died away. Harry Wharton went on calmly:

"Gentlemen, I have to announce a change in the programme. Owing to certain circumstances, over which we have no control, we are compelled to make a slight alteration. Instead of a serious representation of 'Carmen,' we are going to give on this occasion a comic version—"

"Hear, hear!" roared the audience. What else Harry Wharton said was

## HARRY WHARTON—FUNK!

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lost in the cheering. There was no doubt that his announcement was quite welcome to the audience, and Temple, Dabney & Co. looked rather blank. It seemed as if the Wharton Operatic Company's entertainment was to be more popular than ever, and all the wind was taken out of their sails.

Seven o'clock boomed out from the clock tower as Harry Wharton retired, and then something like silence was restored. Harry Wharton was seen to take his place at the piano, and then a voice was heard behind the scenes:

"All right, Cherty, I'm going on! Don't push me. You might make my spectacles fall off and break them, and then you would have to pay for them."

The audience began to giggle. The giggle became a roar as the Toreador came on the stage. A Toreador in spectacles, with clothes rather tight for him,

struck the audience as comic. Harry Wharton played a few bars on the piano.

"Go it, Bunter!"

"On the bawl!"

The shouts of encouragement did not seem to encourage Bunter much. He opened and shut his mouth several times, while Harry repeated his chord again and again. Then, suddenly, taking his courage in both hands, as it were, Billy Bunter plunged into the solo, the "Toreador" song from the second act of "Carmen."

The audience shrieked when Bunter finished. It is safe to say that they never laughed so much in their lives before. And the comic entertainment was certainly a greater success than real grand opera could possibly have been. Bunter's turn gave the thing a good start, and the rest of the entertainment went off on the same lines, with a swing.

The evening was half through when Hazeldene arrived with his sister, who explained to Wharton about the telegram she had received informing her of the postponement of the opera.

Harry mentally chalked it up against the Upper Fourth, but for the present nothing was said. The situation was explained to Marjorie, and she took her turn with a solo, giving the audience Micaela's song in the smugglers' lair with great effect.

Harry Wharton gave the famous Flower Song, Marjorie accompanying him on the piano, and then Bunter was put on again for comic effect. This evening was a great success, though not in the manner originally planned, and the audience departed at last highly satisfied, and with aching ribs.

"Well, it was a success, anyway," the stage manager remarked, when it was all over. "It wasn't exactly what we intended, but it was a success. And the next time we'll take more care those Upper Fourth rotters don't take a finger in the pie."

"I say, you fellows, I suppose, you'll admit that I can sing the Toreador's part now?" Billy Bunter remarked. "If you give the opera in proper form next time, Wharton, I suppose you'll cast me for the Toreador?"

"Well, Bunter, I don't know about that," said Harry, laughing. "But we admit that you were the great hit of this evening, bar none."

A verdict which was endorsed unanimously by the Wharton Operatic Company.

(The amateur actors of Greiffrars are mixed up in more fun and excitement next week. See that you read "THE STAGE-STRUCK SCHOOL-BOYS!")

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