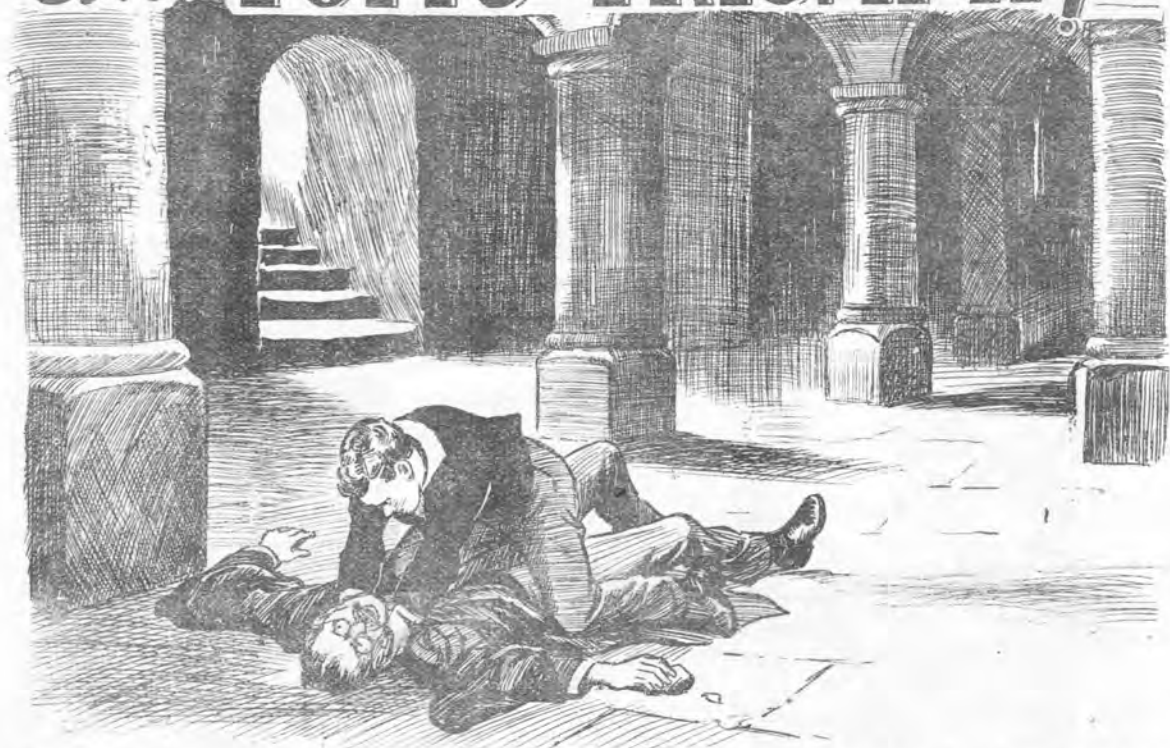


"THE TOFF'S TRIUMPH!" AND "PETTICOAT RULE AT GREYFRIARS!"
GREAT SCHOOL YARNS WITHIN.



The TOFF'S TRIUMPH!



With savage determination Talbot gradually gained the upper hand in the desperate struggle. The professor's grasp suddenly relaxed. "I give in!" he panted. But Talbot did not see that the science master's hand was grasping a large stone!

CHAPTER 1.

Going With a Bang!

SKIMPOLE of the Shell came into Tom Merry's study in the School House of St. Jim's with an excited expression on his face.

His eyes were gleaming behind his big spectacles.

"Has he come yet?" asked Skimpole eagerly.

There were four juniors in the room—Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther, to whom the study belonged, and Talbot of the Shell, who had the honour of sharing the next study with Skimpole.

The Terrible Three were seated in a row in the wide window, and Talbot was sitting on the table, and they were talking football. They were all talking at once, as a matter of fact, and the subject under discussion being so important, they did not heed Skimpole.

"You ought to have stopped that pass, Manners."

"Oh rats!"

"Instead of letting it go into touch—"

"And then Figgins—"

"Right from the throw-in—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Now, look here, Manners, old man—"

"We all make mistakes—"

"Speak for yourself, you ass! I dare say you do—lots—"

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"It was as easy as—"

"And then Figgins—"

"My dear fellows," said Skimpole, blinking round at the juniors, who were growing warm in the argument, "I asked you a question—"

"Oh, buzz off, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry. "Can't you see we're busy?"

"Really, Merry, you might cease discussing those trivial matters for a moment," said Skimpole.

Skimmy, the brainy man of the Shell, whose mighty mental powers were always occupied with deep subjects, regarded football as a very trivial matter. Perhaps that was one reason why Skimmy was a weedy, skinny specimen, developed nowhere but in the forehead, which was truly tremendous.

"Trivial!" roared Tom Merry, Lowther, and Talbot, in chorus. "Why, you ass, the New House beat us in the House match!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "Have you been playing football to-day?"

"Have we been playing football?" said Tom Merry, in measured tones.

"Why, you crass ass, didn't you know it was the House match to-day?"

"I am afraid I cannot occupy my mind with these trivialities, Merry. I have been very busy with my invention."

"Oh, bow-wow! What have you been

inventing now?" growled Lowther. "A special strait-jacket, for personal use?"

"My dear Lowther, I have now perfected my new model of an airship," said Skimpole, beaming. "Glyn laughs at it, and Glyn supposes himself to be scientific. Glyn is an ass, my dear fellows. Talbot has seen it. Talbot knows—"

Talbot laughed.

"I know you have been making the study in an awful muck," he said, "and Gore says he is going to slaughter you and jump on your model."

Skimpole shook his head sadly.

"It is very awkward to have an ignorant person like Gore for a study-mate," he said. "And you are not much better, Talbot—you don't listen when I am explaining the principles of my new invention to you. But it is finished now and ready for the test. But has he come?"

"Who?" asked Tom Merry.

"Mr. Packington, the new science master. He was to arrive this afternoon. I am very desirous of asking his opinion of my new model. It is quite in working order now."

The chums of the Shell laughed. They knew something of Skimpole's brainy inventions, and they could guess what the new science master was likely to think of them.

They were not much interested in the new science master, and had forgotten

YOU'LL VOTE THIS THE BEST "TOFF" YARN YOU'VE EVER READ! STARRING TALBOT, SKIMPOLE, AND THE PROFESSOR, FORGER AND CRACKSMAN!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

all about the fact that he was expected that afternoon. But Skimpole was very keen on "stinks," as the juniors euphoniously called the chemistry class.

The late science master had left, and for a time "stinks" had been suspended, much to the dismay of Skimpole and Glyn, and the few fellows who were interested in that branch of knowledge.

"Has he come?" asked Skimpole again. "I have been so busy that I have not had time to go down since dinner, while you have been playing a game!" added Skimpole severely.

"Haven't seen him," yawned Tom Merry, "and don't especially want to, either. Now, considering where you were standing when Kangaroo sent you that pass, Manners—"

"To let it go into touch, as you did—" recommenced Lowther.

"And Figgins—" began Talbot; then he broke off. "I say, there seems to be a blessed smell of gas. It's escaping somewhere."

"I've noticed it," said Manners, sniffing. "It isn't in this study."

Sniff!

There was certainly a strong smell of gas.

Skimpole smiled.

"That is all right, my dear fellows," he said. "It is only my model airship."

"Your what?" gasped Tom Merry. "You howling lunatic, you haven't been tampering with the gas, have you?"

Skimpole nodded.

"Certainly, my dear Merry! It is very inconvenient for my experiment, not having a gas-burner in the study. But I have fixed a rubber tube to the old gas-pipe in the ceiling. Of course, I should prefer pure hydrogen, which is lighter than ordinary coal gas by—"

"But do you mean you've fixed a rubber tube to the old gas-pipe which was left behind when electricity was installed?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"And you've got the gas turned on?" shrieked Manners.

Skimpole made a soothing gesture.

"Yes, yes; but it's all right. It's filling the gas reservoir of my model. It must be nearly full by this time. You see, I have hung my model from the ceiling, with a short rubber tube running from the gas-pipe to the reservoir of my airship. My model is filling beautifully. That is why I am anxious for Mr. Packington to see it. When it is finished I am going to sail it out of the window."

The juniors stared at Skimpole aghast. To judge by the smell that penetrated into Tom Merry's quarters, not only Skimpole's model, but Skimpole's study must have been filling beautifully.

"Is the fire alight in the study?" ejaculated Talbot.

"Certainly!"

"My—my only hat! You've turned the gas on, and the fire alight in the study?" said Tom Merry faintly.

"Why not, my dear Merry? Gas ascends—"

"You—you—"

"And the fire being on a lower level, there is no danger of an explosion.

But, of course, you fellows would not understand these things—your minds are entirely taken up with such matters as football," said Skimpole loftily.

"However, I had better go back now and see if my gas reservoir is filled—"

With one accord the chums of the Shell rushed upon Skimpole and grasped him as he turned to the doorway.

"Stop, you ass—"

"Stop, you idiot—"

"Do you want to be blown to pieces, you howling jabberwock?"

"My dear fellows," said Skimpole, blinking at them in surprise. "I assure you there is not the slightest danger; gas ascends—"

"You'll ascend, too, if you go into that study!" yelled Lowther. "The blessed House will ascend very likely. Cut off, and get the gas turned off at the main supply, somebody!"

Talbot ran out.

"Talbot, stop!" shrieked Skimpole. "You will spoil my experiment—and I assure you, my dear fellows, that it is a tremendous success. It will go with a bang—"

"I fancy it will!" gasped Lowther. "But you're not going with a bang along with it. Hold the silly chump!"

"I tell you—"

"My hat!"

"Oh!"

Bang!

Skimpole's prediction had come true. His experiment had gone with a bang—and it was a most terrific bang!

To Tom Merry & Co. the arrival of a new science master is of little interest. But to Talbot it is quite another matter—for in Mr. Packington he recognises a companion of his crackman days!

CHAPTER 2.

Not Skimpole's Fault!

BANG!

It rang through the School House from end to end. There was a crash of shattering glass. It seemed to the startled juniors that the very floor shook under them. There was a roar of voices from all directions.

Skimpole staggered against the wall of the passage, his spectacles sliding down his nose.

"Dear me!" he gasped. "What can be the cause of that? It sounded like an explosion, my dear fellows."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Great Scott!"

"Is that blessed gas turned off?" groaned Tom Merry. "We shall have the House on fire next!"

"Talbot's seeing to that."

"What's the matter?"

"Gweat Scott, what's happenin', deah boys?"

Blake and D'Arcy of the Fourth came running along the passage. They coughed and sniffed as the strong smell of gas smote them.

Talbot came running back. He had turned off the gas at the main supply below.

Out in the quadrangle fellows were shouting and staring up at the windows of Skimpole's study, from which

the glass had been blown out in a shower of fragments.

"Gas off, Talbot?"

"Yes."

"All serene now, unless the study's on fire. I suppose we can open the door now the gas is cut off?"

"Better wait a bit."

"The window's open now. The glass is blown out," said Talbot. "What a whopping explosion! That ass Skimpole will be scalped for this!"

"My dear Talbot, I assure you I am not to blame. There must be some fault in the quality of the gas. Gas ascends, and—"

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry.

"But what's the matter, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, turning his eyes-glass in amazement on the Shell fellows. "That fearful vow has thrown me into quite a fluttah."

"That ass Skimpole—"

"It was Tom Merry's fault," said Skimpole, blinking.

"Mine!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yes, indeed! You prevented me from going back into the study. I should have seen what was wrong, and—"

"You'd have had your silly head blown off, you crass ass! Don't you know that we've saved your life, you idiot?" roared the captain of the Shell.

"Pray do not be absurd, my dear Merry! There was no danger if you had not delayed me," said Skimpole.

"You ignorant persons who know nothing of mechanics are very trying to an inventor. I fear that my model has suffered."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing to cause this absurd risibility," said Skimpole severely.

"Now you're for it!" chuckled Blake.

"Here comes Railton!"

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, was striding along the passage from the stairs with a brow like thunder.

But Skimpole had no eyes for Mr. Railton. He pushed past the juniors and opened the door of his study. A terrific "niff" came from the room. The explosion had blown out the windows, smashed everything else, and hurled the furniture right and left. The study was a hopeless wreck.

Fortunately, the fire had been low, and the force of the explosion had extinguished it. A few coals were glowing on the carpet, charring it, and the juniors rushed in to stamp it out.

Skimpole looked round for his model airship. That model, which Skimpole had made with much care, had consisted of a silk envelope, with all sorts of weird wires and cords attached, and a wonderful propeller which was to work on a system of Skimpole's own.

It hadn't worked yet, as this was the first time the marvel had been inflated—and it certainly never would work now, for it had disappeared. The explosion had disposed of every fragment of the airship. A bent gas-pipe was all that met Skimpole's eyes as he looked up for it, and a cracked and discoloured ceiling.

"Oh dear!" said Skimpole. "Oh dear! My model!"

Mr. Railton strode into the study. He gave a gasp as he looked round at the scene of wreckage.

A little old gentleman, who had been with the Housemaster in his study when

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the explosion had occurred, had followed him up to the Shell passage.

He was a stranger to the juniors, and they guessed that this was Mr. Packington, the new science master. He had arrived a little too late to give an opinion on Skimpole's airship.

He was a little man, with a dark complexion and dark moustache and heavy brows, and he wore a very large pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. He looked about fifty, but the juniors noted that he came along with active strides, so perhaps he was not so old as he looked.

He gazed into the study through his glasses in astonishment.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What ever has happened?"

He had a squeaky, high-pitched voice, which made the juniors smile. It reminded them of Clifton Dane's parrot.

"That is what I am going to discover, Mr. Packington!" said Mr. Railton grimly. "What has caused this explosion? This is your study, Talbot. Do you know anything about it?"

Talbot did not reply.

He had finished stamping out the last of the live coals, and he turned round as Mr. Packington looked in, and gave a start as he saw the new science master.

He stood now with his eyes fixed on the little old gentleman.

"Talbot!" rapped out Mr. Railton.

Still Talbot did not speak. He stared at Mr. Packington as if he could not take his eyes from the wrinkled, brown old face and glittering eyes.

Tom Merry, astonished by the absent-mindedness of his chum, pulled him by the sleeve.

"Talbot, Mr. Railton's speaking to you!"

Talbot started round.

"Sorry, sir! What did you say?"

Mr. Railton gave him a sharp look.

"Are you daydreaming, Talbot? What is the cause of this explosion in your study?"

"I—I—"

"I'm afraid Tom Merry is to blame, sir," said Skimpole, blinking at the Housemaster. "However, it was quite unintentional on his part. With the best intentions, he prevented me from coming in here when my model airship was being inflated."

"Oh, you ass!" murmured Tom Merry.

"You—you have been inflating a model airship in the study?" ejaculated Mr. Railton, scarcely able to believe his ears.

"Yes, sir. I was anxious to get it into working order, to show Mr. Packington as soon as he arrived. I wished to ask his opinion on it." Skimpole turned to the new science master, who was looking at Talbot as if he were as much interested in the Shell fellow as Talbot was in him. "Mr. Packington, I am very sorry you will not be able to see my model. It has disappeared. It is very unfortunate. However—"

Mr. Railton grasped the shoulder of the genius of the Shell and swung him round.

"Skimpole, you—you insane boy! What have you been doing? Tell me at once what utterly absurd proceeding you have been guilty of?"

"Nothing of the sort, sir!" blinked Skimpole. "I simply suspended my model from the ceiling, sir, and ran a rubber tube from the old gas-pipe to an opening in the gas-reservoir of my model, sir. It was filling beautifully, and I went to see if Mr. Packington had arrived—"

"You left the gas on with a fire in

the room?" almost stuttered Mr. Railton.

Skimpole smiled pityingly.

"Quite so, sir; but there was no danger. Gas ascends; and as the fire was on a lower level, of course—"

"Then what do you think caused the explosion, you utterly stupid boy?" shrieked the Housemaster.

"Some fault in the quality of the gas, presumably, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, frowning. "This is no laughing matter. Skimpole, you stupid boy, you might have been very seriously injured if you had not been kept from returning to the study!"

"My dear sir—"

"You have had a fortunate escape, and you have caused an enormous amount of damage!" said the Housemaster, in a voice of thunder. "Skimpole, I shall cane you with the greatest severity for tampering with the gas-pipe! I forbid you ever to use gas again for any kind of experiment! Do you hear?"

Skimpole's glasses almost fell off, in his dismay.

"Oh, sir, I trust you will reconsider your decision! I intended to reproduce my model."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimpole, I—I hardly know what to say to you, you stupid boy! If you ever meddle with the gas again, you shall be sent away from the school!"

"Oh!"

"Meanwhile, I shall cane you severely, and the bill of damages for what you have done will be sent to your father!"

"I am afraid my father will be annoyed, sir!" said Skimpole, in dismay. "Perhaps, sir, considering the extraordinary value of my invention, the Head might be willing to pay for the damage?"

"Follow me, Skimpole!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

Mr. Railton strode from the study, and Skimpole reluctantly followed him. He knew what was coming.

Mr. Packington chuckled as he went down the passage after him. The new science master had started at St. Jim's with an extraordinary experience.

Gore of the Shell, who shared the study with Skimpole and Talbot, came hurrying along the passage. He had just heard the news.

Gore looked into the study and jumped.

"What—what— Who's done this?" he stuttered.

"Only one of Skimpole's inventions!" said Monty Lowther blandly. "You have to make little sacrifices for having a genius for a studymate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll slaughter him!" roared Gore. "My looking-glass! My bookcase! Oh, my hat! Where is he? I'm going to kill him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Railton's killing him at present!" grinned Blake. "You can kill him again when Railton's done! He wants killing badly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors cleared off, leaving Gore and Talbot in their wrecked study, Talbot looking curiously thoughtful, and Gore simply raving.

CHAPTER 3.

An Unexpected Guest!

TALBOT came into Tom Merry's study to tea.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were already there. It was a little celebration after a football

match, though this time it was not a victory they had to celebrate. Figgins & Co. of the New House had won the match, chiefly owing, as ten members of the eleven attested, to a certain pass being "muffed" by Manners.

Talbot's handsome face wore an unusually thoughtful expression. Tom Merry & Co. thought they knew the reason.

"How's your study?" asked Lowther. Talbot smiled.

"A wreck!"

"How's Skimmy?"

"Another wreck! Railton gave him a terrific whopping," said Talbot. "I must say the silly ass deserved it. Somebody might have been blown sky-high. We can't use the study again till it has been repaired. Gore's going to dig with Crooke till it's done, and I'm going to ask you fellows to let me do my prep in here."

"Right welcome, my tulip," said Monty Lowther, and Tom Merry and Manners nodded a cordial assent. "What about Skimmy?"

"Skimpole's looking for a chap to let him in, but nobody appears to be anxious to have him," said Talbot, laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I should say not!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I regard that ass as a dangerous lunatic. Bai Jove, here he comes!"

Skimpole blinked into the study.

"My dear Merry, I suppose you have no objection to my sharing your study for a week or two?" he asked. "My own room is, unfortunately, not habitable at present. As it was really your fault that the explosion occurred, I trust that you will be amenable to reason, and will allow me to carry on my experiments here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No!" roared Tom Merry. "Buzz off!"

"My dear Merry!"

"Scat!"

"But consider!" urged Skimpole. "My dirigible airship propels itself without the aid of a motor. Think of that! By means of a system of levers and cranks I have designed a self-acting propeller, and the chief crank—"

"Yourself?" asked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Lowther—"

"Oh, run away, Skimmy—you make us tired!" said Tom Merry plaintively.

"I will share your study, then, Blake," said Skimpole, turning his glasses on the Fourth Former. "I will take my mechanism there now."

"Do," said Blake, "and when I come in I'll chuck it out of the study window."

"Eh?"

"And you after it!"

"My dear Blake—"

"Weally, Skimmy, I uttably wefuse to have you or your wotten inventions in Study No. 6!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "I wegard you as a dangewous-ass!"

"My dear D'Arcy—"

"Run away and play, Skimmy. Ask the new science master to let you have a whack in his study," suggested Monty Lowther. "He's sure to jump at the offer when you explain to him the kind of experiments you make."

Skimpole brightened up.

"My dear Lowther, that is a really very valuable suggestion. I am much obliged to you. Mr. Packington looks a very intelligent man, don't you think?"

"Looks like a boiled owl," said Blake. "But boiled owls might be intelligent,

for all I know. Go and ask him, for goodness' sake. His study's next to Lathom's."

"Thank you very much, Blake."

And Skimpole toddled away. The juniors laughed gleefully. Mr. Packington was not very likely to give Skimpole permission to conduct experiments in his study, especially with explosives. The chums of the School House went on with their tea, and the talk turned on football again. But at the first mention of that now celebrated pass which wasn't taken, and which went into touch, Manners jumped up.

"Chuck it!" he said. "Anybody would think that I lost the blessed game for the House!"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "So you did, deah boy. If you had captuahed that pass and sent the ball—"

"You'd have missed it, just the same!" howled Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"And as it was," said Blake, "right from the throw-in, old Figgins—"

"Blow Figgins!"

"Now, look here, Manners, be reasonable—"

"Fathead!"

"Why, you ass—"

Tap!

It was a knock at the door, but in the excitement of the argument the juniors did not notice it. Manners was excited and wrathful; he had heard quite enough about that celebrated pass which had gone into touch. And, indeed, the number of things which might have happened—according to his comrades—if that pass hadn't gone into touch was really amazing.

"I tell you you're a set of giddy goats!" roared Manners wrathfully. "After all, the way Kangy passed it was rotten!"

"Oh, come—"

"But he couldn't help himself, considering that Blake was getting in his way like a sack of coke."

"I was!" roared Blake.

"Yes; and D'Arcy was dancing about like a monkey on hot bricks!"

"I uttably wefuse to be compared to a monkey on hot bwicks—"

"And Talbot was sitting down taking a rest-cure—"

"I'd been charged over, and I wasn't down a second," said Talbot indignantly.

"And you were all half-asleep when the ball was thrown in—"

"Why, you fathead—"

"You all mucked it up, especially Gussy!"

"Mannahs, you ass!"

"Now, look here, Manners, don't be a clump!"

"Rats!" shouted Manners. "I tell you I'm fed-up. You're a set of silly idiots, and you can't play footer for toffee!"

"Excuse me!"

The door had opened, and the new science master put his head in. But the juniors did not hear him, or see him.

"And I tell you," roared Manners, "that if any silly ass says the word 'pass' to me again, I'll bung this jam tart at his silly chivvy!"

"Now, Manners, you know that pass—" began Blake; but he had no time to get further, for at the word "pass," the jam tart whizzed from the hand of the incensed Manners.

Blake dodged just in time, and the tart whizzed by his head towards the door. But every bullet has its billet; and the same applies to jam tarts—at all events, that jam tart found its billet.

There was a yell from the door as the sticky missile crashed into the face of the science master.

"Oh! Groogh!"

The juniors spun round.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"You've done it now, you ass!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Mr. Packington dabbed at his face with his handkerchief, and wiped his spectacles, without taking them off, however. For a moment his face had been furious in its expression, and the juniors were alarmed by his angry look; but he recovered himself at once.

"Sorry, sir!" exclaimed Manners.

"I didn't see you, sir! I—I meant that for this idiot Blake!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Tom Merry. "We—were—weren't expecting a—a visitor, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir—we all apologise most sincerely, sir," said Arthur Augustus gracefully.

"Groogh!"

"C-can we help you, sir?" murmured Digby.

"Sh-shall I fetch you a—a sponge, sir?" asked Herries.

The juniors were all very anxious to oblige. They did not know what the new master was like; but the best-tempered master might have been exasperated by getting a fat and juicy jam tart suddenly full in his countenance.

Mr. Packington finished dabbing his face and forced a smile. The juniors were relieved to see him smile, after the momentary look of rage that had flashed over his face.

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Packington smoothly, in his high-pitched voice, which reminded the juniors so absurdly of Clifton Dane's parrot. "I quite understand that it was an accident. You should—ahem!—be careful. I seem to have called in at an awkward moment."

"Oh, not at all, sir!" said Tom Merry politely, though he was inwardly wondering what the new master wanted in the study. Of all the juniors there, only Manners was a member of the chemistry class, and likely to have anything to do with Mr. Packington. And the science master could not, of course, have made acquaintance with any of his class yet.

"Pway sit down, my deah sir," said Arthur Augustus, courteously offering the old gentleman his chair.

"Thank you! The fact is, my boys," said Mr. Packington, beaming at them through the big gold rims of his spectacles—"the fact is, I have come to ask you to ask me to tea!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You're very good, sir."

"Quite a pleasure, sir!"

The juniors all spoke at once, with the exception of Talbot, who was looking at the new master in the same strange, fixed way as when he had seen him in Skimpole's study. Mr. Packington smiled benignantly. He did not seem to notice Talbot.

"I trust you will excuse my intrusion," he said pleasantly. "Tea being over downstairs, it occurred to me that I might begin my acquaintance here very pleasantly with tea in one of the studies. But if I am in the way—"

"Not in the least, sir."

"Pway take my chair, sir."

"Shove the kettle on, Monty!"

The juniors were hospitality itself. It seemed to them a very kind and good-natured proceeding of the new master to come there to tea, and they were flattered at his having chosen their study. The science master had made a very agreeable impression upon them.

Mr. Packington sat down, and the juniors looked after his wants. As a rule, it was not "all lavender" having a master to tea—it was a great honour,



Swung off his feet, Skimpole was suddenly turned over, head downwards, and his mighty brain tapped against the quadrangle. "This," said Lowther, "is a vertical crank!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

but rather a bother. But Mr. Packington made himself very agreeable. He laughed over Skimpole's misadventure, and told them stories of his own early experiments as a schoolboy, which made them laugh heartily—and he did full justice to the feed, which was very flattering, too.

In the general cheerfulness, Tom Merry & Co. did not notice that Talbot spoke hardly a word. Talbot did not share in their high spirits. A sudden heavy depression seemed to have come over him, and, excepting when he fixed his eyes with that steadfast gaze upon Mr. Packington's face, he looked at his plate or his cup, and seemed buried in thought.

Mr. Packington did not seem to observe him.

Yet a few times, if the juniors had thought of observing it, his eyes dwelt with a sudden piercing keenness on the silent junior.

So pleasant a companion was Mr. Packington that tea passed off very quickly, and it was an hour later when the science master rose. After thanking the juniors cordially for their hospitality, he took his leave. He left Tom Merry & Co. with the impression that he was a very good-tempered and agreeable gentleman indeed. Talbot did not say a word.

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole Explains!

MR. PACKINGTON came into his study, and turned on the electric light as he entered.

He closed the door after him. The fire was burning in the study, and a big armchair stood before it with its back to the master.

Mr. Packington stood in the study, with a curious, thoughtful frown upon his brow.

"It is he!" he muttered aloud. "No mistake about that! I know him, but does he know me? Can he know me? He said nothing. But what is he doing here, at this school? What can his object be? What—?"

He broke off his mutterings suddenly as a figure rose from the armchair and blinked at him.

"Pray excuse me, sir!" began Skimpole.

A look of fury passed over Mr. Packington's face. He knew that the junior, whom he had not seen when he entered the study, must have heard his muttered words. He made a fierce stride towards Skimpole, caught him by the shoulder, and dragged him violently round the armchair to the middle of the study, and shook him with savage force.

Skimpole gasped, and his glasses slid down his nose, and he blinked over them in amazement at the new master. It was not only the shaking, but the vigour with which it was administered that astounded Skimpole. How there could be so much physical strength in the thin frame of a middle-aged gentleman was a mystery.

"What are you doing here? How dare you be in my room! What do you want?" hissed the new master; and Skimpole was further astonished to hear that his voice was not at all squeaky and parrot-like now.

"Oh—oh dear!" gasped Skimpole. "My dear sir— Oh crumbs! Leggo! Yaroooh! Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Packington appeared to remember himself. He suddenly released the startled junior, and Skimpole dodged

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round the table, keeping that article of furniture between him and Mr. Packington.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the new master harshly. "You—you startled me! I did not expect to find anyone in my study."

"Ow, ow, ow!" gasped Skimpole.

"Ahem! I—I am sorry if I have hurt you!" said Mr. Packington, smoothly once more, and in his parrot-like tones. "I suffer from a nervous complaint, and it is very bad for me to be startled at—my age."

"Oh! Ow! Oh dear!"

"I—I have a habit of talking to myself," went on Mr. Packington, his eyes burning behind his glasses, but his voice smooth and conciliatory. "Did you hear me?"

"Oh, I heard you mumbling, sir, but I did not notice what you said, as I was thinking about my invention, sir."

"Your what?"

"My self-propelling airship, sir."

Mr. Packington gave the genius of the Shell a keen, searching look. His suspicion evidently was that Skimpole was pulling his leg; but he was soon satisfied that the brainy youth was in serious earnest. A smile flitted over his dark face.

"Ah! You are the boy who was responsible for the explosion, eh?" he asked. He was the good-tempered and agreeable master once more.

"No; that was Merry," said Skimpole. "He prevented me from returning to my study in time. I came here to speak to you about it, sir, and as you were not here, I thought I would wait for you to come in. No harm intended, sir, I assure you!"

"If you come into my study again without permission, I will cane you most severely," said Mr. Packington. "I do not like being startled. However, you may go."

"But—but I have not told you what I came for, sir," said Skimpole, regaining confidence as Mr. Packington seemed so good-tempered. "I have been making a model of a very valuable invention, sir—"

"Nonsense!"

"Ahem! I—I thought you might, as a really scientific man, take an interest in it," Skimpole explained. "The fellows don't believe in it; but they're all asses, sir. I am sorry to say that Mr. Railton participates in the general ignorance. He has actually forbidden me to make any further specimens in my study." Mr. Packington was pointing to the door, but the genius of the Shell did not seem to observe it. "I came here to ask you, sir, as a fellow scientist, whether you would allow me to conduct my experiments in your study?"

"What?" gasped Mr. Packington.

"It is extremely improbable, sir, that there will be another explosion, and even if there is, I am sure you would not mind suffering a little damage in the cause of science."

"You fool!"

"Ahem! If I cannot carry on my experiments in the House, sir, I shall have to seek another place—a workshop—out of doors somewhere," said Skimpole. "That will be a great trouble. When an idea flashes into my brain, sir, I like to rush to my study and carry it out at once. Indeed—"

"Leave my study! Stay!" added Mr. Packington, as the brainy man of the Shell retreated unwillingly towards the door. "You may sit down, Skimpole. I think I heard you called Skimpole? I should like to have a little chat with you."

Skimpole beamed. His mighty brain was not keen enough to detect that the new master must have had some ulterior motive for that sudden change of face. "Thank you, sir! I am sure that, as a really intelligent man, you will take an interest in my invention. I will explain it to you at full length, sir. It will not take more than a couple of hours."

Mr. Packington swung round the armchair, and sat down in it, and Skimpole sat down on the edge of another chair facing it. He was prepared to plunge into a description of his marvellous airship, but that was not exactly what Mr. Packington wanted.

"You do not have your study to yourself?" asked the new master casually.

"Oh, no, sir! I have Gore and Talbot there, which is a great inconvenience. I should carry out my experiments much better here."

"Talbot," said Mr. Packington—"has Talbot been long at this school, Skimpole?"

"Not very long. He's almost a new boy," said Skimpole. "Rather an ass, sir. He goes to sleep when I explain to him."

"Where does he come from?" asked Mr. Packington.

Skimpole blinked in some irritation. He had not come there to talk about Talbot.

"Nobody knows, sir," he replied. "It's a long story about Talbot; but never mind him. Now, sir, with an arrangement of a main crank proceeding direct from the propeller—"

"A long story," said Mr. Packington. "You interest me, Skimpole."

"Yes, I expected to interest you, sir," said Skimpole, beaming. "By means of the crank, sir, I dispense with an engine—"

"I mean about Talbot. What is his story?"

"Oh, Talbot!" said Skimpole peevishly. "Everybody in the school knows about Talbot. He's a thoroughly good chap, sir, and punches Gore's head when Gore goes for me. Gore is a beast! And I'm not sure that he really goes to sleep when I'm explaining my invention. I have suspected sometimes that he only pretends," said Skimpole, with a sorrowful shake of the head.

"And his story?" persisted Mr. Packington.

"He was a crackman, sir—"

Mr. Packington started.

"A crackman? Do you mean a burglar?"

"Yes," Skimpole nodded. "Queer, isn't it? Now, with the propeller—"

"You must be joking," said Mr. Packington.

"Not at all, sir," said Skimpole eagerly. "I know it sounds startling; but it's a totally new invention, you see. The propeller is actually self-acting—"

"I mean about Talbot," said Mr. Packington, grimly keeping Skimpole to the subject. "A boy of that character would surely not be admitted to this school?"

"He spoofed the Head when he first came," explained Skimpole. "He was brought up among criminals, you know. He was called the Toff. Queer name!"

"The Toff!" said Mr. Packington, with a start. "Then there is no mistake—I mean, go on!"

"About my invention?"

"No; about Talbot," said Mr. Packington sharply.

Skimpole sighed.

"Well, sir, he came here, and nobody knew what he was; and the poor chap began to think over things, and changed, you know. He gave up his old life, and

handed back all the stuff he had pinched. And then his old friends broke into the school one night, and Talbot chipped in and stopped them. One of them tried to injure him for it and got caught, and gave Talbot away. We all knew then what he was, and he left, of course. It was rather hard on him, because if he hadn't repented, he wouldn't have been given away. He's really a decent sort of chap, though he takes no interest in scientific subjects like me."

"He left?" said Mr. Packington. "Then how is he here now?"

"He went to Spain to get clear, and had to come home on account of the civil war," Skimpole explained.

"And he came back here?"

"Oh, no! He came round to look at the old place, and a beastly detective was after him," said Skimpole. "Then he found a Spaniard trying to blow up a troop train and stopped him, and was wounded. Then they gave him the King's pardon. That set him clear, and the governors of the school agreed to look over his early record, and gave him a scholarship here in reward for his pluck. He was really plucky, you know; and if he only took an interest in scientific—"

"A very strange story," said Mr. Packington. "And is he received here on friendly terms?"

"Oh, yes!" said Skimpole. "We all like him. We all know he hadn't a chance when he was a kid. Some of the fellows were up against him at first, but they soon came round. But to come to my invention—"

"His repentance is really believed in, then?"

"Of course," said Skimpole. "He's jolly well proved it, I should think. He wouldn't have been given away by his old pals if he hadn't left them, you know. Besides, we all know he is as straight as a die. Even Levison backs him up now. And he used to have lots of money when he was the Toff; now he has precious little. But he lent me ten shillings to buy the materials for my gas-reservoir—"

"Very curious!" said Mr. Packington, with a yawn. "I am busy this evening, Skimpole; you may go!"

Skimpole stared at him, open-mouthed.

"But I haven't told you about my invention, sir."

"Your invention is utter nonsense, Skimpole, and you are a stupid boy!" said Mr. Packington. "You may go!"

"But I haven't explained to you about the self-acting propeller—"

"Go, Skimpole!"

"I haven't finished yet, sir. The principle is this: By means of a crank—"

Mr. Packington rose to his feet, with an expression on his face that made Skimpole beat a hasty retreat to the door. He left the study in a dolorous mood, without enlightening the science master as to the principle by which his wonderful propeller became self-acting—by means of a crank.

Mr. Packington, left alone in the study, stood frowning at the fire. He did not talk to himself any more; but he was evidently busy with his thoughts, and, to judge by the expression upon his face, they were not pleasant ones.

CHAPTER 5.

A Scientific Demonstration!

"PENNY for 'em!" said Tom Merry humorously.

Talbot did not smile.

It was the day after Mr. Packington's arrival. Morning lessons



were over, and the chums of the Shell were sauntering down to the football ground.

Talbot had been absentminded in class that morning—so much so that Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, had been a little sharp with him. Talbot was generally one of the most satisfactory pupils, and it was unusual for him to be careless in his work.

Now, with his hands deep in his pockets and a wrinkle on his brow, Talbot seemed to be plunged into deep thought, and to have forgotten that he was not alone. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther regarded him, and looked at one another with suppressed smiles, and finally Tom Merry made him the munificent offer of a penny for his thoughts.

"I'll make it twopence!" said Monty Lowther generously, as Talbot did not reply.

"Eh?" said Talbot.

"What's the trouble?" asked Manners. "Bothered because Linton was ratty this morning? My dear chap, we get used to that."

"Oh, no!" said Talbot. "I—I was thinking—"

He coloured.

Tom Merry frowned.

"Now, you ass," he said warningly. "You don't mean to say that you're thinking about the things we all agreed are to be forgotten?"

Talbot's flush deepened. The other fellows might be able to forget that Talbot had once been the Toff, but it was not so easy for him to forget. But he never spoke of it. It remained at the back of his mind, as it were, and it gave him a gravity that was not in keeping with his years.

And yet very often Talbot was as bright and careless, as cheery and healthy a schoolboy as any member of the Co. Something had brought dark thoughts back to his mind, and his chums wondered what it was.

"No rotter been chipping you on that subject again, I suppose?" asked Tom.

"Oh, no! I—I've been thinking, that's all."

"Don't think," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Those unaccustomed exercises are liable to affect the health when taken too suddenly. Come and punt the ball about."

Talbot nodded and smiled, and joined the chums of the School House in punting the footer about till dinner-time. But when he sat at dinner the cloud returned to his brow. Tom Merry, whose friendship for the Toff was deep and sincere, observed him a little.

He set his lips at the thought that some fellow might have been chipping Talbot on the subject of his past. And yet it was not likely. There had been something of that at first, but it had been completely dropped. Levison of the Fourth, Talbot's old enemy, was his friend now, and Mellish and Crooke and a few like them had realised that it was wiser to hold their tongues.

Tom observed his chum, and he noted that his eyes turned several times towards the table where Mr. Packington, the new master, was seated, chatting with Mr. Railton. The science master seemed to possess a strange interest for Talbot. When the juniors came out of the dining-room, Tom Merry tackled his chum on the subject. "You don't like Packington?" he said.

Talbot started.

"What makes you think that, Tom?"

"The way you look at him. And I remember now that you were as grim as a gargoyle when he came in to tea with us last evening. Why don't you like him? He seems to me a really decent sort of chap."

"I dare say he is," said Talbot. "I hope he is. Why did he come to the study last evening, Tom?"

Tom stared.

"He told us—to have tea with us. I think it was rather a nice thing for him to do!"

"Ye-es—perhaps," said Talbot musingly.

"Anyway, you won't have anything to do with him. You're not in the science class," said Tom.

"No. How did Manners get on with him this morning?"

"Topping!" said Manners, joining them. "He's much better than the chap we used to have. Rather a queer little beggar, with his squeaky voice, but he's got tons of knowledge. Glyn was delighted with him. Packington is going to see some of his experiments in the study. Kerr says he's jolly good, too. Only chap who doesn't take to him is Skimmey. Skimmey thinks he's an ass. He doesn't believe in Skimmey's self-acting propeller, and won't let poor old Skimmey explain it to him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I must say he seems all right," went on Manners. "Understands photography, too, down to the ground."

Talbot smiled. Anybody who took a deep interest in photography was sure of getting on the right side of Manners.

"But who is he?" asked Talbot.

"Where does he come from?"

"Who is he?" repeated Manners.

"Henry Packington is his name, and as to where he came from, I forgot to ask him."

"Oh, don't be funny! I suppose he— he must be known to the Head or to Mr. Railton, or he wouldn't have got a post here?" said Talbot thoughtfully.

"I suppose so," said Manners. "Chaps can't walk into St. Jim's and get a post without jolly good recommendations. What have you got up against the chap?" added Manners, puzzled. "It isn't like you to take a dislike to a fellow for nothing. You even get on with Gore, a thing nobody else can do. What's the matter with Packy, then?"

"Nothing. Only—I don't like him," said Talbot quietly. "I was

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thinking I might join the chemistry class."

"My hat! Because you don't like the master in charge of it?" exclaimed Manners in astonishment. "That's a jolly queer reason for joining a class, I must say."

"Not exactly. That doesn't come under my scholarship," said Talbot. "But I could pay the fee out of the scholarship allowance. It would mean being a bit economical in other directions."

"Jolly glad to have you," said Manners. "But you never cared for 'stinks.' What's the reason now?"

Before Talbot could reply Skimpole joined them. The genius of the Shell had been looking for them.

"Don't walk away, my dear fellows!" exclaimed Skimpole, as the Shell fellows made a movement to retreat. "I want to speak to you. You know that I cannot use my study any more owing to that unfortunate accident due to Merry's carelessness. I have asked quite a large number of fellows, and they all refused, for some reason, to let me use their studies."

"Now, I wonder what their reason can be?" said Monty Lowther seriously.

"It is inexplicable," said Skimpole. "I can only attribute it to the general lamentable ignorance of scientific matters. When I was interested in the subject of evolution I could never get any of the fellows to realise the tremendous importance of knowing for certain exactly what took place on this planet nine and a half billions of years ago."

"I don't remember so far back as that myself," said Lowther, with owl-like gravity.

"Really, my dear Lowther! However, I am now interested in airships. When my airship is completed it will revolutionise flying. You will see, therefore, that this is a matter of tremendous importance. For you to give me the use of your study is a comparatively trifling matter."

"Go hon!"

"I depend upon you, therefore, to help me."

"Bow-wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see any cause for laughter. I may, then, use your study as a workshop?"

"No fear!"

"My dear Merry—"

"Run for it!" said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Pray do not depart till I have completed my observations. If I cannot find a study to work in I must find a workshop somewhere else. Mr. Railton has most unfeelingly forbidden me to use a box-room. Now, if I work in some place outside the school there may be danger from spies. If they should become possessed of my invention it would mean a big loss to this country."

"Awful!" said Lowther. "How should the country bear up under the loss?"

"Pray be serious, Lowther. I shall have to use the woodshed as a workshop, and, unfortunately, there is no gas there. I want you fellows to stop holding meetings and nonsense of that kind in the woodshed while I am busy there. I cannot have my experiments interrupted. If, however, you should take an intelligent interest in the matter I will let you help me in my scientific work."

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther, winking at his chums. "I'm deeply interested

myself. Let us give Skimmy a scientific demonstration, dear boys. Lay hold!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellows, please let go. I—Ow!"

The dear fellows did not let go. They collared Skimmy, swung him off his feet, and lifted him into the air.

"This," said Lowther, with due solemnity, "is what we call a horizontal crank!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow! Please do not let me fall from this height!" gasped Skimpole.

"The centripetal attraction would cause me to strike the earth with a violent concussion—Yaroooh!"

He was suddenly swung over, head downwards, and his mighty brain tapped against the quadrangle.

"This," said Lowther, "is a vertical crank!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow, ow! My dear fellows—

Yow—ow!"

Bump!

Skimpole sat down with breathless suddenness on the ground, gasped, and clutched at his spectacles.

"That," said Lowther, "is a demonstration of the force of gravitation. Up with him, all hands!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Skimpole, as he was swung into the air again.

"Here you see a demonstration of a centrifugal force," said Lowther solemnly. "Our hands, holding Skimmy's neck and legs, apply the centrifugal force, which overcomes the attraction of the earth. Bump him!"

Bump!

Skimpole came into contact with the solid earth again and yelled.

"That," said Lowther, "demonstrates the recurrence of centripetal attraction when the sustaining centrifugal force is removed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, jump on him," said Lowther, "and that will demonstrate—"

Skimpole did not wait for that demonstration. He leaped up and ran for his life.

"And that," bawled Lowther, "is a demonstration of a self-acting crank!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come and have some more, Skimmy. We're just getting interested."

But Skimmy's interest was over. He did not want any more scientific demonstrations. Skimpole, like Charley's celebrated aunt, was still running.

CHAPTER 6.

A Little Too Hasty!

"HERE you are, sir!"

Bernard Glyn showed Mr. Packington into his study, the end study in the Shell passage.

Bernard Glyn was an inventor, on somewhat different lines from Skimpole. Being the son of a millionaire, who was a most indulgent parent, Glyn had plenty of money to spend on his experiments, and he had often startled his chums with the results of them.

Indeed, the results were not always gratifying to the other fellows. Kangaroo and Dane, who shared Glyn's study, were not overjoyed when they found an attachment on the study arm-chair which gave electric shocks to anybody who sat down in it; neither did they enjoy the weird smells which lingered in the room after some of Glyn's chemical researches. Indeed, Glyn's studymates had sometimes threatened to slaughter, scalp, and pulverise him, and boil him in oil; but the

schoolboy inventor went on his way cheerfully.

Mr. Packington had already made friends with Glyn. The enthusiastic junior was delighted with the new master, and he had asked Mr. Packington to come over to Glyn House on the next half-holiday and see his workshop; and Mr. Packington had willingly promised to do so. At home, Glyn had a workshop which was the envy of all his chums. Glyn House was near St. Jim's, and Glyn spent many of his half-holidays there, sometimes taking Tom Merry & Co. along with him.

Glyn's study generally looked like a workshop, too. He showed Mr. Packington into it with great pleasure. He was flattered by the interest the science master took in his researches. But the cheerfulness suddenly died out of Glyn's face as he followed the master into the study.

Somebody had been there!

And that somebody had made a clean sweep.

"My—my—my hat!" gasped Glyn. "Who's been here? My dynamo—my accumulators—my blessed wires—my prepared silk—my—my hat! Some blithering idiot has been raiding my study!"

Mr. Packington smiled.

"And the new propeller?" he asked. Glyn had been going to show him a new propeller he had made with his own hands.

"Gone!" howled Glyn. "It's been raided!"

"Ahem! Then I had better give you a call another time," said Mr. Packington.

Glyn nodded dismally. The new master left the study. Glyn looked round the room, and picked up a cricket stump. He had no doubt whatever that Kangaroo and Clifton Dane had committed that raid. They had often threatened to carry out all his rubbish, as they called it, and pitch it into the river.

And Glyn, with a cricket stump in his hand, proceeded to look for his affectionate studymates.

He ran along the passage, kicked open the door of Tom Merry's study, and glared in. The Terrible Three and Talbot were there, busy with their evening preparation.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther, looking up. "On the warpath? What's the matter?"

"I—I thought they might be here!" gasped Glyn.

"And whom might they be?"

"Kangy and Dane! They've cleared all my things out of my study, and I was going to show them to Mr. Packington!" howled Glyn.

Talbot looked up at that name.

"Mr. Packington! You've made friends with him—what?"

"Yes," said Glyn. "He's coming home with me on Saturday."

Talbot started.

"Coming home with you, Glyn?"

"Yes; and I'm going to ask my pater to ask him to stay over the week-end. He's an awfully clever chap, and takes a tremendous interest in my experiments."

"Oh!"

"And I was going to show him my new propeller," said Glyn, "and those blithering idiots have taken it away. Do you know where they are?"

"Not here," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Is your propeller a self-acting propeller, like Skimmy's? If so, it may have gone off on its own accord."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rot!" said Glyn, and he dashed

out of the study, brandishing the cricket stump.

He burst like a whirlwind into Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

"Kangy here?" he roared.

"Great Scott!"

"What on earth—" began Blake.

But Glyn did not stay to explain.

He saw that his studymates were not there. He retreated without a word, and opened the next study door. Ker-rish, Reilly, and Hammond were there. Glyn glared round the study, much to the astonishment of the three juniors, and then slammed the door.

"Faith, and is he dotty intirely?" asked Reilly in amazement.

Glyn rushed along to Lumley-Lumley's study. There he found Lumley-Lumley, Levison, Mellish, and Blenkinsop. He gave them a glare, in search of the delinquents. They stared at him blankly.

"What the thunder—" began Lumley-Lumley.

Slam!

Glyn was gone.

"I guess that chap wants locking up in a lunatic asylum!" said Lumley-Lumley, in wonder.

But Glyn did not care what Lumley-Lumley guessed. He was speeding downstairs, looking for the delinquents. But the Common-room was drawn blank. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane were not there. Glyn glared round the room.

"Anybody seen Dane and Noble?" he howled.

"They've gone to tea with Figgins & Co.," said Gore.

"Oh, thanks!"

Glyn rushed out of the Common-room and out of the House.

He sped across the quadrangle as if he were on the cinder-path. He rushed into the New House and up to Figgins' study.

Figgins & Co. were having tea, and they had two guests from the School House. Noble and Dane stared at their studymate as he hurled the door open and rushed in.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Hallo!" repeated Kerr and Wynn.

But Glyn did not take any notice of Figgins & Co. He had come there to see their guests. He brandished the stump, and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane jumped up.

"Where are they?" he roared.

"Eh? What?"

"My things! My dynamo, my propeller, my silk, my— You rotters! Where are they?" roared Glyn, starting operations with the cricket stump.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"My hat! He's dotty!" roared Kangaroo, dodging the stump, which came down on the tea-table, with direful results to the New House crockery.

"Collar him!"

"Yow!" roared Clifton Dane.

"Collar the mad idiot!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Bernard Glyn pursued the Cornstalk and the Canadian round the table, piling in with the cricket stump as if he were beating carpets. Figgins & Co. had jumped up in amazement.

"What the giddy dickens—" roared Figgins.

"Hold him! Collar him!"

"Yaroooh!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooh! Seize him!"

Kangaroo and Dane hurled themselves upon their excited chum, and Figgins & Co. rushed to their aid.

(Continued on the next page.)

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Bernard Glyn, with five pairs of powerful hands upon him, was swept off his feet and plumped on the floor.

"Sit on him, Fatty!" panted Figgins. Fatty Wynn grinned, and planted his tremendous weight on Glyn's chest. The schoolboy inventor gasped and collapsed. There was no resisting Fatty Wynn's weight.

"Gro-oogh!" he gasped.

"Now, you silly ass," roared the Kangaroo, "what do you mean by it?"

"What have you burst in like a mad-man for?" shouted Dane. "You thump-ass!"

"Grooogh!"

"Rag him!" howled Kangaroo. "My hat, I'm aching all over! Do you mind if I give him the jam, Figgy?"

"Not at all," said Figgins. "The marmalade, too, if you like."

"Spoooff! Grooogh!" spluttered Glyn, as jam and marmalade were squashed on his face in lumps.

"Groooh!"

"Now, you ass——"

"Give him the tea, too. It's hot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Glyn. "Stop it! Chuck it! Yaroooh!"

"Well, explain yourself, you silly idiot!" said Kangaroo indignantly. "What do you mean by it?"

"Where are my things?" spluttered Glyn. "My dynamo, my accumulators, my silk, my propeller—eh? Where are they, you rotters?"

"Blessed if I know," said Kangaroo. "Aren't they in your study?"

"Wh-what! Haven't you raided them?" gasped Glyn, blinking through the jam.

"No, you ass! No, you fathead! No, you owl!"

"Oh! I—I thought you had! They've been raided, and you silly asses have always been gassing on the subject! I—I—I'm sorry!" gasped Glyn.

"Sorry!" hooted Clifton Dane. "We'll make you sorer, you chump! Why couldn't you ask first, you blithering ass? Bump him!"

"Here, hold on! It was a mistake!" But the indignant juniors were not inclined to hold on. They collared Glyn, and Fatty Wynn rolled off him, and they bumped him till the dust rose from the carpet in clouds, and Glyn yelled with anguish. Then they poured the tea and milk over him, and rolled him out of the study into the passage and slammed the door on him.

Glyn sat up and gasped.

"Ow—ow—ow! Oh crumbs! M-my hat! Yow-ow! Somebody's raided my study, and—ow!—and when I find the beast—grooogh!—I'll pulverise him!"

And the unfortunate inventor limped out of the New House, feeling very sore.

CHAPTER 7.

Very Busy!

A NYBODY seen Skimpole?" Bernard Glyn was asking that question up and down the School House.

Glyn had cleaned himself up after his visit to the New House, and he was still in search of the raider of his study.

"Skimpole?" said Tom Merry. "What do you want Skimmy for? Looking for tips for a self-acting propeller?"

"No, ass!" said Glyn. "I'm looking for my property. That chump has taken my things sometimes, and he may have done it this time. I can't find him in the House."

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Tom Merry laughed.

"You'll find him in the woodshed, then. That's his latest headquarters, I believe."

Glyn breathed hard through his nose. "I—I'll smash him like a potato!" he growled; and he hurried out of the House to look for Skimpole.

Tom Merry & Co. grinned, and followed on. If Glyn found the brainy man of the Shell in possession of his famous propeller, Skimpole was likely to need help.

Figgins & Co. were coming back with Kangaroo and Clifton Dane, and they met the School House fellows in the quad.

"What's the matter with Glyn?" asked Figgins. "He's just rushed past us like a giddy lunatic!"

"Looking for Skimmy," explained Tom Merry, laughing.

"We're going to see that he doesn't quite extinguish him. We couldn't do without Skimmy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the whole of the crowd hurried after Bernard Glyn. A light was burning in the woodshed. Evidently the genius of the Shell was there.

Glyn shoved at the door, but it did not open.

"You there, Skimmy?" shouted Glyn, hammering at the door.

"Yes, my dear Glyn. You cannot come in. I have bolted the door."

"Open it, then, fathead!"

"I am sincerely sorry, my dear Glyn, but I cannot let you in. I am very busy with my experiment. Besides, your voice sounds excited. I trust you are not angry at my borrowing your things. You see, my model was completely destroyed in that explosion, owing to Merry's carelessness, and I cannot afford to waste time, so I have taken a new stock of materials from your study. You do not mind?"

"Mind!" murmured Glyn. "I'm going to slaughter you! I'm going to smash you up into little pieces! I'm going to— Open this door!"

"In the circumstances, Glyn, I must decline to open the door," said Skimpole. "I am at work upon my propeller now—your propeller, perhaps I should say. I found it ready-made in your study. With a few alterations it will suit my airship admirably. I am now planning carefully to—"

"My propeller!" shrieked the unhappy inventor. "You—you crass ass! It took me three afternoons to make that propeller! If you take a shaving off it you will ruin it!"

"I have taken a good many shavings off it, my dear Glyn," replied Skimpole serenely. "In fact, I have changed the form considerably. I have reduced the concavity—"

"Oh, you villain!"

Glyn kicked and banged on the door in vain. He rushed round to the window. There he had a full view of Skimpole at a bench, planing away manfully at the unfortunate propeller. The brainy man of the Shell blinked at the furious face at the window.

Glyn hammered at the window, but it was fastened. He shoved his shoulder against it, and burst it open. Skimpole jumped.

"My dear Glyn, you have broken the fastening of the window. You cannot get in; it is too small! You may stand there and watch me, if you like. I have now finished planing down the propeller. With the materials I took from your study I have remade my wonderful apparatus, by means of which the propeller becomes self-acting. You observe this crank—"

"Oh! You—you—you——"

"A central crank passes from the propeller shaft, and by this wonderful system of cogs——"

"You—you burglar!" howled Glyn. "My propeller! It won't propel a blessed model now. Oh, my hat! Why aren't you in a lunatic asylum?"

"With this silk, fortunately already prepared, I shall make my gas reservoir," said Skimpole, taking up a large pair of scissors.

"Don't you cut up that silk!" yelled Glyn. "Do you know it cost pounds?"

"What does that matter? My invention to revolutionise flying is far more important," said Skimpole.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors outside.

Bernard Glyn did not feel like laughing as he watched the ruthless destruction of his materials; but it struck Tom Merry & Co. as being funny.

"My dear fellows," said Skimpole, blinking reprovingly, "this is a serious matter. I beg you to retire and not attract attention to this place. You realise how important it is, I trust?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How can I get at him?" roared Glyn. "I'll smash in the blessed door!"

"Hold on!" murmured Kerr, with a chuckle. "I've got an idea. Skimmy is afraid of a spy spotting him. Let's fetch him a spy!"

"What!"

"And the spy can cover him with a revolver and make him open the door!" said Kerr, with a grin.

"But, you ass——"

"It won't take me ten minutes to make up my chivvy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bernard Glyn's face broke into a grin. "Right-ho! Buck up!"

Kerr rushed away to the New House, and came back with a bag in his hand. Kerr, the leading light of the New House Dramatic Society, was a past-master in the art of making-up; and Skimmy was short-sighted and unsuspecting.

In the gloom behind the woodshed Kerr set to work, and Figgins struck matches, and Tom Merry held a glass for him. They chuckled gleefully as the make-up proceeded.

In ten minutes Kerr had a dark complexion, a beard, a thick moustache, and black hair, and looked about forty years old. The rest of him was in startling contrast to his face; but he put on an overcoat, and buttoned it up to his chin.

"You want a revolver?" grinned Lowther.

"I've got a bit of steel tube."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All ready?" murmured Kangaroo.

"Shut up, you fellows—don't let Skimmy hear you cackle, or he may smell a rat! He won't expect a spy to be around while we're on the spot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

The juniors shushed.

Kerr, with the fragment of steel tubing in his hand, crept away to the open, lighted window of the woodshed. And the other fellows, smothering their laughter, lay low like the celebrated Brer Fox, and waited!

CHAPTER 8.

Skimpole the Hero!

SKIMPOLE was very busy.

By raiding Glyn's study in that off-hand manner, he had amply supplied himself with materials for his new model, and the construction thereof was proceeding apace. The



Skimpole folded his skinny arms across his thin chest and blinked at the ferocious foreigner with noble defiance. "You may proceed to discharge that firearm," he said. "I refuse to open the door!"

wires, wheels, cogs, and cranks which, when set in motion by the master-hand, were to cause the propeller to revolve "on its own," so to speak, lay in a mysterious conglomeration on the bench.

If Skimpole understood how that weird contrivance was to be worked, it was evidence of the mighty brain-power he possessed. Certainly nobody else could have understood it. The most enterprising spy would probably have passed it unheeded.

"Splendid!" murmured Skimpole as he worked. "I am very pleased with this! I shall have my model completed this week, and I must contrive somehow to inflate it on Saturday. I really trust there will not be another explosion. The only doubt is whether the Air Ministry will have sufficient intelligence to take it up." Skimpole shook his head sadly. "I have already written to them offering my services, and have not received a reply. Of course, my letter may have been overlooked. Now to fasten the fly-wheel— Oh!"

Skimpole jumped.

There was a sound at the open window, and he looked up, expecting to see Glyn again. He had not heard the juniors for some time. But it was not Glyn's face that looked in from the window now. Skimpole's eyes almost started through his spectacles as he saw a dark, bearded face looking at him, and saw an arm extended through the window, with a glistening steel tube levelled at him.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Skimpole. "Who—who are you?"

"Hands up!"

"Oh dear!"

Skimpole blinked at the gleaming steel tube, and put his hands over his

head. The bearded stranger scowled ferociously.

"Keep your hands up!" he said.

"Who—who are you?" gasped Skimpole. "Are you a—spy?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the stranger—a mocking laugh that made Skimpole's flesh creep. "I am a spy—ha, ha!"

"Oh dear! Skimpole blinked at him. "I foresaw this!" he groaned. "It's all Railton's fault. If I had had my box-room in the model—I mean my model in the box-room—a beastly spy couldn't have got at it."

"Open that door!"

"In the circumstances I refuse to open the door," said Skimpole. "I decline to allow a spy to seize my invention." The gleaming tube made a threatening movement.

Skimpole blinked round wildly.

The sight of that levelled weapon made his blood run cold, and the bearded face behind it was utterly ferocious in expression. And there was no escape.

Skimpy's bony knees knocked together. He could have run for the door, but to open it and escape was to let the spy in, and then the secret of that tremendous invention would be in foreign hands. That was not to be thought of. Skimpy might be a champion ass—all St. Jim's agreed that he was—but there was British pluck in Skimpy. His hands were shaking as he held them over his head, and his eyes had grown as large as his spectacles; but he did not make a movement towards the door.

"Do you hear me? Or do you wish to die like a dog?"

"Oh dear!" groaned Skimpole.

"Would you m-mind p-pointing that thing another way? It—it might go off!"

"Will you obey me?"

"I am sorry!" said Skimpole, even in his terror not forgetting his solemn style of speech. "In the circumstances, I have no alternative but to refuse to accede to your injunction."

"Then I shall have to put a bullet into you!"

"Ow! Help!"

"I shall count three!" said the spy, with a horrible frown, and showing his teeth through his dark beard. "When I've counted three, if you have not opened that door, I will shoot! One!"

"Ow!"

"Two!"

"Yow!"

"Three!" roared the spy.

"Yaroooh!"

"Now then—"

Skimpole folded his skinny arms across his thin chest and blinked at the ferocious spy with noble defiance.

"You may proceed to discharge that firearm," he said. "I refuse to open the door."

"What!"

"My untimely fate will be a great loss to science," said Skimpole mournfully. "But I regard you—with scorn and defiance!"

"My hat! I—I mean, then you must die!" exclaimed the spy. "You understand that I shall put a bullet into you?"

"I understand," said Skimpole firmly. "I shall die for my country! Shoot!"

"Great Scott!"

Skimpole closed his eyes. He could not bear to look upon that deadly weapon, which he fully expected to hurl forth his death—being too short-sighted to observe that it was simply

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a piece of steel tubing. With his eyes closed he waited for his doom.

But his doom did not come.

Instead of the report of the deadly firearm there was a yell outside the window of the woodshed.

"Bravo, Skimpy!"

Skimpole opened his eyes and blinked at the window.

The foreign spy had disappeared from the window, and junior faces were crammed into it, grinning.

Skimpole blinked dazedly at Tom Merry & Co.

"Oh!" he gasped. "My dear fellows! You—you have got him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've got him here!" said Monty Lowther.

"Thank goodness! The villain had come specially to seize my invention," gasped Skimpole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo, Skimpy! You gave it to him a treat!" chuckled Figgins. "Fancy old Skimpy standing up to a foreign spy like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole shivered.

"It is no laughing matter, my dear fellows. I assure you that I was dreadfully frightened. But, of course, I could not allow a spy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimpole the hero!" grinned Talbot. "Good old Skimpy! Skimpy's got the courage of a lion—"

"And the brains of an ass!" chuckled Lowther.

"Let us in, Skimpy," said Bernard Glyn; "we've got the spy here. I make you a present of all my things you've pinched as the reward of valour."

"You are very good, Glyn. Of course, by doing so, you are serving the cause of aviation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole unbolted the door, and the juniors crowded into the woodshed, with the spy in their midst. Bernard Glyn clapped the brainy man of the Shell on the back with a heartiness that nearly floored the hero. All his anger had evaporated now. Skimpole was a hero, and the juniors, hilarious as they were, admired Skimpy's pluck immensely.

Skimpole blinked at the captured spy sternly.

"I'm so glad you've captured him, you fellows!" he said. "He must be handed over to the police at once!"

"Mercy!" gasped the spy piteously. Skimpole shook his head.

"No mercy for spies!" he said.

"You were going to shoot me, you villain, and the shock has given me a really unpleasant feeling inside. Tie him hand and foot!"

"Hold on!" said Figgins solemnly. "Perhaps he's in disguise. Spies often disguise themselves. See if that beard comes off."

"Dear me, that is very thoughtful of you, Figgins!" Skimpole jerked at the spy's beard, and it came off in his hand. The moustache came off with it; and then, in spite of the artificial complexion, Skimpole recognised Kerr of the Fourth.

"Dear me! It's Kerr!"

"Go hon!" murmured Kerr.

"Kerr, this is dreadful!" said Skimpole severely. "You—you have become a foreign spy! I am shocked and disgusted, Kerr! But," went on Skimpy, as a new thought dawned on his mighty brain, "perhaps you were only joking, Kerr."

"Perhaps I was," assented Kerr

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cheerfully. "It's barely possible, Skimpy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then a foreign power has not heard of my invention, and sent an emissary to seize my model!" exclaimed Skimpole.

"Seems not!" said Tom Merry. "I dare say that will come in time, though. The spy system is awfully complete, and they can't miss a thing like your invention for long, Skimpy."

"Probably not," assented Skimpole thoughtfully. "I must find a safer place to construct my model."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps I could use the crypt under the old chapel, as Mr. Railton will not allow me to do my work in the House," said Skimpole. "That will be a safe place. Yes, certainly, I will work there after this; and I shall be safe from spies, and also from silly duffers interrupting me with practical jokes. I will take Glyn's electric plant to furnish a light—"

"Will you, by gum!" said Glyn.

"Certainly, my dear Glyn. But now you are here, would you like to see my model work? I have practically completed the mechanical arrangement. Without the gas reservoir it will not rise; but as soon as I set the propeller in motion it will run along the bench. Would you like to see it?"

"You bet! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Observe!" said Skimpole. "By this plan of cogs and wheels acting on the central crank, the propeller is set in motion, and in turn it acts upon a flywheel, the force of which is communicated to the central crank again by another set of wheels. Thus it is self-acting. Observe! I have merely to touch a button."

Skimpole, with a dramatic gesture, touched the button and stepped back, waiting for something to happen.

Nothing happened!

There was a yell of laughter from the juniors, but Skimpole looked puzzled. He pressed the button again.

Still the conglomeration of chassis, wheels, cogs, flywheels, cranks, and propeller remained an inert mass on the bench.

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole, in perplexity. "That is very extraordinary, as it works out perfectly in

theory! I shall have to go over it again, I think. If you fellows like to wait here a couple of hours I will demonstrate to you— Dear me! Where are you gone?"

But they were gone!

CHAPTER 9.

St. Jim's versus the Grammarians!

"FORGOTTEN the footer, Talbot?"

Tom Merry asked the question on Saturday afternoon. Talbot was standing on the School House steps, looking after two figures that were heading for the school gates. They were Bernard Glyn and Mr. Packington, the new science master. Mr. Packington was going home with Glyn for the afternoon, and Glyn had told his chums that he would most likely stay over the week-end. Talbot seemed very interested in that visit of Mr. Packington to the millionaire's residence.

"We're getting ready for the match," said Tom. "The Grammarians will be over here soon. Wake up, Talbot, old chap!"

Talbot smiled faintly.

"Right-ho! I'm ready!"

Tom Merry followed his glance, and noted Mr. Packington's thin figure disappearing out of the gates with Bernard Glyn. He smiled.

"Still bothering about Packy?" he said. "Queer that you should have such a down on him, Talbot. All his class like him."

Talbot nodded.

"I don't dislike him," he said. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"He reminds me of somebody," said Talbot evasively. "Somebody I've seen a long time ago. He can't be the same man. If he is, he's changed a lot in looks. But, of course, he can't be the same. Let's go down to the footer," he added abruptly, dropping the subject.

The junior eleven were meeting a team from Rylcombe Grammar School that afternoon. Gordon Gay & Co. were expected every minute.

Skimpole came out of the School House with a beaming face. Skimpole was in great spirits. The story of the way he had defied the supposed spy had been told far and near, and, loudly as the juniors laughed over it, they agreed that it was awfully plucky of Skimpy, and the genius of the Shell was treated, in consequence, with much more respect than he had been accustomed to.

And Glyn had not only forgiven him for his raid, but had allowed Skimpy to make another. Skimpole explained that he required a light in his new workshop, and Glyn's electric lamp and accumulators would answer his purpose. He further explained that as he was short of money, and Glyn had heaps, it was up to Glyn to hand over his property, considering that the outcome of Skimpy's invention was to revolutionise aviation.

On any other occasion Glyn would probably have refuted his arguments by introducing his boot into the discussion, but in consideration of Skimpy's pluck he allowed the brainy man of the Shell a free hand, and contented himself with chuckling.

"Ah, here you are, you fellows!" said Skimpole. "You are playing some trivial game this afternoon, Merry?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I trust Talbot is not playing. I should like your assistance, Talbot. I

have asked Gore, but he says he would break my model over my head. Gore is a very ignorant boy. You have shown much more intelligence than the other fellows, Talbot, and I should really be glad of your assistance."

Talbot laughed. He was a good-tempered and easy-going fellow, and he was very patient with his somewhat cranky studymate, and had even allowed Skimpy to explain his invention to him. But it was necessary to draw a line somewhere, and he drew it at giving up a footer match.

"Sorry, Skimpy! I'm playing this afternoon," he said. "Come on, Tom!"

And the Shell fellows walked away, leaving Skimpole shaking his head sadly. However, he trotted off contentedly to the old crypt.

The crypt was shut up, and was not supposed to be entered by juniors. It was a damp and dark place, and there was a subterranean passage leading from it, which was full of dangers for the unwary. It had been placed out of bounds in consequence.

But Skimpole's affairs were too important to allow any consideration for school bounds. In the recesses of the old crypt he was safe from spies and practical jokers, and though there was no danger from spies, certainly there was no lack of practical jokers.

In one of the vaults of the old crypt Skimpole had rigged up a bench with planks on trestles, and had conveyed all his treasures there very secretly. Only some of the juniors had been taken into his confidence. He had run up an electric lamp on a wire, and Glyn's accumulators were sufficient to keep it going for some time; and Skimpole expected to achieve success very shortly. Skimpole vanished into the ruins, and several fellows who intended to spend a happy afternoon japing him looked for him in vain.

The Grammar School eleven arrived, and Gordon Gay & Co. came on the football field.

The Grammarians were in great form. They had come over to wipe up the pitch with St. Jim's, as Gordon Gay cheerily confided to Tom Merry.

Tom Merry gave Talbot a dig in the ribs as he saw a cloud settling down on the brow of his chum.

"Wake up, you duffer! What is it now? Still on Packy?"

Talbot started.

"Yes—no," he said confusedly. "Are you ready?"

"I say, old chap, you'll have to buck up, you know!" said Tom anxiously. "The Grammarians are at the top of their form. We can't afford to take any chances. If you don't feel fit—"

"Fit as a fiddle!" said Talbot.

Tom Merry lowered his voice.

"You're looking just as you did before when you'd heard from a fellow in—the old gang," he said anxiously. "You—you haven't heard from any—any of those rotters who used to call you the Toff, have you?"

Talbot flushed.

"No. Hookey Walker is in prison, and he's not likely to escape a second time. I've not heard from anybody. I'd tell you if I had."

"Good!" said Tom Merry, relieved. "Then I don't see what's the matter with you. If you don't feel up to the match, I'll put in young Hammond."

"I'm all right," said Talbot resolutely. "Rely on me." And, with an effort, he banished the troublesome thoughts that persisted in gathering in his mind.

Gordon Gay won the toss, and gave St. Jim's the wind to kick off against. The ball rolled from Tom Merry's foot.

The Grammarians were the first to attack, and their forward line came sweeping down on the home goal, where Fatty Wynn stood prepared to save. But Herries cleared, and Kangaroo sent the ball to Talbot.

Tom Merry's face was anxious for a moment. It was a chance for one of Talbot's lightning rushes down the line; but he had been made uneasy by his chum's strange moods of late.

But Talbot had himself well in hand. Whatever it was that was troubling his mind, he had resolutely banished it now.

Down the line he went like a shot, the ball at his feet, and the Grammarian halves were left standing. The winger centred to Tom Merry just in time, and the captain of the Shell, taking a first-time shot before he was tackled, slammed the ball into the goal, beating the Grammarian goalie to the wide.

It was first blood to St. Jim's, and there was a roar of cheering from the crowd round the field.

"Goal! Goal! Harrah!"

"My hat, you've got a good winger there!" said Gordon Gay, as they walked back to the centre of the field.

And Tom Merry chuckled jocosely.

"Good man, Talbot! Keep that up!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally could not have made that wun bettah myself, Talbot, old sport!"

Talbot did keep it up.

The Grammarians had come there to wipe up St. Jim's, as Gordon Gay had remarked, but they came for wool and returned shorn. Talbot was in his best form, and when he was at his best he was a tower of strength to his side. In the first half the score was two to one in favour of the home team, and when the final whistle blew, after a gruelling match, the score was three—one.

"Three—one!" grinned Blake, as they came off the field. "Did I hear you

remark, Gay, old man, that you came here to wipe up the field with us?"

And Gordon Gay replied with a grunt.

CHAPTER 10.

Startling News!

TOM MERRY & Co. entertained the Grammarians royally after the match.

There was a crowded meeting in the famous study in the Shell passage, which taxed its accommodation to the utmost. But among the merry crowd Talbot was not to be seen. Tom Merry missed his chum, and wondered why he was not there; but he had not much time to think about him just then.

After tea the Grammarians departed, and then Tom looked for Talbot. He did not find him. It was later in the evening when the Shell fellow came into the Common-room, with a listless air. The Terrible Three hailed him at once.

"Where have you been, you bouncer?"

"Only for a little trot," said Talbot.

"Has Glyn come back?"

"No; he's not coming back to-night," said Manners. "His pater's phoned. They're staying over the week-end."

"Mr. Packington is staying with him?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "Glyn's phoned to Kangaroo, too, and he says Packy is a regular brick. He's been showing him lots of things, and has given Glyn a tip about his model locomotive—so Glyn says. He gets on awfully well with Packy."

"Then they won't be back till Monday morning?" said Talbot, with a harassed look.

"No. Did you want to see him for anything?" asked Tom, in wonder.

"Oh, no."

Talbot turned away abruptly. He took up a book, but the chums could see that he was not reading it. It was evident that there was something on Talbot's mind, but they forbore from questioning him.

He had told Tom Merry that he had heard nothing now from the associates with whom his dark days had been passed, when he was known as the Toff. It was not that.

The juniors wondered what it was, and they could not help feeling a little anxious when Talbot did not take them into his confidence. If there was anything wrong with old Talbot they were willing to back him up as one man. But Talbot intended to tell them nothing.

He was grimly silent and thoughtful when the Shell went up to their dormitory. His mood was infectious. The Terrible Three were not feeling as

(Continued on the next page.)

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chirpy as usual, in spite of their famous victory over the Grammarians that afternoon.

Skimpole came in just in time for bed, with all sorts of stains on his hands and his clothes, and an expression of beatific satisfaction on his face. Evidently the self-acting propeller was looking promising again.

The Shell fellows turned in, and Kildare put the lights out. But long after the Shell were asleep Talbot lay awake, his eyes staring restlessly into the darkness. The junior who was generally so cool, steadfast, self-reliant, seemed to be all nerves. He gave a violent start at the sound of someone getting cautiously out of bed, and sat upright in the darkness.

"Who's that?" he asked, startled.

"Dear me! Are you awake, Talbot?"

"Skimpole!"

"Yes," Skimpole's big glasses glimmered in the dormitory as he blinked at Talbot. "Pray do not wake the fellows, Talbot. I do not desire to attract general attention to my nocturnal peregrinations."

"What on earth are you doing?" asked Talbot, in amazement.

Skimpole was dressing himself in the darkness with great caution.

"I'm going to work on my model," explained Skimpole. "It is absurd, and indeed, reprehensible, to waste so much time in sleep when my invention is practically completed. The propeller was on the very point of success when I had to come in to bed. I am going to put in a few hours in my workshop."

"My hat! You're not going down into the crypt to-night!" exclaimed Talbot, aghast.

"Shush! Yes, my dear Talbot. Why not?"

"You'll get into a fearful row if you're found out of the dormitory."

"I shall risk that for altruistic motives," said Skimpole loftily. "Besides, there is no danger. I shall get out of the box-room window, as Levison used to do when he went down to the Green Man. I shall be very careful. Not that I fear punishment, but I should be stopped from going again if I were discovered."

"Better get back to bed, old chap," said Talbot.

"You do not grasp the importance of my work, my dear Talbot."

Talbot smothered a laugh. Skimpole finished dressing himself and left the dormitory, closing the door after him with great caution. Talbot smiled in the darkness; but he soon forgot Skimpole. Darker and more troublesome thoughts came into his mind.

He did not close his eyes; he could not sleep. He lay looking at the stars that glimmered at the high windows—sleepless, restless. He started as he heard the door open cautiously.

"Is that you, Skimmy?"

"Yes," came Skimmy's voice in reply. "I am very sleepy—yaw-aw-aw!"

"How's the propeller?"

"For some reason which I have not yet discovered, my dear Talbot, it does not appear to work. It is very remarkable, because I have worked it out to perfection in theory. However, I shall not be discouraged. I shall work on my model day and night until it is in perfect order. When I can take it to Mr. Railton and show him that the propeller is really self-acting he will see what a tremendous discovery it is, and will allow me, I am sure, to inflate my airship for a trial in the quadrangle. Yaw-aw-aw!"

Talbot grinned. If Skimpole waited

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until his self-acting propeller was in working order, his visit to Mr. Railton was not likely to take place for some time.

The genius of the Shell turned in and went to sleep, and his mighty brain was in repose at last. But the dawn was glimmering in at the windows before Talbot's eyes closed.

"Wake up, slacker!"

Talbot started up in bed.

It was daylight, and Tom Merry was shaking him.

"What is it?" said Talbot confusedly. "Any news?"

Tom stared at him.

"News? No. We don't get news along with the rising-bell."

"Turn out, you blessed slacker!" said Monty Lowther severely. "Didn't you hear the rising-bell?"

"No," said Talbot. "I—I've slept badly."

He rubbed his eyes and turned out. He felt drowsy and listless from want of sleep. A cold bath refreshed him, and after a run in the keen air in the quad he looked more like himself when he came in to breakfast.

It was Sunday, and the juniors, after service, had the morning to themselves. Talbot excused himself from the usual Sunday walk with the Terrible Three. He munched about the quad by himself in a glum mood. He joined Kangaroo when the juniors came in to dinner.

"Heard anything from Glyn?" he asked casually.

The Cornstalk nodded.

"Yes; he's been on the phone," he said. "He told me he would ring me up."

"Anything happened there?"

Kangaroo regarded him with astonished eyes.

"No. What should happen there?"

"Oh!" Talbot looked immensely relieved. "Oh, nothing! I—I suppose Glyn's having a good time?"

"Yes; he says so."

They went in to dinner. Talbot's brow seemed to have cleared, and he was more cheerful than he had been for some time. But as evening drew on he became very thoughtful and silent again. Tom Merry & Co. had given him up by this time; Talbot was in a black mood, and they waited for him to come out of it of his own accord.

But when the juniors went to the dormitory that night, Talbot, in spite of the trouble that was oppressing him, slept soundly. The loss of sleep the previous night had told upon him, and he sank into slumber almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

There was no one to question Skimpole that night when he paid his surreptitious visit to the old vault under the ruined chapel.

The clang of the rising-bell on Monday morning awoke Talbot with the rest. He turned out, and glanced curiously at Skimpole as that brainy youth yawned portentously. He guessed that the cheerful inventor had been out overnight. Skimpole gave him a doleful blink.

"It isn't working yet," he murmured. "There seems to be some hitch. I think I shall have to try a fresh arrangement of cogs."

Talbot grinned. Skimpole might be an ass, but he was evidently a stickler.

Glyn did not appear at breakfast, but he was expected to come in for morning lessons. The Shell were going into their Form-room when the sound of a motor-car was heard outside. A few moments later Glyn joined his Form-fellows.

Talbot's eyes were fixed upon him at once. He caught a glimpse of Mr. Packington, urbane as usual, and smiling, passing into the House with his valise in his hand. But Bernard Glyn was not smiling. He was looking unusually grave.



Skimpole came round his bench and almost fell down at the gasped the genius of the Shell. "Dear me! You are t

Talbot noticed it, and his heart throbbed.

His face turned quite pale for a moment. It was impossible to question Glyn in the Form-room. He had to wait till morning lessons were over for a chance to speak to him. Several other fellows had noted Glyn's serious look, and as the Shell came out of the Form-room after lessons, they gathered round him in the passage.

"What are you looking like a boiled owl for?" was Monty Lowther's polite query.

"Nothing wrong at home?" asked Tom Merry.

Bernard Glyn nodded.

"Yes; something jolly wrong!" he replied. "There was a burglary in the house last night."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jore!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, joining them. "A

burglary, dear boy? Have they caught the burglar?"

"No. The pater's safe was opened, and the beast, whoever he was, made a good haul," said Glyn quietly. "Three thousand pounds' worth of securities and banknotes!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"The bobbies are there now," said Glyn. "Inspector Skeat is on the job. I hope they'll find him. So far as I know, there isn't any clue at present. A window was found open, so they know the way he got in; and the electric burglar alarm didn't work, for some reason."

"Bet you I can tell you the reason," said Lowther. "It's the one you put up, isn't it?"

"Yes; and a jolly good one!" said

Glyn's face changed. He caught hold of Talbot's arm.

"What are you looking like that for, Talbot? You can't be silly enough to think that anybody could suspect—"

"Talbot, old man—"

"Don't be an uttah ass, Talbot!" said Arthur Augustus. "Whatevah do you think of such howwid things for?"

Talbot's lips moved, but he did not speak. The juniors thought they understood his emotion. It was natural that the Toff should think that suspicion might turn upon him. He had, in those wild days when he was a member of Hookey Walker's gang, "cracked" the safe in Glyn House with his own hands.

Much water had passed under the bridges since then, as the proverb says. And, apart from their faith in Talbot, there was the impossibility that he could have been on the scene at all. Unless—the thought came into one or two minds—unless he had crept out of the Shell dormitory in the night.

"Don't be a silly idiot, Talbot!" said Tom Merry, almost angrily. "How can you think that anybody would dream of such a thing? I suppose that's what's in your mind. We all saw you go to bed last night—"

"We didn't see him again till rising-bell this morning, though," said Crooke maliciously.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed. "You cad! What do you mean to insinuate?"

Crooke backed away. "I—I didn't mean—I only said that—"

"My dear Crooke," said Skimpole, blinking at him, "you are labouring under a misapprehension. I saw Talbot in bed last night, and, in fact, spoke to him, and observed that he was fast asleep on two occasions, my dear Crooke. First at half-past ten, and again at two o'clock in the morning. You see, I was up last night, working on my model; and as Talbot had been awake on Saturday night when I went out and came back, you see—"

"Oh, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry, slapping the genius of the Shell on the back with a force that made Skimmy yelp. "You're worth your weight in gold. So you were up last night?"

"Yes, my dear Merry," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "I intend to pot in several hours every night on my model until it is completed. Talbot was awake on Saturday night, probably reflecting on what I had told him concerning the new crank movement I am applying to my propeller. But when I spoke to him last night, he was asleep. I did not wake him, though I should have been very glad to confide in somebody a new idea I had thought of in connection with a system of cogs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Talbot walked away, still without speaking a word. The sublime Skimpole had cleared him of all possible suspicion by his guileless evidence.

But was it that which had brought that deadly pallor to Talbot's face? Tom Merry hurried after him, and overtook him in the quadrangle. The

other fellows remained with Glyn, discussing the startling news he had brought.

"Talbot, old man," said Tom, catching his chum's arm, "what's the matter with you? You can't think anybody suspects you?"

Talbot looked at him.

"No," he said. "That never entered my mind, as a matter of fact; though I see now that it's just as well that old Skimmy was able to clear me, all the same."

"Then what's the matter? You have been like this ever since Glyn went home on Saturday. It's just as if you had expected something to happen there," said Tom Merry.

Talbot drew a deep breath.

"I did not expect it," he said. "If I had expected it, I should have taken measures—I didn't expect it. I feared it."

"Talbot! You knew—"

"I did not know, I tell you; I feared. It was haunting me."

"You mean," said Tom Merry slowly, "that you had some reason for supposing that something of the kind might take place, but you weren't sure?"

Talbot nodded.

"But—but how? You mean you knew, or suspected that—that some member of that old gang was hanging round Glyn's place—"

"In a way—yes."

"And you didn't warn Glyn?" said Tom Merry.

"I couldn't. I didn't know, I tell you. It was a possibility, but it was so unlikely that—that it seemed impossible. But the fear of it haunted me, all the time." Talbot set his teeth. "I could not know—till it happened. Now that it has happened, I know that my fear was justified; though it seemed so absurd at the time that I couldn't think it was right. But I know now."

"You know who has robbed Glyn's pater?"

"Yes."

"Then—then you'll let the police know at once?" said Tom Merry.

There was a pause.

"I—I can't say as to that; but I'm going to see that everything that has been taken is handed back at once. I assure you of that."

"You can do that, Talbot?"

"Yes. Making it public would—well, it would make a frightful scandal, for one thing, and—and there are other reasons." Talbot lowered his voice. "Tom, old man, don't judge me too badly. I've repented of what I was in those days. I've tried to make up for it. But the fellows I knew then, when they knew me as the Toff—I was their comrade in crime." Talbot gave a bitter laugh. "But there's such a thing as honour among thieves. That man, I can't go to the police and give him away—I can't, Tom!"

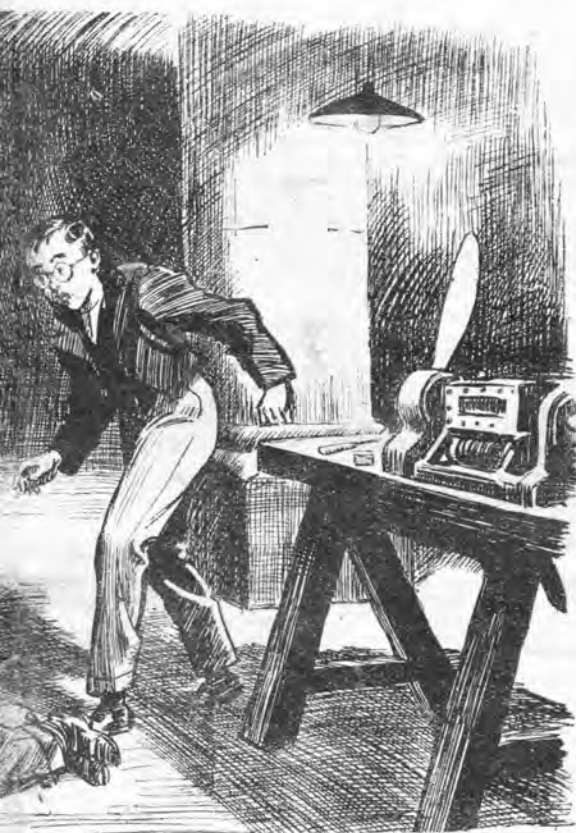
Tom Merry's face was very grave. He understood the struggle that was going on in the unhappy boy's breast—between the claims his new life had brought upon him and that loyalty that forbade him to betray an old associate.

"I can't do that, Tom, without giving him a chance. Don't think too badly of me. But I'm going to make him hand back every penny and clear off. That's enough for me to do, Tom. Glyn's pater won't lose anything. I tell you, everything shall be handed back—every shilling—and the man shall go."

"You must do as you think best, Talbot, old man," said Tom. "But suppose he refuses?"

Talbot's face set grimly.

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the sight of the bound junior stretched at his feet. "Talbot! I was up. What an unpleasant joke to play on you, Talbot!"

Glyn warmly. "I showed it to Mr. Packington on Sunday morning, and he said it was as good as any professional work he had ever seen."

"Well, that's rotten news," said Tom Merry. "I hope they'll catch the beast!"

He broke off as he caught sight of Talbot's face, and started violently. Talbot was as white as death.

CHAPTER 11.

Talbot Acts!

TOM MERRY turned towards his chum:

"Talbot, what's the matter?"

Talbot did not speak.

All eyes were turned upon him with curious looks. Some of the fellows exchanged glances. The mention of a burglary brought back to their minds the old story of the Toff.

"If he refuses, then I shall consider myself free of his claims on me—free to act. I shall denounce him instantly, and he will be taken."

"Good enough, Talbot! But—but who is he? Where is he?" asked Tom.

"I won't tell you that, Tom. There's another reason for keeping it dark, too. It would make a scandal—no end of talk. But leave it to me. I shall give him the chance to hand back his plunder to-day, and if he refuses I shall call the police to collar him."

"Good enough, old man!"

The captain of the Shell left his chum. He saw that Talbot wished to be alone.

Talbot, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, paced to and fro under the old elms, thinking hard. He came in to dinner, however, with the rest, pale but calm.

The news Glyn had brought was the talk of the school now.

Talbot did not join in the buzz of talk at the Shell table. After dinner he hurried out of the dining-room before any of his friends could join him, and disappeared.

Mr. Railton and Mr. Packington came out of the dining-room together, chatting pleasantly. The Housemaster went out into the quad, and Mr. Packington walked away to his study.

He entered the study, and started a little at the sight of a junior, with a pale and grim face, standing on the hearthrug, waiting for him there.

It was Talbot.

For a moment a dark, deadly look flashed over the science master's face, but it was gone at once, and he smiled and nodded pleasantly to the junior.

"Ah, Talbot!" he said agreeably. "You wish to speak to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have heard from Manners that you are thinking of joining my class," said the master pleasantly. "I shall be very pleased if you do."

"I was thinking of it," said Talbot, "but I shall not do so now."

"No! You have changed your mind?"

"Yes. You will not be taking a class at St. Jim's again, Mr. Packington?"

"Eh?"

"You will be leaving the school to-day."

Mr. Packington laughed.

"I do not understand you, Talbot. Is this a joke? I have no intention of leaving the school."

"And before you leave," said Talbot, his voice hard and steely—"before you leave, Mr. Packington, you will restore the plunder you took from Mr. Glyn's safe at Glyn House last night!"

CHAPTER 12.

Face to Face!

A DEAD silence followed Talbot's words.

Mr. Packington stood rooted to the floor, staring at him.

Talbot stood with his eyes on the science master's face—eyes that seemed to burn.

For a full minute the silence lasted. Mr. Packington broke it.

"Are you mad, my boy?" he said quietly.

"No."

"You—you must be! You accuse me—"

"Yes."

"Are you prepared to come into the Head's presence and repeat your disrespectful words, Talbot?"

"Quite!"

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Another long pause.

A change was coming over Mr. Packington's face. The genial, benevolent expression was gone. The features seemed to harden like iron; his eyes glittered like cold steel. He pushed his glasses up, as if to clear his vision.

"May I ask you to explain yourself, Talbot?" asked the science master at last. "Your words are—ahem!—very curious."

"I will explain, professor."

Mr. Packington smiled.

"Professor! I have no claim to that title," he said.

"I know that; but in the underworld you were known as the Professor, and by that name you are known in the records of Scotland Yard," said Talbot steadily.

"Dear me!"

"Your name is no more Packington than—"

"Than yours is Talbot?" suggested Mr. Packington, with a smile.

"You know me?" said Talbot.

"Indeed I do. The Toff is not so easily forgotten," said the science



master coolly. "Since you know me also, we can compare notes, and, in fact, have a pleasant chat over old times."

"I did not come here for a chat," said Talbot. "I came here to tell you that you can either restore your loot, and leave St. Jim's instantly, or be arrested this afternoon, and taken to prison. Take your choice, professor."

The professor smiled tranquilly.

"A hard choice, Toff! May I ask you first—what is your little game here?"

"You have heard my story."

"I have heard it. I recognised you, of course, the day I came; but as you did not seek me out, I concluded that you had not recognised me," said the professor calmly. "I have heard that you have reformed; that by some theatrical trick you obtained a pardon for your offences, and that you are supposed to be leading a straight life here. Of course, I am too old a bird to be caught by chaff like that. I know that you are simply on a lay. What is the lay?"

"It is all true."

"Oh, yes. You are on a new lay, and there is no reason why we should not be friends," said the professor. "Help me, and I will help you. We shall be stronger together, Toff."

"We cannot be friends," said Talbot quietly, "unless you should do as I have done—give up your present life and take to honesty and poverty."

"Not quite in my line," said the professor, smiling. "In fact, not in my line at all, Toff. Besides, I have another to consider. You have forgotten Marie."

"I have not forgotten her," said Talbot, his lip quivering a little. "I would be glad to see her again, and to attempt to undo the harm of the lessons she has learned from her father—"

"And from yours," smiled the professor.

Talbot winced.

"My father is dead," he said. "His wrongdoing has died with him. Do not speak of him to me. It does not lay in your mouth to reproach him. But for you he might never have been the man he was. Come to the point—will you do as I ask?"

"Hardly!"

"You have the choice of that or arrest."

The professor looked at him hard.

"You do not mean that, Toff?"

"I mean every word," said Talbot steadily. "Unless you do as I ask, I shall go direct from this study to the Head and denounce you."

"You ask me to believe that you are sincere—that you have really thrown over the old life and taken on new ways?" said the professor, with a mocking smile.

"I ask you to believe nothing. You can please yourself. I warn you of what I am going to do; that is all."

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

"You demand a share—five hundred pounds—eh?"

Talbot crimsoned.

"If you repeat those words, professor, I shall not give you a chance at all," he said hoarsely. "Once for all, will you do as I ask?" He made a movement towards the door.

"Stay!" said the professor quietly.

"Let us talk this over. Suppose I take you at your word—we will admit that you have really reformed, that the Toff has turned over a new leaf, and become a respectable member of society. Stranger things have happened. I am too old a hand to be surprised at anything. If that is so, however, why have you waited so long? Why did you not speak at once?"

"I did not know."

The professor glanced at his reflection in the glass, and smiled.

"It is skilfully done, is it not?" he said pleasantly. "There are few who would recognise me—like this."

"I did not recognise you," said Talbot. "Something struck me as familiar the moment I saw you; but you look twenty years older with that disguise and those glasses. And—and I could not believe that you would have the daring to come here like this. I was uneasy, suspicious, but I could not believe that it was you. Yet when you came to the study the first evening, I guessed."

"I was surprised to see you here, and I wished to ascertain whether you had recognised me," smiled the professor.

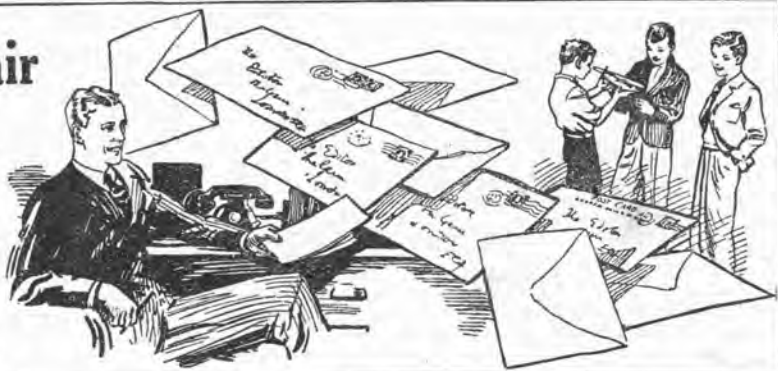
"I guessed it, but I could not be sure; you played your part so well. And then I knew it must have been difficult for you to enter here, unless you were what you represented yourself to be. And, again, I remembered that forgery was in your special line in the old days, and that may have served you—"

"Exactly! I have written myself out quite a set of excellent papers, some of them with well-known signatures

(Continued on page 13.)

The Editor's Chair

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



HALLO, Chums! Do you remember that thrilling story which appeared last February called "The Housemaster's Peril"? Most readers do, I am sure, for it was the type of yarn that stands out in the memory. I remember getting many letters in praise of it.

Well, next week you will read a sequel to this story. It's called:

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S BODYGUARD!"

and, personally, I think it's even more thrilling than the first yarn. You remember Munro who came to St. Jim's for revenge on Mr. Railton, because the Housemaster's evidence at a trial for robbery had caused him to be sent to prison? In next Wednesday's gripping story, Tom Merry & Co. see in a newspaper that Munro has escaped from prison. They feel certain that the man will make for St. Jim's to seek revenge on Mr. Railton again, so they form a bodyguard to watch over their Housemaster. Their attentions are not welcome to Mr. Railton, and they therefore have to work in secret. But that doesn't affect the efficiency of the bodyguard, which, as later exciting events prove, is just as well for Mr. Railton's safety.

You can take my word for it, chums, you'll enjoy every word of this thrill-packed yarn.

"PETTICOAT RULE AT GREYFRIARS!"

As you have read in this number, the Remove at Greyfriars have not taken kindly to their temporary Form-mistress, Miss Locke, and one or two of the juniors have tried to make things unpleasant for her—to their own regret! In next week's chapters, however, Harry Wharton & Co. realise that, after all, Miss Locke is quite a good sort, and decide to back her up. This leads Wharton in particular into trouble with the Removites who are strongly opposed to feminine rule—with the unfortunate result that Harry finds himself in Miss Locke's black books.

Frank Richards is in first-class form in dealing with this enthralling situation, and readers will follow the story with keen interest.

This popular author is also at his best in:

"THE HEAVY HAND!"

the amazing cover-to-cover yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. which appears in our companion paper, the "Magnet." It tells of the striking method which Horace Coker adopts to compel Billy Bunter to tell the truth in a serious matter. Coker has always been

a heavy-handed fellow, but never was his vigorous efforts more successful than when he brings them to bear on the Owl of the Remove. Remember to ask for this splendid yarn. It's out now, price 2d.

THREE GREAT YARNS.

By the way, I should also like to draw the attention of readers to the three new numbers of the "Schoolboys' Own Library." Make a note of these titles: "The Fugitive Schoolboy!"—No. 295—a powerful yarn of Greyfriars, featuring the Levison brothers of St. Jim's. "The Fourth Form at Rookwood!"—No. 296—which deals with the rollicking adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. And, lastly, "The Spendthrift's Lesson!"—No. 297—a thrilling story of the boys of St. Frank's, starring the Hon. Douglas Singleton, the junior who wastes a quarter of a million pounds in a few weeks.

These grand school stories are all on sale now, and well worth the outlay of fourpence each.

IN REPLY.

Now it's time for me to deal with this week's letters.

A. and R. Weller, V. Moreton, T. Carr.—Your selection of the ten best 1936 stories was certainly good and well considered. Thanks for sending it in.

J. Harrington (Batley, Yorks).—So you are another new reader, John? I'm glad to welcome you! Yes, as you say, you always get "value for money" in the companion papers. Kildare is 17 years 8 months; D'Arcy, 15 years 3 months; and Talbot, 16 years 1 month.

K. Matthews (Clapham Park, S.W.12).—I have no more news yet about the Greyfriars film. As soon as I learn anything definite I will let readers know. D'Arcy's age is given in the reply above. Bunter is 15 years 1 month. Abbotsford is eight miles from St. Jim's. The Shell consists of thirty boys. Reader Stephens' address is 8, Richmond Parade, North Circular Road, Dublin, Ireland. Thanks for your selection of 1936 stories.

J. Worthington (W. Tarring, Worthing).—Please see reply to Reader Matthews regarding the Greyfriars film. Thanks for your selection of the best 1936 stories.

H. Jones (Coventry).—See reply above concerning the Greyfriars film. You will read in due course of Talbot's

further adventures. I cannot give you the information you want just yet.

T. Berry (Redcar, Yorks).—Tom Merry is 16 years old; Lowther, 15 and 11 months; Manners, 16; Kildare, 17 and 3 months; Darrell, 17 and 6 months; Cutts, 17; Knex, 17 and 5 months; Levison, 15 and 6 months; Blake, 15 and 4 months; Talbot, 16 and 1 month; and D'Arcy, 15 and 3 months. Sorry; your jokes were not quite suitable. I don't publish limericks.

H. Sparrow (Nelson, New Zealand).—Many thanks for your interesting letter. I am sorry to hear that you have been in hospital for over three years. I wish you a speedy recovery from your illness.

E. Pannell (Portsmouth).—Kildare's age is given above. Thanks for your congratulations! Your "Pen Pal" notice has been added to the waiting list.

G. Moss (Reading).—Your "Pen Pal" notice hasn't gone astray. It will appear in due course. Sorry to keep you waiting, but all notices are published strictly in turn.

P. Banyard (Enfield).—Thanks for your opinion of the best stories you've read. The adventures of the chums of St. Frank's appear every month in the "Schoolboys' Own Library," price 4d. I cannot tell you when your notice will appear.

J. Hardie (Aberdeen).—Thanks for your interesting letter and helpful comments. I will bear in mind your suggestions. Glad you think the GEM is Number One among boys' papers. Your first joke was quite good, but it didn't offer much in the way of an illustration. Try again. The "Who's Who in Cricket," published by the Amalgamated Press, is now out of print.

J. Harrigan (Reading).—I am sorry, but I cannot divulge the information you want.

Miss M. Wainwright (Leicester).—Glad to hear that you still take the GEM every week. A story featuring Monty Lowther appears the week after next. Sorry; your joke just missed the mark.

Miss C. Egan (Dublin).—Thanks for your opinion of the best 1936 stories. Your selections are favoured by most readers. Try again to win half-a-crown.

G. Whitehouse (Sutton).—No, Martin Clifford has not yet dealt with the theme you suggest. It would be rather difficult to develop, as Tom Merry is so popular. Thanks for writing.

Chin, chin, chums!

PEN PALS COUPON
10-4-37

THE EDITOR.
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attached," said the professor, with a nod.

Talbot drew a deep breath.

"I suspected it, yet I could not be sure. And then your friendship with Glyn; that made me suspicious again. I was on tenterhooks. But I could not be sure till I heard Glyn's news to-day. When I learned that a burglary had taken place at Glyn's house, I knew why you had made up to him and passed a week-end there. I was fearing, expecting to hear such news, and when I heard it I could not have any further doubts."

"It was a shock to you?" smiled the professor.

"Yes, it was a shock, though I had feared it. But I made up my mind at once."

"And you are going to commence your new life of honesty by betraying an old pal—and Marie's father?"

Talbot winced again.

"I am giving you a chance," he said huskily. "Give back what you have stolen, and leave this place at once, and you are safe from me. You could not have expected to play this game for long. Your forged papers must have been discovered sooner or later. It could not have lasted many weeks."

"Long enough for me to do my work," said the professor. "The affair at Glyn's was merely a side-show—an extra picking. My real business is here."

"I knew it! Dr. Holmes, my benefactor, the man who has given me my chance in life, was to be your victim!" exclaimed Talbot violently.

"My last victim," said the professor, with perfect coolness. "From this excellent and secure headquarters I planned to make a clean sweep of all the cribs worth cracking in the countryside, and to wind up here with a final haul, and then depart between two days, as we used to express it in the gang. You would not have the heart to spoil so excellent a programme, Toff?"

"I will not talk to you," said Talbot. "I tell you what you are to do, and if you refuse, you go to prison!"

"You mean that?"

"Don't you remember that the Toff was always a fellow of his word?" said Talbot bitterly.

"I remember!" Mr. Packington slid his hand into his pocket. "And you may remember, too, that the professor was always a bad man to corner."

Talbot's lips curled contemptuously as a revolver appeared in the hand of the professor. There was not the slightest sign of fear in his face.

"Put that away," he said. "Do you think you can scare me? I am waiting for your answer, and I shall not wait long!"

The professor looked at him, and fingered the deadly weapon, as if calculating chances.

"Consider," he murmured. "I was showing you the revolver. It went off by accident. By a regrettable mischance the bullet struck you in a vital spot. How would that sound?"

Talbot laughed.

"It would not sound good enough," he said. "for there would be an inquest and a keen inquiry, and it would come out that Mr. Packington, the science master, was really the professor, a well-known crackman and forger; and then—"

The professor nodded, and slid the revolver out of sight again. Apparently he realised that it was not "good enough."

"You are right," he said smoothly. "Unfortunately, I have only one neck. They would get at the truth, and it

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would be too great a shock to poor Marie if her father were hanged. We must come to terms."

"I have named my terms. You restore the plunder and leave St. Jim's to-day."

"So suddenly, Toff? To-morrow—"

Talbot made an impatient gesture.

"Do you think you can fool me?" he exclaimed. "I do not intend to give you a chance at Dr. Holmes' safe. You will hand over the plunder to Glyn and go."

The professor appeared to be plunged in deep reflection. There was no sign in his wrinkled face of the rage in his heart. He knew that he was in a tight corner, and he was as cool as ice.

"You hold the winning hand," he said at last. "The game is up. I see that. You are hard on me, Toff."

"I have no choice. Professor"—Talbot's voice grew very earnest—"you know what I have done—why not do the same, if only for Marie's sake?"

"I fear I am a little too old to change my ways," smiled the professor. "Moreover, the leopard cannot change his spots, nor the Ethiopian his skin."

"I have changed."

"For how long? You are sincere now, but will it last?" The professor laughed.

"I do not think so. But you hold the winning hand, and I throw up my cards. I accept your terms. When am I to go?"

"By the next train."

"Without a word of adieu to the Head?" The professor sighed. "I have been on such excellent terms with that kind and innocent old gentleman. This school has been quite a haven of rest to me. You are hard on an old pal, Toff. And you will not even allow me to take a small proportion of—"

"You shall take nothing that does not belong to you," said Talbot. "Where is the plunder? It must be handed to Glyn, who will know if it is all there. I will not trust you an inch."

"My favourite pupil will know that I am not what he has deemed. You are very hard Toff, but I am in your hands."

"Enough said. Where is it?"

"I have hidden it, of course. I should not be careless enough to keep it in my study," said the professor smoothly. "Accidents might happen. If you must have it, you will find it in the crypt under the old chapel—a bag, placed behind the arch of the first vault."

Talbot looked at him keenly. The suspicion instantly flashed into his mind that the professor intended to send him on a wild-goose chase, and, while he was so occupied, to escape with the loot.

"You will come with me," he said.

"You do not trust me?"

"No. I believe the plunder is here, and you intend to make off with it as soon as you are out of my sight," said Talbot grimly. "I shall not lose sight of you for one moment until it has been given up to Glyn."

The professor laughed.

"But I have told you the truth. It is hidden in the vault. I chose that as the safest place. It was always possible that there might be suspicion and a search. I do not take chances."

"Then come with me," said Talbot.

"I will come if you choose," said the professor, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But the bell has gone. You are due in your class-room."

"That can wait."

"As you choose."

Talbot opened the door and they quitted the study together.

CHAPTER 13.

Struck Down!

THE quadrangle was deserted. All the fellows were in their Form-rooms. But Talbot was not thinking of classes just then. He knew what would happen if the disguised crackman escaped from observation.

The professor was silent, and seemed in a depressed and subdued mood as he made his way to the old chapel ruins with the Shell fellow. Once or twice he gave Talbot a look as if to ascertain whether the Toff relented. But Talbot's face was set and grim.

The professor sighed as he entered the ruins. He descended the dilapidated stone steps that led to the crypt, and with some difficulty opened the heavy oaken door at the bottom.

Within, the vaults were dark and dreary.

The professor entered, and Talbot followed him as far as the door. He knew that there was a subterranean exit from the crypt, and he feared a trick. But the professor seemed to have resigned himself to his fate. He fumbled in his pocket.

"Have you matches?" he asked. "It is dark here."

Talbot struck a match. The professor stretched out his hand to take the box, but instead of taking it he clutched Talbot's wrists and dragged the junior suddenly into the vault.

Talbot, on his guard as he was, was taken by surprise. He was dragged stumbling into the vault, and the next instant the professor's arms closed round him like steel.

But Talbot recovered in a second, and gripped the rascal in his turn.

The professor was ten years younger than his disguise made him look, as Talbot knew; but the stalwart junior was a match for him, and he knew that, too. And he was an expert wrestler. He gripped the professor and bore him backwards to the stone floor.

"Not so easy!" said Talbot, between his teeth.

The professor uttered an oath.

He struggled fiercely, silently. Talbot was silent, too; he needed all his breath for that grim struggle, and he was too far away from the school buildings for a cry for help to be heard.

For several minutes the struggle went on, with silent, savage determination, and the sturdy schoolboy gradually gained the upper hand.

The professor's grasp suddenly relaxed, and he lay gasping under the junior. In the darkness Talbot could not see that the rascal's grasp had closed upon a stone.

"I give in!" panted the professor.

"I surrender, Toff!"

And barely had he spoken when his hand came up and a heavy stone struck Talbot on the temple.

The junior gave a sharp cry and relaxed his hold, reeling sideways. The professor was up with a bound—his exhaustion had been feigned—and he was on the stumbling boy like a tiger. His hand rose and fell again, and Talbot pitched to the floor, stunned.

The professor, panting, stood over him, ready to strike again if it were needed; but it was not needed. Talbot, with a crimson streak on his forehead, lay insensible at his feet.

The professor burst into a short, harsh laugh.

"A bad man to corner, Toff!" he muttered. "I warned you—a bad man to corner!"

He breathed hard for some moments,

and then bent over the boy, groping in the dim glimmer of light that came from the open door of the crypt.

He stripped off the boy's jacket and cut it into strips with a knife, and then proceeded, calmly and methodically, to bind him hand and foot. Talbot lay inert under his busy hands. The professor worked with perfect coolness and with thoroughness. In a few minutes Talbot was secured beyond the possibility of escape.

But the professor was not finished yet. He made a gag of the junior's handkerchief, and forced it into his mouth, and bound it there with strips of cloth passing round his head.

Then he dragged the still unconscious boy farther into the vault. He smiled and stepped back to the door.

"Good-bye, Toff!" he murmured. "A bad man to corner, Toff, I told you!"

He stepped out of the crypt and closed the heavy door behind him. He ascended the steps and sauntered away through the ruins of the old chapel. He glanced round before leaving the ruins, but there was no one in sight. With perfect calmness, he strolled away towards the School House.

In his study he lighted a cigar and reflected.

"The game is up!" he murmured, as he watched the wreaths of blue smoke curling towards the ceiling. "Up—with a vengeance! He will not be found there; but I cannot let him die in the vault.

"He is safe there till I choose to tell where he is. I shall have to cut my campaign short, that is all. I have learned all I need to know for my job here. The Head's safe to-night, and to-morrow morning Mr. Packington will be missing. I will leave a note to tell them where to find the Toff. A pleasant

surprise for them. And Mr. Packington will disappear." He laughed. "A dangerous man to corner, Toff!"

He looked at his watch. There was a chemistry class that afternoon, and it was nearly time. The professor yawned, threw away his cigar, and made his way composedly to the laboratory.

Manners, Glyn, and Kerr, and the rest found Mr. Packington precisely the same as usual that afternoon, excepting that perhaps he was a little more cheery and chatty. They had never liked the science master better. No thought of the unhappy lad lying in the cold, chill, stone vault troubled the equanimity of the professor.

Meanwhile, of course, Talbot had been missed in the Shell Form Room.

Tom Merry & Co. wondered what had become of him; and Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who was the soul of punctuality, frowned when he saw that Talbot was missing from his place, and was ready with the vials of wrath to pour out upon him when he appeared.

But Talbot did not appear.

Afternoon lessons passed off without Talbot coming into the Form-room. The juniors were puzzled, and Mr. Linton was decidedly angry. He sent Tom Merry once to look for him to see if he was in the House, but the captain of the Shell returned without having been able to find him.

"Talbot has apparently allowed himself a half-holiday," said Mr. Linton, compressing his lips, when Tom Merry returned with his report. "I shall have to explain to him that he cannot do so with impunity."

When afternoon lessons were over, and the Shell came out, they were in a buzz of surprise on the subject of Talbot. It was unheard-of for a fellow

to cut lessons without leave, and he was certain to have a heavy reckoning to pay with his Form-master.

Tom Merry, remembering what Talbot had told him, thought that he understood. The Toff was dealing with the unknown man who had robbed Mr. Glyn. It did not occur to Tom, of course, that the unknown man was in the school, and he naturally concluded that Talbot had gone out of St. Jim's to see him. He waited anxiously for his chum to come back. When the matter was explained, Talbot's taking french leave would be excused. But his chum did not come back.

He did not come in to tea; he did not come to the study to do his prep. By that time Tom Merry was getting a little alarmed.

He had not hitherto told Manners and Lowther of what Talbot had confided to him, as it had been understood that he was not to mention it. But now, instead of settling down to his preparation, he took his chums into his confidence.

Manners and Lowther listened to him in amazement.

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "That's where he's gone, then. But he didn't tell you where he expected to find the crook?"

Tom shook his head. "Jolly queer he doesn't come back!" said Manners, with a worried look. "Suppose the crackman, whoever he is, has turned on him—knocked him on the head, perhaps—"

"That—that's what's come into my mind," said Tom. "What do you fellows think? Shall I tell Mr. Railton about it? Talbot meant me not to tell anybody; but, in the circles—"

"In the circles, my son, the sooner you tell the Housemaster the better," said Lowther gravely. "Goodness knows what has happened to him!"



Even as Mr. Packington whipped out the revolver, Mr. Railton sprang forward. The heavy ruler crashed on the science master's hand and the weapon dropped to the floor!

Tom Merry made his way to Mr. Railton's study. He found Mr. Linton there with the Housemaster. They were discussing the absence of Talbot. The master of the Shell had learned from Mr. Packington that he had seen Talbot leave the school gates early in the afternoon. Since then nothing had been seen of him.

"Has Talbot come back?" asked Mr. Railton as Tom Merry appeared.

"No, sir. But I know something about what he may have gone out for, and I think I ought to tell you," said Tom.

"Tell me at once."

"Talbot told me this afternoon that he knew, or guessed, who it was that had robbed Glyn's pater, sir," said Tom.

"What!" exclaimed both the masters together.

"He told me he was going to see the man, and make him give back what he had stolen," said the captain of the Shell. "He thought it was someone whom he had known or seen a long time ago. You understand, sir?"

"I understand," said Mr. Railton gravely. "The unfortunate boy—he has perhaps met with some violence in attempting to make the villain make restitution. Have you any knowledge of where he went, Merry? We know that he was seen to leave the school about three o'clock."

"He didn't tell me, sir," said Tom miserably. "He only told me he would see the man and force him to make restitution. That's all."

"He should have spoken to me," said the Housemaster, frowning. "However, it is too late to think of that now. I

will telephone to the police at once. You can tell me no more than that, Merry?"

"That is all, sir."

Tom Merry left the study, and Mr. Railton went to the telephone. Half an hour later Inspector Skeat, of Rylcombe, was at the school. He consulted with the Housemaster and with the Head, and left again, looking very grave. The general belief was that Talbot, having discovered the thief, had been captured to prevent the police being informed. And the good old Head feared to think of what might have happened to the boy.

Inspector Skeat had undertaken that the search for him should be instant and thorough; but it was, of course, outside the school. That Talbot might be still within the walls of St. Jim's did not occur to anyone. Mr. Packington's evidence that he had seen the boy going out of the gates was conclusive on that point.

Tom Merry & Co. waited in bitter anxiety for news.

But no news came.

The juniors went to their dormitories at the usual hour, but it was long before they slept. The mystery of Talbot's fate hung like a black cloud over the school.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole to the Rescue!

AND Talbot?

Little did Tom Merry dream how near his chum was to him at that moment.

Talbot had come to his senses, to find himself in darkness, chilled to the bone

by the contact of the stone flags upon which he lay.

When his aching and confused brain cleared he realised what had happened. The professor had left him there—perhaps to be released later, perhaps to die in that black solitude.

He struggled with his bonds, but even as he did so he knew that his struggle was useless. The professor would not have taken any risks on that point. He was bound too securely. He could roll from side to side on the cold flags, but that was all. He could not remove the gag from his mouth, and in the deep old vaults a cry would not have been heard if he could have called.

The unfortunate lad almost abandoned himself to despair.

Not a glimmer of light penetrated into the vault. He could not even guess in what direction were the steps leading up to the door. He rolled over several times and came in contact with the wall, but which wall he could not guess; and the tightness of his bonds made it painful for him to move.

His head was swimming and aching; exhausted, he gave it up at last and lay still.

What was the hour? He had no idea. He could not gauge the flight of time. Was it still day, or had night fallen? Where was the professor? Had he fled with the plunder that was already in his hands? And was he waiting for the night to make another haul before he vanished for ever?

Talbot felt that the latter was the case. He knew the character of the desperate man. With the Toff hidden in the vault, he had nothing to fear. And he would not go without the plunder of the Head's safe.

That was the chief object that had drawn him to the place. And Talbot writhed in anguish at the thought that while he was lying there helpless, his benefactor was being robbed by the impostor who had crept into the school under a false name.

He had been wrong. He should not have given the villain a chance. If he had denounced him to the police at once, this would not have happened. But how could he have foreseen this? He realised that the professor must have foreseen the possibility, at least, of such a deed. He must have observed the old crypt, and noted that it was out of bounds, and seldom or never visited, and so suitable for this purpose.

While Talbot, during those days of anxiety, had been wondering, pondering, as to whether the man was what he appeared to be, or not, the professor had been preparing for all eventualities, in case Talbot recognised him and refused to keep his secret.

How long was he to remain here? No one ever came to the crypt. He might perish here of hunger, if the professor did not choose to tell of his whereabouts. Not that that was likely. The cracksmen would not risk the punishment for that. But he would be gone in safety with his plunder before Talbot was freed. He might be gone already!

It seemed to the suffering boy that hours—days—had elapsed since he came to his senses in the blackness of the vault, when suddenly he heard a sound in the gloom.

Was it the professor returning? He strained his ears to listen. The door of the crypt was opening—he heard it clearly—and there was a step in the darkness! Then a mumbling voice:

"Dear me! How very dark it is!"



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Talbot felt a thrill pass through him. For it was the voice of Skimpole. He had forgotten Skimpole and his nightly visits to the crypt, where, in the farther vault, he had rigged up his precious workshop.

Evidently the hour was late. Skimpole had come from the dormitory. Talbot's heart throbbed with hope now. There was a scratching sound and a match flared out.

Talbot, straining his eyes, saw the genius of the Shell blinking round through his spectacles, the match in his hand. He was groping his way with his match into the second vault, where his bench was, and the electric lamp suspended above it. The professor, with all his astuteness, had known nothing of that; he had not explored the crypt, and he had not suspected what was in the second vault.

Talbot strove to cry out, but the gag was too secure; he could make no sound. The shortsighted junior passed within a dozen feet of him, and went into the next vault. Then there was a blaze of electric light. A glimmer of it came through the arch into the vault where Talbot lay.

The bound junior proceeded to roll over on the stone flags, making his way slowly and with effort towards the second vault.

Skimpole was at work there at his bench, blinking over his marvellous propeller and the equally wonderful crank. He gave a start as Talbot bumped against the trestles of his bench.

"Dear me! What ever is that?" murmured Skimpole.

He came round the bench, and almost fell down at the sight of the bound junior, with a crimson stain on his brow, stretched at his feet.

"Talbot!" gasped Skimpole.

He blinked down at the junior, his eyes almost starting through his spectacles.

"Dear me! You are tied up!" said Skimpole, in astonishment. "What a very unpleasant joke to play on you, Talbot. Dear me, your head is cut! However, I will release you immediately."

Skimpole took his scissors from the bench and cut the bonds.

Talbot sat up dizzily, with a cry of pain as the restored circulation throbbed in his cramped limbs. Skimpole had taken the gag from his mouth; but he could not speak for some minutes. His mouth was stiff and numb.

"How very fortunate that I have found you, my dear Talbot!" purred Skimpole. "They have been searching for you everywhere, but nobody thought of looking here. Tom Merry told Mr. Railton that you were going to find the man who burgled Mr. Glyn's house, you know. It is really very remarkable that you should be here, because Mr. Packington saw you leave the school this afternoon, you know."

Talbot panted.

"Has Mr. Packington gone?"

"Gone?" repeated Skimpole, in surprise. "Not that I am aware of. Why should he go?"

"What is the time?"

"It is now eleven o'clock," said Skimpole. "I am later than usual to-night, because the fellows would not go to sleep. Some of them are still awake, and they called me names—silly ass, fat-head, and so forth. They do not understand the importance—"

"Thank you, Skimmy. You've done more than you think in helping me out of this. The bound! There is time yet. You are sure Mr. Packington is not gone?"



"I really do not see any reason why he should go, my dear Talbot. If you mean gone to bed, though—I think not, as there was a light in his study when I came out."

Talbot hurried away to the door of the crypt. His head was aching, and he was faint and exhausted; but a grim determination bore him up.

Skimpole blinked after him in surprise.

"My dear Talbot—"

But Talbot did not pause. He hurried out of the crypt. In the open air the keen night wind revived him. He dashed away in the direction of the School House.

The House was locked up for the night. But there was a light in Mr. Railton's study. The Housemaster was not gone to bed. Talbot could see two shadows on the blind; the Head was with the Housemaster. They were too anxious about the missing junior to think of bed.

In Mr. Packington's study at some distance a light was also burning.

Talbot's eyes gleamed as he glanced at it.

He approached the Housemaster's window and tapped softly on the lowest pane.

He heard an exclamation from within. That tap upon his window at that hour of the night must have startled Mr. Railton considerably.

Talbot tapped again.

The blind was drawn up, and the window opened. Mr. Railton looked out into the dark quadrangle.

"Talbot!" he exclaimed.

"Good heavens!" cried the Head. "Talbot, you are hurt!"

The boy clambered in at the window without replying. He stood unsteadily in the study, his hand to his brow. Dr. Holmes caught him by the shoulder to steady him.

"Sit down, my dear lad. You have been attacked."

"Thank heaven you have returned!" said Mr. Railton. "You have seen the man—"

"Yes, yes!" panted Talbot. "He is still here. Come with me, Mr. Railton, and he can be taken at once. Mr. Packington is still here!"

"Mr. Packington!" exclaimed both the masters together.

"Yes. He is the thief. I—I knew

him long ago!" almost whispered Talbot. "I did not recognise him at first—he was skilfully disguised; but after the robbery at Glyn's house, while he was there, I knew!"

"My dear boy, you must be making a dreadful mistake!" gasped the Head. "I had the very best recommendations with that gentleman."

"He is a professional forger," said Talbot, "and a crackman, too. He stunned me in the vault under the crypt, and left me there tied up. I have only just got away. I was going to make him restore what he had taken, and let him run, and then he—"

The Head looked at him very keenly. His first thought was that what Talbot had gone through had caused his mind to wander.

"It is the truth, sir!" exclaimed Talbot, almost fiercely. "He has stayed here only to rob the school before he goes—he would not have been here to-morrow morning. I tell you, sir, I know the man. He is known as the Professor in the underworld. All the police know him. He has imposed upon you—and upon me, too, until to-day. You will find what was stolen from Glyn's house in his study. And he is armed. He carries a revolver, and he will use it if he is given the chance. Let Mr. Railton come with me. We can handle him—"

"Can this be true?" gasped the bewildered Head. "If it is true, you have again saved me from a great loss, Talbot, my boy. But—"

"Let us see Mr. Packington," said Mr. Railton grimly.

"But if—he is armed, please do not go into danger!"

Mr. Railton smiled grimly, and picked up a heavy ebony ruler.

"Come, Talbot!"

Two minutes later Mr. Railton knocked at the science master's door.

"Come in!" squeaked the high-pitched voice of Mr. Packington.

The Housemaster entered. Mr. Packington rose to his feet, with an expression of surprise upon his face at that extremely late visit.

"Ah, Mr. Railton! What—" He broke off, and his expression changed, as Talbot followed the Housemaster into the study. The white face, with its streak of red across the pale forehead, came like a spectre before his eyes. The colour faded from his face, and for an instant he stood rooted to the floor.

In a flash he knew that the game was up. His hand went into his pocket. To threaten or to fight his way out was now the crackman's only thought. But even as the revolver whipped out, Mr. Railton sprang forward, and the ruler crashed on his hand, and the weapon dropped to the floor. The next moment the disarmed rascal was in the powerful grip of the Housemaster.

Talbot did not need to help. In the athletic Housemaster's grasp the professor was as an infant. In a few moments he was helpless. He turned his eyes, burning with rage, upon the Toff as he panted for breath.

"Curse you!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Railton. "Pick up that revolver, Talbot. Now take my handkerchief and bind this villain's wrists. Dr. Holmes—the Head was peering into the study with a startled face—will you telephone to Inspector Skeat?"

"Bless my soul!"

The professor burst into a bitter laugh, and threw himself into his chair,

(Continued on page 28.)

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PETTICOAT RULE AT GREYFRIARS!

An Agreeable Disappointment!

"WHERE'S that young bouncer? Tea's not ready!" Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh, the chums of the Remove at Greyfriars, had just come into Study No. 1, hungry after their cricket practice. They had expected to find the table laid and the tea ready, and there was a general growl of exasperation when they saw the table bare, the kettle in the fender, and the fire not even lighted.

There was no sign of Billy Bunter in the study. It was his duty to get the tea in Study No. 1. Bunter did not go in for cricket, but he was an excellent cook. As he never had any money, he found it a convenient arrangement to get the tea in the study and instal himself as a permanent guest at the festive board. As a rule, he could not be accused of forgetting meal-times—far from it.

But on the present occasion he had certainly overlooked the fact that it was time tea was ready. There was not a sign of preparation for a meal, and Bunter was not to be seen.

Nugent looked at his watch. "And we're three minutes late, too!" he exclaimed indignantly.

Harry Wharton looked serious. "Something must have happened," he remarked. "I can't believe that anything short of an earthquake would make Bunter forget a meal."

"He can't have forgotten it; that's impossible," said Bob Cherry decidedly. "He must be hungry himself. Something has happened."

"The probability is great," murmured Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "The esteemed Bunter has never been known to forget a meal, my worthy chums. There has been an accidental happening to the honourable Bunter."

"Better go and look for him, I suppose."

"Better get tea ourselves," said Nugent. "I'm jolly hungry, for one! I expect Bunter has been invited to a feed and has forgotten all about us."

"Well, that wouldn't matter if the young idiot had told us beforehand," said Harry Wharton. "But to—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here he is!"

A fat face adorned by a large pair of spectacles looked in at the door; it belonged to Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove.

The Famous Four made a simultaneous movement towards him.

"You young porpoise!"

"Where have you been?"

"Why haven't you got tea?"

"I say, you fellows—" said Billy Bunter, blinking through his big glasses at the chums of the Remove.

"Get the fire lighted!"

"Boil the kettle!"

"I say, you fellows—" "Look here, if you don't—" "I say, you fellows, have you seen her?"

"Her? Whom?"

Harry Wharton took the fat junior by the shoulder and shook him.

"Now then, you young ass, explain yourself—and sharp!" he said.

Billy Bunter wriggled in the grasp of the captain of the Remove.

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

"Please don't shake me, Wharton; it puts me in a flutter, and you may make my glasses fall off, and if they break you'll have to pay for them."

"Will you explain what you're talking about, you young ass?"

"Certainly, Wharton! I shall be very pleased to do so; but don't hurry me, or I get confused and—"

Harry Wharton laughed. It was certainly of no use hurrying Bunter; it made him all the slower in explaining. "I thought perhaps you had seen her," said Bunter, blinking through his big glasses. "I have, you know."

"Whom?"

"The Head's sister."

"Dr. Locke's sister?"

"Yes. You knew she was coming to Greyfriars on a visit, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes!" said Harry Wharton carelessly. "She's a B.A., or something, isn't she?"

"That's it," said Nugent. "I've got a picture of her in my mind's eye; tall

Pretty and charming as the Head's youthful sister is, she is by no means welcome to the Remove as Form-mistress!

and thin, of course, with a nose like a knife and an eye like a gimlet."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Undoubtedly the worthy sister of our esteemed Head is as our Nugentful chum describes her," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But that must not prevent us from showing her the extreme respectfulness."

"Certainly not!" said Bob Cherry. "But you don't mean to say that you've forgotten tea because the Head's sister has come, Bunter?"

"I know she's a jolly nice girl," said Billy Bunter, ignoring Bob Cherry's question.

"A what?"

"A jolly nice girl. She's not tall and thin and nose-y at all—not the least bit in the world. She can't be more than twenty-three or so."

"By Jove!"

"A pretty, slim girl, and not like what Nugent describes."

"Really!"

"A lot of fellows have seen her, and Skinner says she looked at me very sweetly as she came in," said Billy Bunter bashfully. "Of course, there was nothing in that. Girls have looked at me before."

"Yes, I dare say they have," assented Nugent. "I expect they wondered what you were doing outside the Zoo."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"But, I say, this is interesting about the Head's sister," said Bob Cherry. "I should like to see her if it's true

what Bunter says. There must be something wonderful about her to make Bunter forget it was tea-time."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Harry Wharton nodded. "I should like to see her."

"It's easy enough," said Billy Bunter eagerly. "I can show you if you like. She came out of the Head's study a minute ago and has gone along to have a look at the class-rooms. The Head is showing her over Greyfriars. She'll be along the passage in a minute, and you can see her over the banisters."

"Good!"

"Follow me," said Bunter importantly.

The chums of the Remove followed him. They were curious to see Miss Locke and to observe whether Bunter's enthusiastic description was correct. Bulstrode came out of his study as they went towards the stairs.

"Anything on?" he asked.

"The Head's sister," said Bunter. "I'm going to show these fellows—"

"Oh, cheese it, Bunter, and get along!"

"Certainly, Wharton! But—"

"Get along!"

Bunter got along. Bulstrode joined the juniors, and so did Hazeldene and Micky Desmond. One or two other fellows, hearing what was on, came along, too, and so the Removites numbered quite a crowd when they reached the staircase.

The staircase was rather dusky, and the juniors flattered themselves that they could crouch quietly there and watch over the banisters for the passing of the Head and his interesting sister without being observed.

The stairs were soon crammed, and the juniors watched expectantly. A class-room door was heard to open down the passage. A whisper ran through the crowd of watching juniors.

"She's coming!"

The stately figure of the Head appeared, with a slim, girlish form by his side. The juniors had just caught sight of the latter, when there was a sudden commotion on the upper stairs behind them.

Herr Rosenblum, the German master, had come out of his room, and was descending the stairs. The German was rather short-sighted, and the stairs were dusky. He walked right into the crowd of juniors without knowing that they were there and fell over them.

"Ach! Himmel!"

The German gasped out the words as he rolled over the crowded juniors.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"My hat!"

It was a chorus of wild exclamations, as an avalanche of juniors, falling over one another, rolled down the stairs.

The Head's Sister.

MISS LOCKE stopped and uttered an exclamation.

"Good gracious! What is that?"

The Head put up his glasses in amazement.

"Dear me, something appears to have happened!"

Something certainly had happened. Nearly every junior on the stairs had rolled down to the bottom, and for some

ANOTHER SPARKLING STORY OF THE EARLY SCHOOLDAYS OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.

moments nothing could be seen but wildly waving arms and legs.

Miss Locke gazed at the avalanche in amazement.

"Ach! I was hurt!"

"I say, you fellows, gerroff my chest!"

"Faith, and it's a pancake I am intirely!"

"Get off!"

"Gerroooh!"

"Hallo, hallo! Crawl off, you boulder!"

"The crushfulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton was the first to extricate himself from the crush and gain his feet. He scrambled up, red and breathless, his head singing from the impact of a hard elbow behind his ear.

Miss Locke looked at him, and at a glance Harry saw that Billy Bunter's description was quite correct. Amy Locke was a young and graceful girl with a sweet face and soft, brown eyes.

"I—I beg your pardon!" gasped Harry Wharton.

Miss Locke smiled.

"Indeed! You have nothing to apologise for."

"We—we must have startled you."

"Well, yes, you did."

"You did, indeed, Wharton," said the Head severely. "What does this mean? Explain yourself. What do you mean by falling downstairs and startling us?"

"We didn't fall on purpose, sir."

"H'm! I suppose not. But—"

"I say, you fellows, help me up! Some of my ribs are broken, and I've sprained my spinal column and twisted an artery in my shoulder."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "You must be awfully clever to do that, Bunter."

"Really, Cherry—"

"My hat!" gasped Nugent. "I've got a pain in a dozen places. Can I help you, Herr Rosenblum?"

"Ach! Thank you, ain't it, my poy?" Nugent helped the breathless German to his feet. The juniors were scrambling up, looking very sheepish.

Bulstrode rubbed his head ruefully, and Levison was rubbing his leg. Micky Desmond mopped a stream of red from his nose. Herr Rosenblum puffed and blew like a grampus.

"Ach! I tink tat I am vinded, ain't it?"

"Herr Rosenblum, will you tell me how this happened?" said the Head.

"Himmel! I know not. I step on te stair, and it is not a stair; it is a poy, and he move and I fall."

"What were you boys doing on the stairs?" asked the Head sternly. "This might have been a serious accident. What were you doing there?"

The juniors were silent.

"Answer me, Wharton!"

"Well, sir, the fact is—"

"Go on!"

"We—we—we—"

"I am waiting, Wharton."

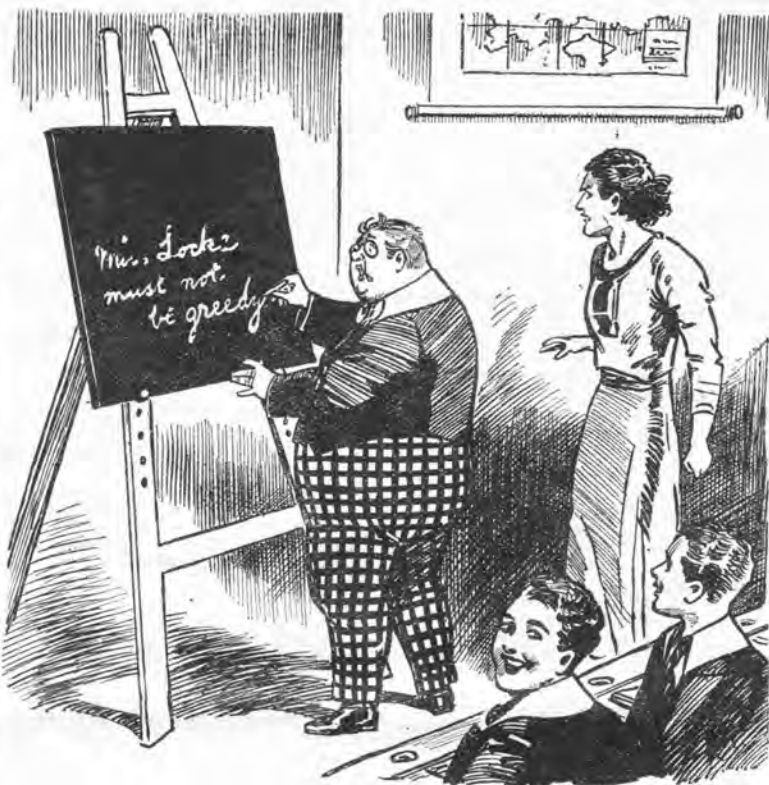
"The explainfulness is difficult," said Hurree Singh, coming to Harry's rescue. "We are afraidful of offending the charming Miss Locke."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"The newfulness of her arrival reached us, and we hurried to behold the esteemed and never-to-be-sufficiently-respected sister of our honourable head-master sahib," explained the Nabob of Bhanipur. "For fear of bringing the blush of consciousness to the cheek of beauty, we ensconced ourselves hidefully on the honourable staircase to observe the charming Miss Locke unseenfully."

Miss Locke coloured slightly.

"I assure Miss Locke that we meant nothing but respect," said Harry



"Write 'I must not be greedy,'" ordered Miss Locke. And Bunter wrote. There was a yell of laughter from the Remove as they read the sprawling words he chalked on the blackboard. "Miss Locke must not be greedy!"

Wharton. "We wished to see her without appearing impertinent or curious, and so—"

"Oh, I see!"

"That is the case exactly. Then the honourable and ludicrous Herr Rosenblum stepped footfully on us, and the catastrophe occurred suddenly. The regretfulness is terrific."

Miss Locke laughed.

"I hope your curiosity is satisfied now," she said. "It is fortunate that no damage has been done."

"Ach! I am vinded, ain't it?"

"Really—" began the Head.

There was a deep groan from Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows," he said faintly, "I shan't be able to get tea in the study to-night. I'm dying!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head.

"Is the poor boy really hurt?" said Miss Locke.

Harry Wharton bent over the fat junior.

Billy Bunter had lost his glasses and he was breathless, but a brief examination satisfied Harry that the fat boy of the Remove was not hurt.

Billy Bunter thought otherwise. He had had a heavy bump, and he made the most of it. He groaned again deeply.

"Help me up!" he murmured. "Carry me somewhere and get me something to eat. It may not be too late to save my life."

"Oh, get up!" said Harry. "You're not hurt!"

"Really, Wharton, that seems to me quite heartless. I—"

"Get up!"

Miss Locke came quickly forward, a look of concern on her pleasant face.

"Perhaps the boy is really injured," she said. "Let me see."

"He's all right, Miss Locke."

"But perhaps— Dear me!"

Billy Bunter had suddenly leaped up with a wild yell. He showed remarkable agility for a youth who was on the point of death.

"What is the matter? Is he delirious?"

"Ow! Somebody stuck a pin in me! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! It hurts!"

"This—is this absurd," said the Head, with a frown. "Who did this?"

"If you please, sir," said Bob Cherry weekly, "I thought it would be the quickest way of seeing whether he was dying or not."

"Cherry!"

"I'm hurt!" growled Billy Bunter. "My spinal column is sprained, and—"

"Don't be absurd, Bunter! How could your spinal column be sprained? Boys, you may go, and don't let anything of this kind occur again."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I hopefully trust that Miss Locke forgives us heartfully," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

The Head's sister smiled.

"Quite, my friend."

"The apologise is terrific."

"We're well out of that!" muttered Bob Cherry, dragging Hurree Singh away. "Come on, Inky; you've apologised enough, and life is too short for all you'd like to say. Let's slide."

And the juniors promptly did.

The Head and his sister walked on, a very majestic frown on Dr. Locke's face. But there was a twinkle in Amy Locke's eyes.

"They are the Form I was telling you

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about, Amy," said Dr. Locke. "The most unruly Form at Greyfriars."

"The Remove?"

"Yes, the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form. There are many fine lads in the Form, such as Wharton and Cherry and Nugent, but they are wild and reckless; much more so than I wish to see, though I approve of a certain amount of spirit in a boy." The Head paused a moment. "Mr. Quelch has his hands full with them. He has lately been ill, and to my mind he came back to his duties too soon, before he was really fitter to resume."

Miss Locke nodded thoughtfully.

"Why doesn't he take a rest, then?"

"Well, while he was away we had a substitute in his place—a gentleman named Chesham, who was highly recommended to me, but turned out to be a—well, a faddist," said the Head. "He had great difficulties with the Remove. Mr. Quelch has a strong sense of duty, but really he would have done better to leave the resumption of his duties a little longer. A few days' rest might—"

"Suppose—"

The Head looked at his sister.

"Suppose what, Amy?"

"Suppose Mr. Quelch were to take the rest he needs, for a few days—"

"He would willingly do so if there was someone to take the Remove; but it is such a heavy charge upon my time. I am already busy—"

"Why shouldn't I take the Remove for a few days?"

The Head stopped suddenly in amazement. He looked at the calm face of his sister as though he could scarcely believe his ears.

"You take the Remove?" murmured the Head.

"Why not? You know I have taken my degree and am fully qualified as far as that goes. And—"

"The most unruly Form at Greyfriars!"

"I could manage them."

"But, my dear Amy—"

The girl laid her hand on his arm.

"Let me try, Arthur. That can do no harm, at all events. I am here for several days, and I should like the experience, and Mr. Quelch can take the rest he needs. Let me try."

"Well, really, Amy, if you wish—"

"I do."

"Then you shall try."

There was a surprise in store for the Greyfriars Remove!

The Remove is Amazed!

"IMPOSSIBLE!"

"Fact!"

"It can't be!"

"It is!"

"Rats!"

"You can say what you like," said Hazeldene, who was standing in the doorway of Study No. 1, while the chums of the Remove were having their tea. "but I tell you it's on the notice-board in the Hall."

Bob Cherry set his teacup down with a clatter.

"I suppose you're trying to jape us," he said. "I can't take it in."

"It's there, in the Head's handwriting."

"The improbableness is terrific."

"It's a fact."

"I say, you fellows, we all know Vaseline," said Billy Bunter, with a wise shake of the head. "He's an awful crammer, you know."

Hazeldene turned red.

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, certainly, Wharton! But you

remember that time he dished you over the exam—"

Bob Cherry stamped on Bunter's foot under the table. The fat junior broke off with a howl. Hazeldene had turned over a new leaf of late, and was on very good terms with the chums of Study No. 1, but Bunter's indiscretion knew no bounds.

"What did you do that for, Cherry?"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Really, Cherry—"

"Well, it's a fact," said Hazeldene.

"You can look at the notice-board yourselves when you come down, that's all."

And he walked away.

"It can't be!" exclaimed Nugent. "It must be a hoax."

"The hoaxfulness is terrific."

"As if the Remove would knuckle under to a woman!"

"And just a girl, too!"

"It's all rot!"

"I don't know," said Harry Wharton, with a thoughtful frown. "Miss Locke is a B.A., you know; and as Quelch has been looking rather sick—"

"But a mere girl—"

"Quelch came back too soon and a rest would do him good. He would have stayed longer at the seaside, only Chesham mucked things up."

"That's so."

"It may be possible—"

"I don't see how we can stand it," said Nugent. "It's too much of a come-down for the Remove. How the Upper Fourth will chuckle at us!"

"Yes; I can see Temple, Dabney & Co. grinning at us over it," said Harry Wharton. "Blessed if I know what we're going to do, though. We can't be rude to Miss Locke."

"H'm! I suppose not."

"We can't rag her as we ragged the Chesham ass!"

"But are we going to stand it?" demanded Bob Cherry wrathfully. "We shall be guyed by the whole school. A girl teacher—as if we were kids in the Second!"

"It is a bit thick, and no mistake. But it may only be a jape, after all. Let's go and look at the notice-board."

"Good! That will settle it."

And the chums of the Remove, leaving the tea unfinished, left the study.

Billy Bunter did not go with them. He was curious, too; but he was hungry, and hunger always came first with Billy Bunter. He went on steadily finishing up the ham and eggs and sardines, and then carefully and methodically clearing off the cake and biscuits, and everything else except the crockeryware. Then he sat down in the only armchair with a sigh of satisfaction.

Harry Wharton and his chums descended to the hall and found a crowd round the notice-board. There were a good many Upper Fourth fellows, and they were grinning gleefully.

"I say, have you seen this, Wharton?" asked Russell.

"Not yet."

"Well, look at it."

Harry pushed his way forward. He looked at the notice pinned up among the others on the board. It needed only a glance to show that it was really in the Head's handwriting and that it was perfectly genuine.

"To-morrow and until further notice, the Remove will be taken by Miss Locke, in the place of Mr. Quelch, who is leaving Greyfriars for a few days."

"That's the Head's hand," said Bob Cherry.

"And his signature," said Nugent.

"The genuineness of the honourable notice is great."

"It's true."

"Of course, it's true!" said Temple,

the captain of the Upper Fourth. "Just what you kids in the Remove want, too—a lady teacher."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"That's it," said Fry. "They want teaching manners; they always did. A nice, gentle, kind lady teacher—"

"We've taught you manners before now!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "We're ready to start again."

"Rather!" said Nugent emphatically.

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Start then."

"We'll jolly soon—"

"Hold on, there!" exclaimed Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars. "Don't start rowing in the hall or you will catch it."

"Oh, these kids are cheeky, as usual," said Temple loftily. "We have to keep them in their place, you know. They're going to have a nice lady teacher—"

Wingate laughed.

"Oh, shut up, Temple!"

The chums of the Remove walked away with wrathful faces. Not one of them thought of going up to the study to finish tea. It would have been useless, as Billy Bunter had finished it already. But they were thinking of other things.

"We're not going to stand it," said Bob Cherry. "Miss Locke is a nice girl, but she's not going to boss the Remove."

"But how are we going to stop her?"

"How are we going to stop her, Harry?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No good asking me conundrums."

"You must think of something. What's the good of being the blessed captain of the Remove if you haven't an idea in your head?"

"Well, a chap must have time to think."

"The emergency is great and the botherfulness is terrific," said the nabob. "We shall be the laughable stock of the honourable asses in every other Form."

"That's where the shoe pinches. You can see how Temple, Dabney & Co. are cackling already."

"Something must be done," said Wharton.

"Yes; but what?"

"I don't know," said Harry frankly. "I've never looked for a situation like this before, and I don't exactly know how to meet it, and that's a fact. We were taken by surprise by the Chesham ass; but we took his measure and made him sit up. I don't know how we shall deal with Miss Locke."

"We're not going to have her for a giddy Form-master."

"Form-mistress, you mean," said Levison, joining them. "This is a pretty come-down for the Remove, isn't it?"

"That's just what we were talking about."

"Aren't you going to do anything, Wharton?"

"What can I do?"

"Well, you ought to know. You're head of the Form. If you can't get out of a thing like this, what's the good of being captain?" demanded Levison unpleasantly.

"Oh, you travel along!" said Bob Cherry, taking Levison by the shoulder and giving him a push. "There's too much of your flip-flap. Scoot!"

The chums of the Remove strolled away from the spot, still discussing the matter, but it was difficult to come to a decision. There was nothing to be done, as a matter of fact, and that was the trouble. But the alternative—to grin and bear it—was not to be thought of.

There was trouble ahead for the Remove, and just how matters would turn out remained to be seen.

Petticoat Government!

THE Remove marched into their class-room the following morning with mingled feelings. There was suppressed wrath and indignation in every face, but the dominant feeling was one of expectancy.

Some cherished a hope that the matter would, after all, turn out to be a hoax, or a mistake, or anything but a fact. Others opined that Miss Locke would lose her nerve when the time came to take the Remove at morning lessons. Few really expected to see the Head's sister installed in their Form-master's place.

The Remove took their seats. Miss Locke had not yet appeared. The clock hands pointed to a minute past the quarter-past nine. The Form-mistress was late. But that, after all, was the privilege of the fair sex, and did not imply that she was not coming.

"I'm not going to stand it for one!" muttered Bulstrode.

"Nor I," said Hazeldene; "if there's anything else to be done!"

"Something must be done!"

"But what?"

"Oh, don't ask me silly ass questions!" growled Bulstrode.

"The honourable Bulstrode has no more knowfulness than the rest of us," observed Hurree Singh. "The objectfulness is terrific!"

"She isn't coming," said Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up! Here she comes!"

Miss Locke entered the room.

The Removites who had expected her to be nervous were disappointed. There was not the slightest trace of nervousness about Miss Locke. She gave the Form a bright smile and a cheery nod, and walked straight to the Form-master's desk.

There was a murmur in the Remove.

"Well, she's got pluck," said Bob Cherry.

Miss Locke faced the Remove.

"Good-morning, my boys! As you know, I am taking the Form for a few days, while Mr. Quelch has a rest, which he needs very much."

The Remove was silent.

"I am sure we shall be very good friends," continued Miss Locke. "There will be no difference at all in the lessons. You will work exactly the same as if Mr. Quelch were with you."

Bulstrode grinned.

"Shall we?" he murmured.

Miss Locke's eyes fixed on Bulstrode.

"Did you speak?" she asked quietly.

"N-no!" stammered Bulstrode, turning red.

"Very good. If any boy has anything to say before lessons commence, I am quite willing to give him a hearing."

Most eyes turned upon Harry Wharton. The Remove expected him to rise and denounce feminine rule in no measured terms; but the captain of the Remove did nothing of the kind. He sat in his place, his eyes on his desk.

There were audible murmurs, and Skinner leaned over from the desk behind to give Wharton a nudge.

"What's the matter?" asked Harry, looking round.

"Aren't you going to speak?"

"What am I to say?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Well, I don't, either!"

"The impossibility of being rude to Miss Locke is terrific," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"That's the worst of it!" growled Bob Cherry. "If she were a man—"

"If she were a man the difficulty wouldn't have arisen."

"True."

"Hallo! That's that ass Bunter getting up. Sit down, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter was on his legs.

Levison had been whispering to him earnestly, and it was pretty plain that he had succeeded in persuading Bunter to speak, against his secret disinclination.

"You're just the chap to do it, Bunter!" muttered Levison. "Besides, you know from the way she looked at you yesterday that she likes you."

"Do you really think so, Levison?"

"It's absolutely certain. Then look how concerned she was when she thought you were hurt after that tumble downstairs."

"So she was."

"You're the chap to speak, Bunter. Go it!"

"Of course, I know I could put it better than any other fellow in the Form—"

"Go it! You're the chap!"

And Billy Bunter, thus persuaded, rose to his feet. There was a murmur from the Remove.

"Sit down!"

Bunter blinked round through his spectacles. Miss Locke fixed her eyes on him.

"Do you wish to speak?"

"Y-e-e-es, miss!" stammered Bunter.

"What is your name?"

"Bunter, miss—William George Bunter."

"Well, you may go on, Bunter."

"If you please, miss—What was the next?" murmured Bunter, glancing down at Levison, who sat at his side.

"You don't approve of female Form-masters."

"Ah, yes! If you please, miss, I don't approve of female Form-masters."

The Remove burst into a giggle. Miss Locke gave Bunter a look which would have frozen anybody else; but it had no effect on the short-sighted Bunter, who did not even see it.

"What was the next, Levison?" he murmured.

"You think women ought to keep their place," whispered Levison.

"If you please, miss, I think women ought to keep their place."

"And wash up dishes at home," whispered the prompter.



"Ow!" "Oh!" "My hat!" With a chorus of wild exclamations Herr Rosenblum and the avalanche of Juniors, falling over one another, rolled down the stairs, to land in a heap at the feet of the Head and Miss Locke!

"And wash up dishes at home," said Bunter.

Bunter blinked round at the Remove. He could see nothing to laugh at himself. Levison was grinning. There was a red spot on either of Miss Locke's pink cheeks.

"Have you finished, Bunter?"

"Yes, miss!"

"If I did not think you had been prompted to make these absurd observations, I should punish you severely!" said Miss Locke.

Bunter gasped. This certainly did not sound as if Miss Locke was very "sweet," as Levison had put it, in his direction. Still, he immediately reflected that women were great adepts at hiding their feelings.

"You have been prompted to this impertinence," said Miss Locke. "What was the boy next to you whispering about?"

Levison looked uneasy. He had not expected the temporary Form-mistress to be so extremely keen-sighted and observant.

"I—I—I—I—" stammered Billy Bunter.

"The next boy will stand up."

Levison unwillingly stood up. The eyes of the whole class were upon him. Bunter dropped upon the form again with a gasp. He was glad to be out of the range of Miss Locke's clear eyes.

"What is your name?"

"Levison," said the junior sulkily.

"You prompted Bunter to make these ridiculous observations?"

Levison was silent.

"Answer me, Levison!"

"Yes, I did," said Levison. "I don't see that they are ridiculous. I think they—"

"I am not asking you what you think, Levison. Pay attention to me. I will overlook this fault of yours, as I do not wish to commence here by inflicting a punishment. But it must not occur again. Understand that, all of you. We will now proceed to the first lesson."

Levison sat down, looking very red.

"I must depend on you for some information in this matter," Miss Locke went on, glancing at the first row of boys. "I shall soon get into the ways of the Form, I think. You must help me. What is the first lesson?"

Her glance was on Bulstrode, who towered head and shoulders above any other fellow in the Remove. Bulstrode winked at Skinner, who sat next to him.

"Roman history, miss," he replied.

Harry Wharton looked at Bulstrode. The bully of the Remove had not told the truth, for the sake of taking a "rise" out of the fair teacher. Miss Locke had no suspicion.

"You will let me have your book, please," she said.

"I am sorry, miss, but—"

"You surely have your books with you?"

"I ought to have them, miss, but—"

"Well, what?"

"I have left them on the piano in my study," said Bulstrode.

The Remove giggled. The idea of a piano in a junior's study struck them as funny. Perhaps it appeared rather peculiar to Miss Locke, too, unused as she was to a boys' school. She gave Bulstrode a quick glance.

"You have left them where?" she asked.

"On the piano in my study, miss."

"Go and fetch them at once!"

"Certainly, miss."

Bulstrode left the class-room.

Miss Locke turned to Harry Wharton.

"Let me see, your name is—"

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"Harry Wharton."

"Very good! Please lend me a book for first lesson."

Wharton coloured.

"You have not forgotten your books, too, Wharton?"

"No, miss, but—"

"What is it?"

"Bulstrode made a mistake. First lesson is not Roman history."

Miss Locke's brow contracted just a little.

"Ah, a curious mistake! Please give me some more correct information on the point, Wharton, and we will proceed."

Harry did so, and several fellows who had expected him to carry on the game of "clipping" started by Bulstrode were disappointed.

Harry's manner to the Head's sister was quiet and respectful. As a matter of fact, Wharton did not know what to do. He did not like the situation, but it was not easy to see a way out of it.

First lesson was over when Bulstrode returned.

"Where are your books, Bulstrode?" asked Miss Locke, as she saw that the bully of the Remove came in empty-handed.

"They're not there, miss."

"Two mistakes in one morning," said Miss Locke significantly. "You had better be careful, Bulstrode. Go to your place."

Bulstrode went to his place with ostentatious slowness.

"What is second lesson this morning, Wharton?" asked Miss Locke.

"Latin, miss."

"What books do you use?"

"Eutropius and Cæsar. It is the Third Book—De Bello Gallico—this morning."

"Thank you, Wharton!"

Miss Locke opened her book.

"Where did you leave off yesterday?"

"Cap. 7, miss."

"We will go on from there. 'His rebus gestis, cum omnibus de causis Cæsar pactatum Galliam existamaret.' You will construe, Bulstrode."

"I haven't a book, miss."

"You have not found it yet?"

"It wasn't on the piano in my study," said Bulstrode. "I think I must have dropped it during my trot round the Close before breakfast."

"Bulstrode!"

"Yes, miss?"

"I have already warned you to be careful. Take Levison's book and construe."

"Certainly, miss!"

"Begin, then."

Bulstrode glanced at the Latin, which he could have construed with perfect correctness if he had chosen; but he did not choose.

"Cum omnibus de causis Cæsar pactatum Galliam existamaret"—Cæsar got upon an omnibus—

There was an irresistible cackle from the Remove. Miss Locke turned pink.

"Bulstrode!"

"Yes, miss."

"You will go to the bottom of the class."

"But—"

"Don't answer me! Do as I tell you!"

Bulstrode looked at Miss Locke, and then set his teeth and sat down in his place. There was a murmur in the Form.

A Firm Hand!

MISS LOCKE looked at Bulstrode, who kept his eyes fixed doggedly upon his desk. The murmur was followed by a breathless hush. Bulstrode had taken

upon himself the burden of defiance. What would come of it?

"Bulstrode!"

Miss Locke's voice was very quiet and cool. The Remove bully did not reply nor look up. He meant to show the Remove that they would have done better to have made him captain than in conferring that honour upon Wharton.

"Bulstrode, go to the bottom of the class."

The Remove bully did not stir.

"Bravo, Bulstrode!" said Levison, in an audible whisper.

"Levison!"

"Yes, miss."

"Go to the next place at the bottom of the class, next to Bulstrode."

"What for?" asked Levison insolently. "For impertinence."

Levison did not move. There was a painful silence in the Form.

The Remove had chafed at feminine government; but now that there was actual rebellion, some of them began to think that it was not very manly to "rag" a woman. After all, Miss Locke meant well, and it was only for a time.

Wharton was becoming strongly inclined to back up the Head's sister.

"Very well," said Miss Locke, taking Mr. Quelch's case from the desk. "Bulstrode, stand up!"

Bulstrode sat still. Miss Locke came up to the first row of desks, the juniors watching her with breathless interest.

"Stand up, Bulstrode!"

There was something in her voice now that made the Remove bully obey. He rose uneasily to his feet, his face sullen.

"Hold out your hand!"

Bulstrode started.

"Hold out your hand at once!"

The Removeite gritted his teeth.

"I won't!"

Miss Locke's lips were set in a tight line. There was a gleam of determination, too, in her soft, brown eyes.

"Listen to me, Bulstrode! You will hold out your hand and take your punishment, or I shall send a note to Dr. Locke reporting you for insolence and insubordination. You know what the result of that will be."

Bulstrode knew. It would be a severe flogging in the Head's study. It struck him all of a sudden that in defying Miss Locke it was not merely the temporary Form-mistress he was defying, but the whole power of Greyfriars, represented for the moment by that slim and graceful girl.

"Go it, Bulstrode!"

It was a whisper from several reckless fellows behind him; but Bulstrode was not inclined to "go it."

Slowly he held out his hand. Miss Locke gave him a sharp cut across the palm. The pain was nothing to the burly Removeite, but he coloured crimson with the humiliation of it.

"The other hand, Bulstrode."

The other hand came out slowly. The cane descended with a sounding whack that rang through the silence of the room.

Bulstrode wriggled.

"Now, you will go to the bottom of the class, Bulstrode!"

For a moment Bulstrode stood still, a struggle evidently going on in his breast, and then he slowly and savagely moved from his desk.

"You heard what I told you, Levison!"

Levison followed Bulstrode without a word.

"And now," said Miss Locke, "we will resume. You may construe, Wharton."

Harry Wharton stood up and construed. He did it perfectly, and received a word of commendation.

"Rotten sneak!" muttered Levison. "Trying to curry favour with her!"

"This isn't the finish!" muttered Bulstrode. "I had to give in—"

"You did, and no mistake," said Levison, who was always ready with a sneer, at friend or foe. "It was a climb-down."

"Oh, shut up! This isn't the finish."

"Take fifty lines each for talking in class, Bulstrode and Levison!"

And the two malcontents "shut up" then promptly enough.

The morning lessons went on, and

the feelings of the Remove warmed a little towards Miss Locke.

She showed very plainly that she was quite up to the work of the Remove, and, indeed, gave them the impression that she was beyond it, and was condescending, as it were, from vastly superior heights of knowledge.

She could be severe, as she had shown in the case of Bulstrode and Levison. But to the boys who were attentive and painstaking she was kindness itself.

But the thought of what was to come after school made the Remove chafe.

They shrank from the prospect of the chipping of the Upper Fourth.

Bulstrode and Levison were not the only ones who came to grief. The eye of the Form-mistress was on Billy Bunter.

Bunter had a bag of texts under his desk, and from time to time he helped himself, when he thought that he was unobserved. He seldom ventured upon anything of the sort when Mr. Quelch was taking the class, but he was not so much afraid of Miss Locke. But the eye of the Form-mistress was on him.

(Continued on the next page.)

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest with each other. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on page 17, and posted to The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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Miss H. Lockyer, Southwick, Mark, Somerset; age 14-17; girl correspondents; interested in old companion papers and drawing; overseas.

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A. Esakuf, 16, St. George's Street, Yeoville, Johannesburg, S. Africa; age 13-16; stamps; East Indies, Canada, U.S.A., Europe.

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J. White, 477, Edinburgh Road, Carnyne, Glasgow, E.1; age 21; stamps, cycling, snapshots, postcards; abroad.

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Miss J. Crawford, 1, Woodlands Drive, Glasgow, C.4; age 14-18; girl correspondents; France or Germany.

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Miss M. M. Milnes, 5, Smith Street, New Road Side, Wyke, Bradford; age 17; girl correspondents; sports, films.

W. S. Outerbridge, Shelly Bay, Bermuda; pen pals.

"Bunter!" Miss Locke rapped out presently, so suddenly that Billy Bunter, who had his mouth full, gave a jump, and nearly choked.

"G-r-r—yes, miss?"
 "What are you doing?"
 "Nothing, miss."
 "You are eating!"

There could not be much doubt upon that point for Billy Bunter's jaws were working away like a machine in his hurry to bolt the mouthful.

"You must not eat in class, Bunter!"

"If you please, miss—"

"Don't let me see you doing it again!"

Billy Bunter inwardly resolved that she should not. But he did not mean to leave his tarts till school was over. He waited until Miss Locke's back was turned and then he recommenced with another tart.

"Bunter!"

"Oh!" murmured Billy Bunter. "She's got eyes in the back of her head, I believe."

"Bunter, you are eating again!"

"If you please, miss—"

"Come out here!"

Bunter, looking extremely nervous, stepped out before the class. He was thinking of the cane; but it was not that he had to dread. Miss Locke signed to him to go up to the blackboard and take the chalk.

"Now, Bunter, you will write as I tell you on the blackboard."

"Ye-o-s, miss!" stammered the alarmed Bunter.

"Write 'I must not be greedy'."

"Very well, miss."

And Bunter wrote. There was a yell of laughter from the Remove as they read the sprawling words. Miss Locke's face was a study. For this was what Billy Bunter had scrawled across the blackboard:

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"Miss Locke must not be greedy!"

"Bunter!"

The tone of Miss Locke's voice made Bunter drop the chalk to the floor. He jumped and blinked at the Form-mistress through his glasses.

"Ye-o-e-s, miss?"

"How dare you write that nonsense?"

"But—but you told me to!" stammered Bunter. "You told me to, yourself!"

The Remove giggled joyfully.

"I told you to write 'I must not be greedy'."

"That's what I've written!"

Miss Locke looked at him searchingly, and then suppressed a smile. She

saw that it was not intentional impertinence she had to deal with.

"Bunter!"

"Yes, miss. You told me—"

"I intended you to write the first personal pronoun. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, miss."

"Then write as I have said!"

Bunter picked up the chalk and wrote:

"The first personal pronoun."

The Remove laughed without restraint. Miss Locke turned pink.

"Bunter, I cannot credit that you are really so stupid!"

"What's the matter now?" gasped the unhappy Bunter. "I've only done as you told me. I don't see what all the fellows are cackling at. What's the matter?"

Miss Locke tried not to smile. She rubbed the board clean, and then took the chalk from Bunter, and wrote the words on the blackboard herself.

"I must not be greedy."

"Oh, I see now!" gasped the fat junior. "Do—"

"You will stand by the blackboard for the rest of the lesson, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Miss Locke—"

"You will do as I tell you!"

And Bunter did.

(Miss Locke's certainly having no nonsense from the Remove. Make sure you don't miss next week's exciting chapters.)

THE TOFF'S TRIUMPH!

(Continued from page 21.)

his hands bound, a helpless prisoner now.

"The game's up," he said. "You have downed me, Toff—you have downed an old pal!"

"I gave you your chance," said Talbot, with white lips. "I had no right to give you a chance, but I gave it to you."

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

"I was a fool not to take it," he said.

"You were always a hard nut to crack, Toff. But while there's life there is hope, and the lock was never made that will hold me."

Talbot made no reply.

Tom Merry & Co. met with a surprise when they came down the fol-

lowing morning. Talbot was in bed in the school sanatorium, suffering from a severe contusion on the head, and he was not likely to appear in the Form-room for two or three days to come.

Mr. Packington—known in his true character now—had left St. Jim's in charge of Inspector Skeat. In his study the inspector had found concealed the plunder of Mr. Glyn's safe.

Later in the day the Terrible Three were admitted into the sanatorium to see their chum. They found Talbot propped up on pillows, his face white and his head bandaged. He greeted them with a faint smile.

"So it was Paeky, after all?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"How's your napper?"

"Feels pretty bad," said Talbot; "but it's mending. I shall be back in class in a few days."

"Thank goodness it's no worse!" said Monty Lowther. "The amazing part of the thing is, that old Skimmy has come in useful. It's come out that he was in the crypt, and he's been excused

for playing the giddy goat, on account of his usefulness. But Mr. Railton has promised to boil him in oil, or words to that effect, if he gets out of the dorm again. He's had to shift out of the crypt, and he's started in the woodshed again, and the self-acting propeller is going strong."

Talbot laughed.

"Good old Skimmy!"

A couple of days later Talbot was in class again, looking a little paler, but otherwise his old self.

Skimpole cheered his convalescence by giving him a description, at great length, of a new principle he was applying to his self-acting propeller, to which Talbot listened with exemplary patience. For, whatever may be the value of Skimmy's invention, it was certainly the brains man of the Shell who had caused Talbot's triumph.

(Next Wednesday, "THE HOUSE-MASTER'S BODYGUARD!"—a thrilling yarn of peril and adventure, starring Mr. Railton and Tom Merry & Co. Order your GEM early.)



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