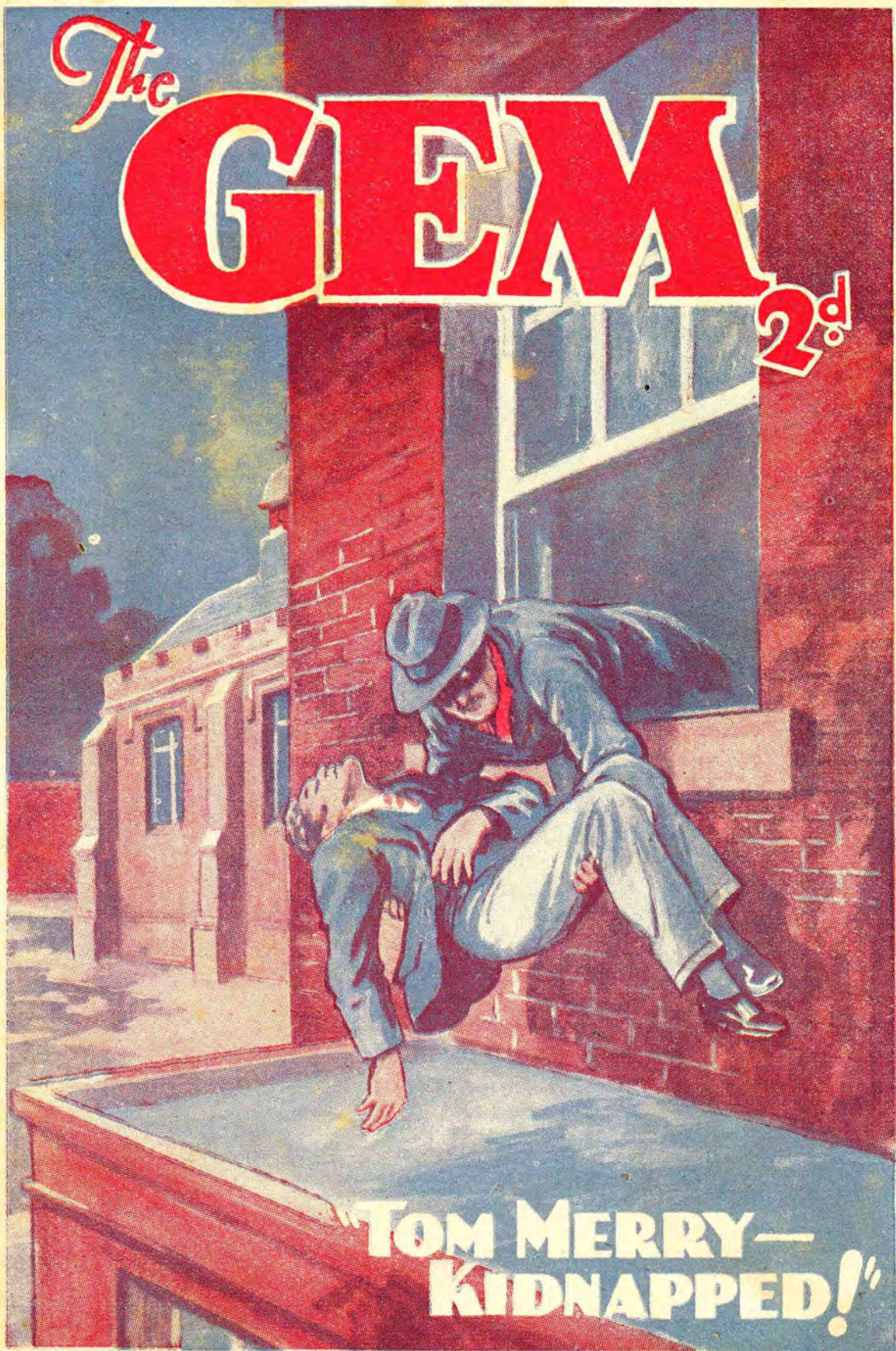


"BUNTER THE HYPNOTIST!" Full-of-Fun Yarn of the
GREYFRIARS FAT BOY INSIDE.

The GEM

2d



TOM MERRY—KIDNAPPED!



Tom Merry clenched his hands, and the masked man made a threatening motion with the cudgel. "You lift a finger," he said menacingly, "and I'll lay you on the floor so quick you won't know wot 'it you!"

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy in a Hurry!

TING-TING-TING-A-LING!

A bicycle bell rang furiously outside the gates of St. Jim's. Blake of the Fourth, who was lounging carelessly in the gateway with his chums, Herries and Digby, glanced out into the road.

A cyclist was tearing up to the gates of the school as fast as his machine could carry him. And the three Fourth Formers stared in blank astonishment at the rider. For the rider was their noble and elegant chum, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form, the swell of the school, whose manners as a rule had all the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

But Arthur Augustus' manners at the present moment showed not the shadowiest trace of Vere de Vere repose.

Bent over his handle-bars, his eyeglass jammed into his eye as if it was glued there, Arthur Augustus was scorching for all he was worth, racing as if he was on the race-track, or as if his life depended upon his speed.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "Gussy! Hallo, what's the matter?"

"Nobody's after him!" said Digby, looking down the road. "What the dickens—"

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Ting-a-ling-a-ling! went the bell, as Arthur Augustus turned his machine into the old gateway. Blake, Herries, and Dig had barely time to jump out of the way. Fellows were not allowed to ride their machines within gates, and they had naturally expected Arthur Augustus to jump off there. But he rode right in, and Herries, Blake, and Digby jumped in three directions just in time.

"You mad ass!" roared Blake, staggering against the gate. "Are you off your rocker? Stop!"

"Stop, you chump!" roared Herries.

"Stop, you ass!" bellowed Digby.

But Arthur Augustus did not stop. He continued his reckless career up the gravel drive.

At the steps of the School House, D'Arcy jumped off his machine. The bicycle went whirling away, and Arthur Augustus, without a glance at it, dashed up the steps.

Monty Lowther and Manners of the Shell were chatting there with Reginald Talbot. They saw D'Arcy coming, and wondered what the hurry was. But D'Arcy did not stop to explain. Breathlessly he rushed through them, and Monty Lowther sat down on the steps. Talbot reeled against the door, and Manners staggered into the hall and collapsed there.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself reeled from the shock, but only for a

moment. He recovered himself in an instant, and dashed on for the stairs. The Shell fellows yelled behind him.

"You silly ass!"

"I'll scalp you!"

"I'll pulverise you!"

D'Arcy did not heed. He rushed blindly up the stairs. After him rushed the three Shell fellows, on vengeance bent. There was a sudden roar on the staircase as D'Arcy rushed into Reilly of the Fourth, who was coming down.

"Oh!" roared Reilly. "Is it mad ye are?"

Reilly was spread over the stairs. Arthur Augustus gasped and caught at the banisters.

"Sowwy, deah boy! I'm in a hurywy."

"Sure, and I'll slaughter ye—"

"Sowwy!"

D'Arcy raced on up the stairs, and Reilly sprang up and raced after him. There were four fellows in pursuit now, all excited and all enraged, all breathing vengeance. But the swell of St. Jim's seemed quite unaware of it.

He went down the Shell passage like a racer.

"After him!" panted Lowther.

"Collar him!"

"Faith, and I'll scalp ye entirely."

The door of Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage was open. Bernard Glyn of the Shell was standing there, chatting with someone in the study,

SENSATIONAL STORY OF A DARING AND AMAZING IMPERSONATION AT ST. JIM'S, FEATURING TOM MERRY AND HIS DOUBLE.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

doubtless Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell himself.

Glyn glanced round at the sound of rapid footsteps, and looked in surprise at the swell of the Fourth as he raced up.

"Hallo, Gussy! What-yarook!"

Glyn went spinning as D'Arcy rushed into the study.

He brought up against the opposite wall, and gasped.

"Why, you ass—you fathead—"

Right into the study went the unheeding Arthur Augustus, at such a rate that when he arrived there he could not stop himself. Right into the study table he dashed, catching at it with both hands to save himself.

Tom Merry was seated on the other side of the table.

He was working at an imposition, or, rather, he had been working at it, but had paused for a chat with Glyn when he looked in.

He had a pen in his hand and a sheaf of impot paper and an inkpot before him.

He stared blankly at Arthur Augustus as the latter charged into the study. Then came the catastrophe. Arthur Augustus grasped the table as he charged into it. Study tables in junior studies were not built to resist an impact like that.

The table went over, as might have been expected in the circumstances.

The edge of the table caught Tom Merry across the chest, and he went flying backwards over his chair.

Chair and Tom Merry landed on the study floor, and after them shot the impot paper and the inkpot!

Splash!

"Grooooooh!" came in gurgling accents from Tom Merry. He was on his back, sprawling over the chair, and the inkpot had landed under his chin. The edge of the table rested on his legs, and the breathlessly excited face of Arthur Augustus looked down at him over the tilted table.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Grooo-oogh!"

"Gweat Scott! I'm sowwy!"

"You—you dangerous lunatic!"

"It's all wight, deah boy!"

"All right, is it?" gasped Tom Merry, struggling to get to his feet. "Wait a tick till I get up, you dangerous maniac, and I'll show you whether it's all right or not!"

"I wepeat that it's all wight! It's weally you there, Tom Mewwy, isn't it?" demanded Arthur Augustus, screwing in his eyeglass a little more tightly to take a closer survey of the captain of the Shell. "I weally hardly know you with all that ink ovah your face."

"I'll show you in a second whether it's me!" said Tom Merry sulphurously.

He leapt to his feet and rushed upon the swell of St Jim's. Arthur Augustus backed hastily away.

"I tell you it's all wight, deah boy!"

There was a tramp of feet in the passage. Four or five breathless juniors came rushing in.

"Here he is!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Collar him!"

"Squash him!"

"Jump on him intirely!"

"Weally, deah boys—weally—yawwooh—oh, gwooooh!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared

on the floor, under a swarm of avengers. For some moments nothing could be seen but arms and legs and excited faces, crimson with wrath and exertion. From under the excited heap came an anguished voice:

"Oh, cwumbs! Wow-ow! Welsease me! Oh, wescue!"

CHAPTER 2.

Important News!

"SQUASH him!"

"Scalp him!"

"Slaughter the spalpeen!"

"Bump the silly ass!"

Those exclamations were all uttered at once, and each of the speakers was trying to carry out his own suggestion. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in great peril of being squashed, scalped, bumped, and slaughtered at one fell swoop. His voice made itself heard in painful accents.

"Pway chuck it, you chaps! I've got somethin' important to say to Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry was mopping ink out of his neck now, and off his face. He had received all the contents of the inkpot; and the inkpot had been newly replenished just before Arthur Augustus entered the study. Tom Merry was not in a good temper.

"Keep him down, you fellows!" he said. "When you've done bumping

When Tom Merry is kidnapped from St. Jim's there is no hue and cry after the kidnappers. For Reggie Clavering, his double, secretly takes the place of the Shell captain—to bring all the disgrace he can on the name he falsely bears!

the silly josser I'll empty a bottle of ink over him! We've got a new bottle, and he's welcome to the lot!"

"Good egg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a wail of anguish from D'Arcy.

"Tom Mewwy, you wottah, I uttahly wefuse to have ink poured ovah me! I came here to do you a favah."

"Well, you've done it," said Tom, mopping away at the ink. "Now I'm going to do you one, in the same way. One good turn deserves another."

"You uttah ass!"

"Hallo, is Gussy here?" asked Jack Blake, arriving at the door with Herries and Digby. They had followed the cyclist across the quadrangle, and the uproar in Tom Merry's study brought them to the spot. "Glad to see you've collared him. He's gone dotty, you know. I've seen it coming on for some time."

"Weally, Blake—"

"And now it's broken out," said Blake. "He nearly ran us down on his bike at the gates—"

"And he's left his bike curled up in the quad," said Digby.

"We're thinking of getting a strait-waistcoat for him!" growled Herries.

"Blessed if he oughtn't to be taken about on a chain, like Towser!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Arthur Augustus was still feebly wriggling in the grasp of the juniors. They were holding him spreadeagled on the carpet, ready for the ink. Tom Merry had taken a large bottle of blue-black ink from the cupboard, and was uncorking it, and D'Arcy was watching him with distended eyes.

"Over his head and down his neck!" said Monty Lowther. "Give him the lot! It's worth a bob to do Gussy a real good turn like this!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You uttah wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Ow! Blake, deah boy, keep that howlin' idiot off, with his beastly ink!"

Jack Blake shook his head.

"It will teach you to moderate your transports, my dear chap," he said. "Look at what you've done to Tommy's chivvy. It wasn't much of a chivvy to begin with, but look at it now!"

"Ass!" said Tom Merry.

"You uttah asses are wastin' time!"

"I've nearly got the cork out!" said Tom Merry cheerily.

"I was not wewewwin' to that, Tom Mewwy. You are wastin' time; and vewy likely he will get away if you don't buck up."

That mysterious remark caused Tom Merry to pause in his labours with the corkscrew and stare blankly at the swell of St. Jim's. The other fellows stared, too. They had not the remotest idea of what Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was driving at.

"He!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Who?"

"The chap I came to tell you about!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Do you think I waced home on my bike for nothin', you ass?"

"I thought you were dotty," said Blake.

"Dotty or potty," said Tom Merry. "You don't mean to say that you had a reason for rushing into my study like a dangerous lunatic?"

D'Arcy glared at him.

"You uttah, cwass ass, do you think I should have huwwied like that without a weason?"

"Then you had a reason?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Of course I had, you chump!"

"Well, if it was a good reason I'll let you off the ink," said Tom Merry, putting down the bottle. "Now, out with it!"

"Pway allow me to wisc, you fellows!"

"Let him get on his hind legs," directed Tom Merry. "But mind he doesn't bolt. If he's really mad he may start running again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not mad, you fwightful ass!"

"It's up to you to prove that," said Tom Merry. "We're willing to give you a hearing. Now, what did you come bolting to my study like a runaway mule for?"

"I've seen him!"

"What—a mule?"

"You uttah ass—no; that fellow—your giddy double!" D'Arcy exclaimed excitedly. "And I washed back in a gweat huwwy to make sure that the chap there was your double, and not you, you ass! If I hadn't found you here, I should have thought it was you I had seen there, you see. So I scorched home at top speed, and washed here to find you. And here you are, deah boy!"

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D'Arcy gasped out the words.

It was not very lucid; but the juniors understood now, and there was a general exclamation

"You've seen him!"

"Tom Merry's double!"

"Clavering!"

"Where is he?"

Arthur Augustus dusted down his clothes, some of his noble serenity returning. He was the cynosure of all eyes now, and he realised his importance.

It was indeed important news that he brought—important to Tom Merry & Co., at all events, especially to Tom Merry himself.

For the previous week Tom Merry had been in very serious trouble owing to the presence of Master Reggie Clavering in the vicinity.

Reggie Clavering was Tom Merry's double; in appearance they were almost exactly the same. Seen together, probably differences would have been noted; but seen apart, they were infallibly mistaken for one another.

And Clavering having been guilty of a blackguardly act, with the deliberate intention of letting the blame fall upon Tom Merry, the Shell fellow had had great difficulty in proving his innocence.

Clavering had, indeed, overstepped the bounds of the law in his attempt to injure Tom Merry by means of that strange personal resemblance; and when the truth came out, the local police had looked for him, but he had vanished.

The juniors of St. Jim's had looked for him, too, with the intention of giving him such a ragging that he would never want to come near the school and trouble Tom Merry again. But they could not find him.

Clavering had gone—no one knew whither. And Tom Merry & Co. were pretty well satisfied that he would never venture back into the neighbourhood of St. Jim's.

Why the fellow wished to cause injury to Tom Merry was a mystery. Tom had only met him once, and did not even know him.

There was some reason, but the juniors could not guess what it was, though they puzzled their brains over it a good deal.

It had been agreed that Master Clavering was to be watched for, in case he reappeared in the neighbourhood, though the juniors did not suppose for a moment that he would. He had made his cowardly attempt to ruin Tom Merry; he had failed, and he had fled, and they did not expect to see anything more of him.

Hence the excitement with which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's news was received.

The juniors understood now why the swell of St. Jim's had come scudding back to the school at top speed and rushed into Tom Merry's study without stopping a second on the way. He wanted to assure himself that Tom Merry was there, and that it was really the double whom he had seen outside St. Jim's.

"So he has come back, has he?" said Tom Merry, a steely glitter coming into his blue eyes, and his hands clenching involuntarily.

He wanted very much to get to close quarters with Master Reggie Clavering. If he succeeded in getting his double within armslength, he intended to make him thoroughly sorry for impersonating him.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Where did you see him?" demanded Monty Lowther.

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"I was out for a spin on my bike, you know," Arthur Augustus explained. "I came home by way of the towing-path. I passed the Feathahs Inn on my way back—you wemembah, the place where we had a wow with Cutts once—"

"Yes, yes! Go on!"

"As I was passing the Feathahs on my bike I saw a man go in—a chap with a small moustache and an eyeglass. He struck me at once."

"Struck you!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What on earth did he strike you for?"

"I do not mean that he struck me, you ass; I mean that he struck me!" explained Arthur Augustus. "I mean, I was struck by seein' him there. You see, he was the same chap I saw with that wottah Clavewin' once in Wylcombe Lane."

"Oh, I see! Buck up!"

"I am buckin' up. I wemembah that Clavewin' had called him Gerald Gowin'."

"Gerald Goring!" said Tom. "Never heard the name."

"Well, it struck me at once that, if that chap was there, pewwaps Clavewin' was there, and I looked into the garden, and, lo and behold," said Arthur Augustus impressively, "there was your double, Tom Mewwy, sittin' undah a twee, dwinkin' somethin' and smokin'!"

"The rotter!"

"Did they see you?" asked Lowther. "Wathah not! You know, there are twees along the bottom of the garden, and I looked through the twees. I thought it was Clavewin', but it was so like Tom Mewwy that—that—"

D'Arcy paused and hesitated. "That you thought it might be me—smoking?" said Tom grimly.

D'Arcy coloured.

"Well, no, deah boy! I knew you wouldn't do a thing like that; only—only he is so vewy remarkably like you, you know, that—that—well, I wished home at once, to make sure that you were here, that's all!" D'Arcy confessed. "I thought that if I found you here, that would settle it, and I'd take you fellows back with me at once to see Clavewin' and wag him. Of course, I knew it was Clavewin', as he was smokin', but—but the wesemblance is vewy remarkable."

Tom Merry nodded shortly. He could see that there had been a doubt in D'Arcy's mind. It had crept in, in spite of D'Arcy himself.

"Well, all right," he said. "So the rotter has come back—and he's at the Feathahs, is he? I suppose he thinks he's safe there—it's a good distance from the school, and a lonely place."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry looked round at the crowd of juniors in the study, his eyes gleaming.

"You see how it is, you fellows. That scoundrel has come back—he's just waited a week or so for the affair to blow over, and now he's come back—to play his rotten tricks again. He can't have come for anything else. He's got something up against me—I don't know why. Well, you know what we agreed if he came back?"

"What—ho?"

"You'll back me up?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then get out the bikes, and we'll go over and see Clavering," said Tom grimly. "You chaps can see fair play while I handle him. I'll give him the licking of his life—or else he shall give it to me! And if I can't lick him, one of you can do it. He's got to be thoroughly licked!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll go and wash this ink off, and

join you at the gates," said Tom hurriedly. "Get the bikes there. If we're late in for locking-up it can't be helped. We can't let slip a chance like this for dealing with that rotter."

"Right—ho!"

The crowd of juniors hurried out. As they ran the bicycles down to the school gates they encountered Figgins & Co. of the New House. And as soon as Figgins & Co. knew what was on they rushed for their machines at once. The New House fellows were the deadly rivals of Tom Merry & Co. of the School House; but in this matter they were backing up Tom Merry most loyally. Figgins especially was very anxious to interview Master Reggie Clavering, Master Reggie having once been guilty of rudeness towards Cousin Ethel, a fact that Figgins of the Fourth could never possibly forget.

Ten minutes later a crowd of cyclists were scorching along the towing-path in the sunset, heading for the riverside inn at top speed, Tom Merry in the lead, riding hard, with a gleam in his eyes that boded ill for his double when he met him.

CHAPTER 3.

A Precious Pair!

REGGIE CLAVERING struck a match and lighted a cigarette.

The boy who so strangely resembled Tom Merry was sitting at one of the little tables in the garden of the Feathahs Inn—an old garden thick with trees, sloping down to the towing-path and the shining river.

On the opposite side of the table sat the man with the black moustache and the eyeglass. There was no one else in the garden. On the table stood a bottle of whisky and a soda siphon and glasses. Master Reggie Clavering was evidently precocious in his tastes, for he was partaking of that form of liquid refreshment as well as his older companion.

Gerald Goring was watching him curiously.

"Well," said Clavering, as he blew out a little cloud of smoke—"well, I'm here, Goring. And the sooner you tell me what you want, and let me get away again, the better I shall like it. After what happened last week I don't care about sticking in this neighbourhood. It's not safe. Why couldn't you meet me somewhere else?"

Goring shook his head.

"You're wanted here," he said.

Clavering gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"Look here," he said, taking the cigarette from his mouth, "if it's that game over again I'm not having any. You may as well understand that first as last. It was a rotten failure. Tom Merry proved somehow that it wasn't he who went to the Grammar School and bashed Gordon Gay. It ought to have worked—all right, for all the Grammar School chaps took me for Tom Merry. But he wriggled out of it somehow. And they set the local bobbies, too, looking for the fellow who had impersonated Tom Merry. Why, I might have been arrested!"

"You cleared off just in time," said Goring, with a nod.

"Well, I'm fed up!" growled Reggie. "I'm not going to risk being sent to a reformatory to please you. I think they've let the matter drop—they don't want a scandal. But there's no earthly chance of playing the same game again. If anything happened like that again everybody would know perfectly well

that it wasn't Tom Merry—that it was his double. It would simply mean that the police would look for me again—and they could find me if they tried. I'm not going to get into trouble like that for nothing. It's not good enough. I tell you plainly that if you want me to impersonate Tom Merry again I'm not doing it! That's flat!"

And the precocious youth helped himself to whisky and soda.

"Don't take too much of that stuff," said Goring, with a curl of the lip. "You're not old enough to stand it. And I want you to keep your head clear."

"Rats!" said Reggie.

"I'm not suggesting trying the same game over again," went on Goring, after a glance round to make sure that the garden was deserted. "I know as well as you do that the game is up in that direction. It ought to have succeeded."

"But it didn't!" snapped Clavering.

"No, it didn't; so that idea will have to be dropped. But I've thought out a better idea—a plan that can't fail!" Goring's voice sank still lower. "I've told you what's at stake, Reggie. If Tom Merry is disgraced and expelled from St. Jim's it's worth fifty thousand pounds to me. And you get your whack out of that!"

Clavering's eyes glistened.

"That sounds all right," he said; "but I don't see how it can be worth anything to you. Where is the money, anyway?"

"That's my secret."

"Is it coming from some enemy of the fellow?"

Goring chuckled.

"No; from a friend of his."

Clavering stared.

"You're getting that enormous sum of money from a friend of Tom Merry's, on condition that he is disgraced and sacked from the school?"

"Exactly."

"Well, that's all rot, and you know it!"

"You would understand if you knew the circus."

"Tell me, then."

Gerald Goring shook his head.

"Least said, soonest mended," he said.

"Excuse me, Reggie, but it's possible for a chap to know too much. Besides, that's neither here nor there. It's going to be made worth your while, and that's enough for you to know."

Clavering grunted discontentedly.

"You've done what I asked you, Reggie—about getting leave from home?"

"Yes!" snapped Clavering. "I've told my uncle I'm going to stay with some friends in Sussex for a week. He doesn't care what I do—not a rap! As a matter of fact, he's glad to be rid of me for a week. He doesn't like me."

"That's not surprising!" chuckled Goring.

"Oh, stow all that!" growled the promising youth. "I've got a week to do as I like in, and that's all right. But mind, nothing like that last scheme of yours. I'm not going to take the risk. Besides, I should be spotted at once."

"I tell you I've chucked that. What I want you to do is quite safe," said Goring impatiently.

"Well, if it isn't, I shan't have anything to do with it."

"Suppose," went on Goring, sinking his voice to a whisper—"suppose it could be contrived for you to change places with Tom Merry—at his school!"

Clavering started.

"Change places with him!"

"Yes. Suppose you could get his

clothes and things, and put them on, and walk into St. Jim's as Tom Merry."

"Why, you—you ass!" gasped Clavering. "I'd meet the chap face to face!"

"You wouldn't!"

"Why not?"

"Because he would be somewhere else—being taken good care of," said Goring significantly.

"Oh!"

"Take it that Tom Merry is put somewhere where he can't get away. That's my part of the business," went on Goring, in the same low, cautious tones. "You walk into St. Jim's in his clothes—as Tom Merry!"

"My hat!"

"You've been at a Public school—you know the ropes. You'd drop into his

he might say. He would be found reeling about the streets under the influence of liquor, and taken up by the police," said Goring coolly. "I should arrange that."

"Great Scott!" Clavering shrank back a little involuntarily. The cool, unscrupulous wickedness of the scoundrel sitting opposite him seemed to scare him, rascal as he was.

Goring laughed lightly.

"What do you think of the idea, Reggie?"

"I'd be glad to do the beast a bad turn," said Clavering sulkily. "I hate him. He licked me once, and he's the kind of fellow I hate, anyway. But—but that—"

"Think of what's at stake!"



Breathless with excitement, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed through Lowther, Manners, and Talbot, knocking them right and left. "You silly ass!" "I'll scalp you!" "I'll pulverise you!" roared the Shell juniors. D'Arcy did not heed—he dashed on.

place quite easily. You know his friends by sight. There would be no difficulty about that. Nobody could have the slightest suspicion."

"My hat!" repeated Clavering breathlessly.

"And once you are there, you could easily act in some way to get the sack."

"Get the sack!"

"Yes, as Tom Merry."

"Oh!"

"You can do anything you like, so long as it's bad enough to be sacked for. You're sacked from the school as Tom Merry. You leave in disgrace, and a few days later I release the real Tom Merry—"

"Then he'd tell his story about having been kidnapped."

"Who'd believe him?"

"H'm! I suppose nobody would," said Clavering thoughtfully. "It would sound like an awfully clumsy lie, of course."

"Exactly; and the circumstances would be arranged to discredit anything

"Well, it's good enough," said Clavering. "But you've got to get Tom Merry in your hands first. That won't be easy."

"Leave that to me. Until that's done, I shan't ask you to take a hand," said Goring quietly. "All you've got to do is to lie low here till you're wanted. But I think it won't be many hours."

Reggie helped himself to whisky and soda again.

"My hat!" he said, his eyes glistening. "I should have a high old time playing that part at St. Jim's. I'd make some of them sit up, hang them! I hate the lot of them!"

"Quite so. You—"

Gerald Goring paused.

There was a sound of a crowd of bicycles on the towing-path. They stopped at the gate of the inn garden. Goring started to his feet.

"Hang it! There they are—Tom Merry himself!"

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There was no time for Reggie Clavering to escape. The garden gate was thrown open, and the crowd of St. Jim's juniors rushed in, Tom Merry at their head.

CHAPTER 4.

Ragging a Rascal!

TOM MERRY halted under the trees, his eyes gleaming. He took no notice of Gerald Goring. His eyes were upon the boy seated at the table—the boy who had resembled him so closely that he might have been his twin brother.

Clavering was cowering back. Round the table crowded the St. Jim's juniors—a dozen of them, and all in deadly earnest. There was no escape for Tom Merry's double.

"Here he is, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jubilantly.

"Fairly caught!" chuckled Blake.

"Nailed, by Jove!" said Figgins.

"Hardly expected to see us here, what?" said Kerr, with a grin. "How do you do, Master Reggie Clavering?"

Clavering did not speak. His eyes wandered round the circle of threatening faces with a hunted look. Goring was twisting his moustache with suppressed rage. His hand had been closed for a moment upon his heavy malacca cane, but he had released it again at once. It was clearly no case for violence. The St. Jim's fellows were too many for him, and their looks showed that they would not have stood on ceremony if he had chipped in.

"So I've found you, Clavering!" said Tom Merry, in a low and steady voice.

"Were you looking for me?"

"Yes."

"Well, you've found me; and now you've found me, what do you want?"

"First of all, I want you to explain the reason why you impersonated me and tried to get me into trouble," said Tom quietly.

Clavering laughed nervously.

"I didn't," he said. "It—it was only a lark. Gordon Gay ragged me, and—I went for him. I didn't know they would take me for you."

"That's a lie!" said Tom directly. "You gave your name as Tom Merry when you went to the Grammar School."

"I—I—I—"

"For some reason I don't understand, you passed yourself off as me, with the intention of getting me disgraced."

"I—I—I—"

"Will you explain why you did it?"

"It—it was only a lark."

"Was it? Well, it was the kind of lark I don't like," said Tom Merry grimly. "Not that I believe you, you cur! I know you must have had some reason, though I can't guess what it was. But I don't expect to get the truth out of you. You've done me harm, when I've never done anything to offend you, except that I licked you for being impertinent to Ethel Cleveland a long time ago. But that wouldn't be reason enough to make you take all this trouble to injure me."

"It was only a lark," said Clavering sullenly.

"Well, now you are going to pay for your lark," said Tom Merry. "These fellows have only come to see fair play. You're going to get a fair show, which is more than you wanted to give me. Get up!"

"What do you want?"

"I'm going to lick you!"

Clavering wetted his dry lips with his tongue. It was only too clear that he did not want to stand up and face the

junior he had injured. He was not the stuff of which heroes are made.

"I—I'm not going to fight you!" he stammered. "You can clear off. I don't want anything to do with you!"

Tom Merry laughed grimly.

"It isn't a case of what you want, but of what you're going to get," he said. "Get up from that table!"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll make you!"

Tom Merry reached over the table, grasped Clavering by the collar, and wrenched him from the chair. Clavering stood upon his feet now, quivering with rage.

"Now," said Tom, "I'm ready!"

Gerald Goring lighted a cigarette. It was impossible for him to interfere, and he knew it.

Tom Merry stripped off his jacket and pushed back his cuffs.

"Will you put up your hands?" he demanded.

"No, I won't," said Clavering. "I—I'm not in a condition to fight. I've been drinking."

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Tom Merry's lips curled with contempt.

"All the more reason why you should be licked!" he said.

Clavering put his hands into his pockets.

"I won't fight you," he said; "you can do as you like!"

Angry as he was, Tom Merry could not lick a fellow who refused to defend himself, but to allow the young rascal to escape the penalty of his rascality—that was not to be thought of.

"You'll either fight, or take a ragging," he said, "and you'll find the ragging worse than the licking, I promise you that!"

"Yaas, wathah, you wottah!"

"Oh, collar him!" said Blake impatiently. "He hasn't the pluck of a white rabbit, and he's not worth licking. Collar him!"

"Blessed if I ever saw such a rotten funk!" growled Figgins. "If he won't stand up to you, Tommy, let him pick one of us. I'd be happy to oblige!"

"Same here!" said Talbot heartily. "Would you prefer me, you cad?"

"Or me?" chimed in Monty Lowther.

"Or me?" said Manners.

"Let me alone!" growled Clavering savagely. "I tell you I'm not in a state to fight anybody. Another time—"

"Another time won't come, if you can

help it!" said Tom Merry. "What have you come back here for at all? It's to play some more of your rotten tricks. I know that. Well, you're going to be made to understand that it doesn't pay. You're going to be handled in such a way that you'll be glad to give St. Jim's a wide berth in the future. Now, for the last time, will you put up your hands?"

"No."

"Then collar the cad!"

And the crowd of juniors closed in on Tom Merry's double.

"Help!" yelled Reggie. "Goring, help me!"

"Your friend had better mind his own business!" said Blake, as he ground his knuckles into Clavering's collar. "We shouldn't mind ragging him, too, if it came to that!"

"Yaas, wathah! A man who would allow a kid to drink whisky in his presence ought to be jolly well wagged!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

Goring looked very uneasy.

"If you don't help me, Goring, I'll give you away!" yelled Reggie.

"Oho! So that fellow's in the game, too, is he?" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a quick look at Goring.

The latter sprang to his feet. He knew that Reggie Clavering meant what he said.

"Let the kid alone!" he exclaimed, grasping his heavy cane. "I won't see him ill-used! Release him at once!"

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Stand back!"

"You'll get hurt if you chip in here!"

Reggie Clavering was struggling savagely in the grasp of the juniors, kicking and tearing, and scratching like a cat. He yelled again to Goring to help, and repeated his threat; and Gerald Goring ran to his aid, brandishing the heavy cane. But the St. Jim's juniors did not care for the cane. Half a dozen of them fastened upon Goring, and he was swung off his feet and plunged into the grass.

"Let me go, you young villains!" roared Goring.

"Rats!"

"Sit on him, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn grinned and plumped down his heavy weight on Goring's chest. The man with the black moustache gasped and collapsed. Kerr stood on his legs, and Figgins took a firm grasp upon his hair to make sure of him. Goring struggled in vain under the New House juniors. Meanwhile, the School House fellows attended to Reggie Clavering.

Tom Merry had said that the ragging would be worse than the licking—and it was!

For the next few minutes the young rascal had the impression that he was in the middle of an earthquake and a cyclone combined.

He was bumped again and again. The remains of the whisky was poured over him, and then Blake let fly with the soda siphon, drenching him from head to foot; his collar was torn out, his jacket ripped up the back.

"Duck him!" shouted Lowther.

And Clavering, struggling wildly but in vain, was rushed headlong down to the towing-path, in the midst of the excited juniors.

"Let me go! I—I— Help!"

Splash!

The water was shallow at the river's edge, but it was deep enough for Tom Merry's double. He went right under, and came up streaming with water and mud.

"Groo-oogh, groogh!" he gurgled.

He scrambled out of the water, only to fall again into the hands of the avengers. Splash! went the unhappy impersonator of Tom Merry into the thick, soft mud at the river's edge. It covered him like a blanket.

"Groogh!"

He crawled out of the mud, smothered from head to foot and barely recognisable. There was a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I'm afraid the wottah's clobber is quite ruined."

"Give him another!"

Splash! went Clavering into the soft mud again.

This time he did not crawl out: he sat up in the mud, gasping and spluttering. It covered him to the armpits as he sat there.

"Grooooooggh!"

"I think that's enough," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Have you had enough, Clavering?"

"Groogh!"

"Now will you promise to clear off and not come back?"

"Groogh!"

"You won't be allowed to get out till you've promised," said Tom Merry coolly. "You can stay there an hour if you like."

"Groogh! I—I promise!" stuttered Clavering. "I—I'll go—I—I'll stay away! I—I'll do anything you like! Groogh!"

"Good! We'll drop in to-morrow to see if you've gone," said Tom Merry. "If you're still here, you'll have the same over again! Understand?"

"Ow! Groogh!"

"Come on, you chaps! I think that's settled him!"

And the St. Jim's juniors, laughing loudly, remounted their machines and rode away down the towing-path. Their laughter died away in the distance as Reggie Clavering crawled out of the mud. It was sticking to him in chunks, and he squelched out mud and water as he limped feebly back into the garden. Gerald Goring was there, ruffed and rumpled and white with fury.

They looked at one another.

"Well!" said Goring, gritting his teeth.

Clavering panted.

"I—I'm ready for anything now," he muttered in a choking voice—"anything you like, so long as I can get even with them!"

"To-night!" said Goring.

"The sooner the better!"

And Clavering crawled limply into the inn.

CHAPTER 5.

In the Dark Hours!

TOM MERRY & CO. rode back to St. Jim's in a cheerful mood.

They were late for locking-up, and the whole party were rewarded with fifty lines apiece, but they did not mind. They had, as they believed, succeeded in "squelching" Tom Merry's double, and they were satisfied with their success. After that terrific ragging they were pretty certain that Reggie Clavering would not venture to remain in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's. Whatever rascally scheme he might have had in coming back, it was nipped in the bud now.

"We'll take a spin down to the Feathers to-morrow and make sure he's gone," Monty Lowther remarked when the Terrible Three went to their study to do their lines and their prep. "But I think he'll have cleared off."



"Oh, he'll be gone!" said Manners. "It isn't as if he were a chap with any pluck to speak of. I fancy he's scared off for good. Dash it all, a ragging like that might have scared off even a fellow who had some courage—and he hasn't any!"

So it was in a mood of satisfaction that the chums of the Shell sat down to do their preparation.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in high feather that evening. It was the swell of St. Jim's who had spotted Clavering and brought vengeance down upon the scheming rascal, and D'Arcy was very well satisfied with himself in consequence. Indeed, Arthur Augustus was so satisfied with himself that Blake offered to take his measure for a new hat of a larger size.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus serenely. "It's jolly lucky for some of you chaps that you've got me here to look after you, that's all. That wottah would have been playin' his wotten twicks again if I hadn't spotted him. Now we're wids of him for good and all, you can wely on that!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 agreed with that—though, as a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus' conviction was very far from the truth.

Tom Merry was very thoughtful that evening and there was a cloud of deep thought upon his brow when the Shell went up to the dormitory. He was as satisfied as his chums that Reggie Clavering was done with, but he was puzzled. Why had Clavering played such a trick upon him as he had done, with the evident intention of getting him into disgrace in the school?

Tom Merry had been within an ace of getting expelled after Clavering had impersonated him at the Grammar School. Why had he done it? And that black-moustached fellow with the eyeglass, whom Clavering had addressed as Goring—what had he to do with it? Clavering's words in the inn garden had proved that Goring was in the plot. But why? Tom Merry did not remember ever to have seen that man before. He did not know the man or his name.

Why should an utter stranger seek to mix himself in the Shell fellow's affairs in this way, and plot with his double to cause him to be disgraced?

It was a hopeless puzzle.

That he had an enemy—a cunning and unscrupulous enemy—in the man with the black moustache, Tom Merry could not help realising. He realised now, too, that Clavering, rascal as he was, had undoubtedly been under the influence of the older rascal in the trick he had played. Tom Merry's double was merely a tool in the hands of the scoundrel, whose object evidently had been the ruin of Tom Merry. But why?

Tom Merry was utterly puzzled. He thought the matter over, but he could come to no solution. He wondered whether he would ever know. It was impossible to get the truth from either Clavering or Goring. Falsehoods he might get from them, but not the facts; he knew that. And there was no other source of information. It seemed as if it would remain a mystery.

And would there be any other scheme to fear from his enemy? If Goring had plotted against him once, whatever his reason, might he not plot again? His reason, unknown as it was, doubtless still existed.

It was enough to make the captain of the Shell feel decidedly uncomfortable.

Into his happy, careless life of a schoolboy had come the shadow of plotting and crime, whence and why he did not know, and did not guess.

Manners and Lowther were equally exercised in their minds about it; but they had to admit that they could find no explanation.

"No good trying to think it out, Tommy," said Monty Lowther, as he observed the frown upon Tom's knitted brows. "It's a giddy mystery."

Tom Merry nodded.

"What I'm thinking is, that if that man wants to injure me, he may try again," he said. "And I don't know what form it may take next time."

"Why should he want to hurt you, Tom?"

"I can't guess."

"You're sure you don't know him?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, it's a mystery and no mistake," Monty Lowther commented. "It's as plain as your face that the fellow Goring is using Clavering for his own game—that's clear enough. But, after all, I think it's pretty safe now. The whole school knows that you've got a double, and that he's tried to disgrace you by passing himself off as you and doing rotten things. Whatever he does in the future, you'll be safe from him now that everybody knows the facts."

"Yes, that's so."

"Besides, I'm sure he's scared off. He won't dare to stay about here after the way we've handled him."

"But Goring—"

"I don't see what he can do," said Lowther thoughtfully. "He was able to use your double to harm you, but that's knocked on the head for good now. Anything else he might try we should be able to deal with."

"We'll keep an eye open for him, anyway," said Manners.

Kildare came into the dormitory to see lights out, and the chums of the Shell turned in.

After lights out there was the usual buzz of talk in the dormitory. The Shell fellows were all interested, naturally, in Tom Merry's double, and the juniors who had taken part in the ragging had to tell the story over again several times.

The talk ran chiefly on the affair of Reggie Clavering, but Tom Merry did not join in it. He was thinking. But

his thoughts came to nothing. He had to acknowledge that he could not penetrate the veil of mystery that surrounded Gerald Goring and his scheme.

The voices died away in the Shell dormitory.

Tom Merry, troubled by his thoughts, remained awake after the other fellows had gone to sleep, but gradually he dozed off. The puzzling thoughts in his mind became vaguer till they were merged in dreams.

When eleven o'clock sounded from the old clock tower of St. Jim's, Tom Merry was as sound asleep as the rest of the juniors.

Silence and slumber reigned in the old School House.

In an hour more the last of the lights were out, the last door had closed, and the School House was plunged into sleep.

One!

The hour came dully through the night from the clock tower, but there was no wakeful ear in the vast pile of St. Jim's to hear it.

Boom, boom!

Two o'clock!

Dead silence in the old School House when the strokes had died away.

Into the high windows of the Shell dormitory the starlight streamed faintly, showing up dimly the beds and the sleeping juniors.

It fell upon the handsome face of Tom Merry as he lay in sound slumber.

Faintly, imperceptibly, the door of the dormitory opened.

A man's face looked in in the dimness.

It was a face half-hidden by a black mask. In daylight the clear-cut features of Gerald Goring might have been recognised. But in the dimness in the sleeping School House there was no chance of recognition if the intruder had been seen.

The door was some inches open. It

remained so for a full five minutes, while the midnight intruder listened to the steady breathing of the Shell fellows.

Satisfied that all were sleeping at last, he pushed the door farther open, and stepped into the dormitory, silent in his rubber shoes. The door was gently closed.

For several minutes more the intruder stood motionless in the shadow, his heart beating hard, his eyes glistening.

The juniors slept on.

Then the man crept nearer to the beds. He scanned face after face in the dim light of the stars.

He paused at last—by Tom Merry's bed.

Closer and closer, like a cat stealing upon its prey, till he was close beside the sleeping, unconscious junior.

From his pocket he drew silently a folded cloth, from which a faint, sickly odour came.

He approached the cloth to the face of the sleeping junior, and Tom Merry's features twitched for a moment in sleep.

He was breathing the odour of chloroform, and moment by moment his slumber became deeper, heavier. His breathing grew harder.

Goring's eyes glittered over him. There was no chance now of the hapless junior awakening. The intruder had run risks, but the very daring of his venture had ensured its success.

The chloroformed cloth was moved closer to the junior's face, and pressed over it at last. Tom Merry hardly stirred. For several minutes the cloth remained there, in the firm hands of the plotter. When he withdrew it, Tom Merry was no longer sleeping—he was plunged into insensibility.

"Safe—for an hour at least!"

Goring did not utter the words, but

he grinned. His victim was helplessly in his hands now. Unless some of the juniors awoke—

But the rascal made no sound. At that hour of the night slumber was heavy. Silently, carefully, Goring lifted the drugged junior from the bed. He laid him upon the floor without a sound, and then, with deft fingers, arranged the bolster and pillow in the bed to give the appearance of a sleeper there. If anyone should awake and glance in that direction, there was nothing to excite suspicion.

Then he raised the insensible junior in his arms, and silently moved to the door. He moved without haste—with coolness and caution.

Five minutes elapsed, and then the dormitory door had closed silently behind the rascal, and he was bearing away the still form in pyjamas.

CHAPTER 6.

A Change of Identity!

"IS it all right?"

"It was a tremulous whisper.

"Hush!"

Reggie Clavering trembled. He was waiting there, in the darkness, in the upper box-room at the back of the School House at St. Jim's.

He had been waiting there for his confederate. It was by means of the box-room that the two rascals had entered the House. Outside, there was an outhouse. They had climbed upon it, and Goring had opened the box-room window. It was a simple catch, and easily opened by a thin blade inserted between the sashes. Clavering, trembling, had waited there while Goring was gone.

He had returned now—successful from his errand.

He came noiselessly into the box-room, and Clavering trembled still more as he saw the still form hanging upon the rascal's powerful shoulder.

Goring laid the insensible junior upon the floor, and closed the door of the box-room.

The House was still and silent. Evidently there had been no alarm.

Clavering's eyes almost started from his head as he gazed down at the motionless form upon the floor, dimly seen in the darkness.

He clutched Goring's arm.

"You have not—not—" He choked over the words.

"Fool!"

"But he—he looks—"

"I told you what I was going to do. It is chloroform."

Clavering gasped.

"He is not—not— He seems so still! And it is possible to overdo it!"

"Fool!" repeated Goring. "He is as well as you or I!"

Reggie Clavering drew a deep, quivering breath.

"And no one awoke?" he whispered.

"Why should they awake?" growled Goring. "I am not a bungler. I have done more difficult things than this."

"I—I suppose so," muttered Clavering, shrinking away from him. "Then the coast is clear?"

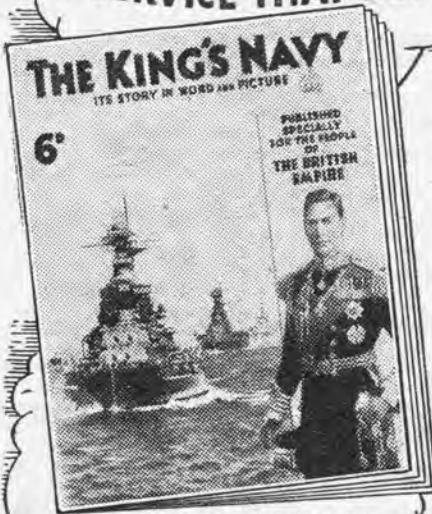
"Quite clear."

"And I—I—"

"Your place is ready for you. Strip off your clothes, and get into his pyjamas. I'll put your clothes on him. Quiet!"

Goring's low, unshaken voice seemed to calm the nerves of his less-courageous confederate. Clavering listened a moment; the House was

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quite still. He began to take his clothes off with quick, nervous fingers. In a few minutes the change had been effected. Tom Merry, insensible and inert, was put into Clavering's clothes, and Clavering stood shivering in the Shell fellow's pyjamas.

"It's cold!" he muttered.
Goring muttered an oath.
"You understand?" he whispered.
"You're to go to his dormitory—"

"Where is it?"
"Fool! Haven't I shown you the plan of the school, and explained it to you a dozen times?" Goring muttered savagely.

"But in the dark—"
"I will take you there," said Goring, between his teeth. "You'll go in quietly, and slip into Tom Merry's bed—the empty bed, you understand."

"Yes, yes!"
"That's all. Go to sleep there, and wake up in the morning as Tom Merry. That's all you've got to do!"

"And you—"
"I shall have Tom Merry in a safe place before then," muttered Goring, with a low chuckle. "He won't get away; you can rely on that!"

"It seems easy enough," said Clavering, with a deep breath.

"Quite easy. We've arranged about communication with one another afterward. You remember the instructions?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Good enough. Now come on!"

"But—but he—"

"He's safe enough."

"He can't—can't wake?" muttered Clavering, with a scared look at the insensible form on the floor.

"Not for an hour yet; and I shall have the chloroform ready for him when he does, in the car!"

"I'm ready!"

"Not a sound, now!"

"All right!"

Goring opened the door, and, with his hand on Clavering's arm, led him from the box-room.

Silently they reached the door of the Shell dormitory, and silently Gerald Goring opened it.

There was silence within, broken faintly by the deep breathing of the sleeping juniors.

Goring pushed Clavering into the dormitory.

He pressed his hand; it was not safe to speak. Clavering moved cautiously towards the beds.

He was trembling—with cold and with nervousness. But he braced himself as he realised that the danger was past.

Goring had withdrawn; the door had closed again. Even if any of the juniors should wake now, they would only see Tom Merry—as they supposed—out of bed.

But they did not awake.

Clavering found the bed. The bolster and pillow under the bedclothes looked like a sleeper, but there was no sound of breathing there.

Slowly and cautiously he pulled back the bedclothes, arranged the bolster and pillow, and slipped into bed.

The bed creaked a little under his weight. He caught his breath, and listened fearfully.

But there was only silence.

He rested his head upon the pillow, and drew the bedclothes over him. His fears were gone now. He knew that he could trust Gerald Goring for his part of the scheme. There was no danger in that quarter.

He was safe now. Nobody at St. Jim's could distinguish him from the junior he was impersonating; nobody

could dream of the trick that had been played in the still hours of the night—that Tom Merry had been stolen away, and his double had taken his place. Who could suspect that? He was secure, and his fears had vanished.

A sardonic smile was on his face now, as he lay in Tom Merry's place, and listened to the steady breathing of the Shell fellows. He was one of them now—he was Tom Merry of the Shell; and the cheat could not be discovered, so long as he played his cards carefully.

And with that sardonic grin still upon his face, Reggie Clavering fell asleep in Tom Merry's bed.

Meanwhile, Gerald Goring was losing no time. He had stolen back silently to the box-room, where his insensible victim still lay.

He closed the door and opened the window. He pressed the chloroformed cloth tightly over the unconscious junior's face once more, to make assurance doubly sure. Then he lifted him to the window, and carefully lowered him upon the leads of the out-house. The night was dim, and the

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LABOUR-SAVING!

deserted at that hour. There were no eyes to see the two rascals as they bore the insensible junior away. A hundred yards from the school, in a side lane, a small car had been backed, with lights out. The unconscious junior was lifted into the car, and Goring followed him in. His confederate took his place in the driver's seat.

A few minutes more, and the car was speeding along the shadowed road—speeding away from St. Jim's.

Tom Merry, unconscious of what was passing, was borne away—away from his comrades, away from the old school. In his bed, in the Shell dormitory in the School House, his double was already sleeping—as calmly as though no crime lay upon his conscience. When the rising-bell rang out in the morning, he would awaken—as Tom Merry!

CHAPTER 7.

In Another's Name!

CLANG, clang, clang!
Monty Lowther sat up in bed in the Shell dormitory in the School House and yawned.

The spring sunshine was glimmering in at the high windows. The iron tongue of the rising-bell was clanging unmusically, heard far and wide.

"Wake up, Tommy!" sang out Lowther, as he turned out of bed.

Tom Merry's bed was the last to keep its occupant that morning. Even Gore, generally supposed to be the laziest fellow in the Shell, was not the last up for once.

"Tommy, old son, you'll be late!" called out Manners.

No reply came from Tom Merry's bed. Lowther stepped to the bedside and shook the sleeper, and the latter's eyes opened drowsily.

"Time to get up!" said Lowther.

"Let me alone, confound you!" Lowther simply jumped.

As a rule, Tom Merry woke up fresh and good-tempered in the morning. Even if any "jape" overnight had disturbed his slumbers, and he did not wake up fresh, he could generally be relied upon for good temper.

But he didn't look good-tempered now; at all events, the occupant of Tom Merry's bed didn't. His face was heavy with sleep, and he was scowling. The sharp, irritable answer had been rapped out without a moment's thought. Lowther was so much astonished that he stared blankly at the junior.

His look recalled Tom Merry's double to his senses. He had forgotten, in the moment of waking, the part he was playing. He flushed red, and sat up.

"Steady on, Tommy!" said Lowther at last. "What's the matter with you?"

"This isn't the way to speak to a pal!"

"Oh, all right! Is it rising-bell?"

"Yes; it's stopped."

Clavering grunted wretchedly. He was not used to early rising. Since he had left his last school, months before, he had led a slacker's life—late hours at night, and late rising in the morning. To turn out at seven sharp was an infliction of discomfort he hardly knew how to endure. But he had to endure it, and he dragged his unwilling limbs from the bed.

"You're not looking very fit this morning, Tom," Lowther remarked, regarding him. "Not getting your cold back, are you?"

"M-my cold?"

"You had a rotten cold last week. Don't say you're catching it again."

"I'm not."

"Good! You look as sleepy as a boiled owl! Not been out on the tiles, I suppose?" Monty Lowther demanded humorously.

"No; I'm a bit drowsy, that's all."

"Cold water will cure that."

Clavering nodded, and turned to his washstand. He was accustomed to hot water for his bath in the morning, and bathing in cold water did not appeal to him. But he knew that he must fall in with the customs of St. Jim's if he were not to risk exciting suspicion. He sponged himself down, shivering in cold water, and dressed.

"Feel better now—what?" said Lowther.

"Yes."

"Come down, then. We'll have a run in the quad before brekker."

"I'm on!"

Clavering spoke naturally enough. The utter lack of suspicion on the part of the Shell fellows reassured him. There was not the faintest suspicion in the dormitory that the real Tom Merry was not there, and that the false one had taken his place.

Clavering began to enjoy the part he was playing. He was not blessed with much courage, but the part required little of that; there was no danger of discovery, unless he made some outrageous mistake. The cheat required cunning, resource, unscrupulous ingenuity, and those qualities he had in abundance.

The blacker part he had to play—that of disgracing Tom Merry while bearing Tom Merry's name—would come later.

For the present, his game was to take the place of the Shell captain without exciting suspicion, to accustom himself to the place, to learn all the details that it was necessary for him to know. And to that end he assumed, as well as he could, Tom Merry's kind manner and sunny smile.

"Excuse my being ratty when I woke up, Lowther," he said as they left the dormitory. "I was rather sleepy."

Monty Lowther laughed.

"That's all right, old son. I'm not touchy. Really, I was a bit surprised. You seemed to have picked up the other fellow's way of speaking."

"What other fellow?"

"That cad Clavering."

"Oh," murmured the junior, "I—I see! Well, I hope I shall never be like him, Lowther."

"Quite impossible, old son," said Lowther. "I suppose, as a matter of fact, you were thinking about him instead of sleeping last night, trying to work out the giddy mystery—what?"

"Ye-es."

"Thought it out yet?" asked Manners. "I've been thinking, too. And why that chap Goring and that cad Clavering should be plotting against you, Tommy, is more than I can guess. I give it up!"

"I—I was thinking about it," said Clavering, quick to take his cue. "I've come to the conclusion that it was only a lark, after all."

"What—what Clavering did?"

"Yes; he said it was only a lark, you know, and I really think it was. He can't have any motive for wanting to injure me."

"But Goring?"

"Goring! Oh, he's only a friend of Clavering's. He's got nothing to do with it."

"But you forget," said Lowther. "Clavering himself said something at the Feathers about giving Goring away. That shows the man is in it."

"Clavering was half squiffy, you

know. I don't suppose he quite knew what he was saying."

They were in the quadrangle now, and Monty Lowther and Manners both paused to look inquiringly at their chum. Tom Merry's change of views surprised them. Evidently he had been thinking the matter out to some purpose.

"Then you don't think there's a plot against you at all, Tom?" Lowther demanded.

"No. Why should there be?"

"Of course, we can't guess that. It's their secret."

"Well, I don't think there is. I'm sure we shan't hear anything more of Clavering," said the cheat coolly. "He's gone for good."

"Well, I hope you're right."

Blake & Co. were already in the quadrangle. Herries had brought his bulldog out for a run, as he generally did before brekker. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy saluted the Terrible Three in his usual graceful way.

"Wippin' mornin'!" he remarked.

"We shall get some cwicket to-day, deah boys. We're goin' to keep up pwactice for the Gwammah School."

"Yes, rather."

"I've been thinkin', Tom Mewwy," resumed the swell of St. Jim's, turning his eyeglass upon the Shell fellow. "In the cirs, as the Gwammawian match is the first important match of the season, powwaps you would be willin' to do the sensible thing."

"What is that?"

"I mean, I am willin' to captain St. Jim's juniars in your place, if you like, for this occasion only," D'Arcy explained. "You see, we want to start the season with a win, and I weally think that is the best way to make sure of it."

Clavering laughed, but his heart was beating faster. It was only through that careless remark of D'Arcy's that he discovered that Tom Merry was junior captain of St. Jim's. He realised that he had a great deal to learn if he was to play his part well.

"I'll think about it, D'Arcy," he said.

"Vewy well, deah boy."

Monty Lowther gave an expressive grunt.

"What rot, Tom! If you don't captain the team next Saturday you'll leave it to Kangaroo or Figgins or me, you ass!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, scat!" said Monty Lowther disrespectfully.

"Hallo!" said Herries, coming up with Towser. "What's the argument? Hallo, Towsy, what's the matter with you? Down, dog!"

The juniors all stared at Towser. Towser, the bulldog, was an animal of somewhat uncertain temper, but he had always liked Tom Merry. But now Towser was growling at the captain of the Shell. Herries made a clutch at his collar and held him back, looking very puzzled.

Clavering backed away, the colour fading from his cheeks. Towser did not look pleasant when he was angry, and his jaws were formidable.

"Keep that brute away!" snapped the captain of the Shell angrily.

"Yaas, hold the beast, Hewwies!" said Arthur Augustus reprovingly. "That wotten bulldog has no wespsect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs!"

"Down, dog! Down, Towsy!" commanded Herries, as the bulldog continued to growl, with his eyes fixed upon Tom Merry's double. "What on earth's the matter with the dog? What have you been doing to him, Tom Merry?"

"I? Nothing."

Herries shook his head.

"Must have been doing something," he declared positively. "Towser doesn't act like that for nothing. I always know when a fellow's a rotter, by Towser taking a dislike to him. He can't stand Levison or Mellish or Cutts. Now he can't stand you. Look at his face!"

"Do you call that a face?"

"You let Towser's face alone!" growled Herries. "He's a jolly good dog, Towser is. None of your namby-pamby lapdogs. What have you been doing to him?"

"Nothing, you duffer!"

"Not tormenting him in his kennel?"

"Tom Mewwy wouldn't do a wotten thing like that, Hewwies."

"Well, I suppose he wouldn't," admitted Herries. "All the same, Towser isn't growling at him for nothing. I want to know the reason."

"The reason is that he's a rotten, ill-conditioned mongrel that ought to be shot or drowned!" growled the Shell fellow.

Herries flushed with anger.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Why, you silly ass—"

"Rats!"

Clavering swung away, and Herries made a stride after him. But Jack Blake caught him by the arm and swung him back.

"Peace, my infant!" said Blake calmly. "Not worth scrapping about. Go and chain Towser up before he does some damage."

Herries snorted.

"Towser's got some reason," he said.

"He doesn't like Tom Merry now; Towser never makes any mistake. I shouldn't wonder if it turns out that we've been mistaken in Tom Merry."

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wats, deah boy!"

"Piffle!" said Digby.

Herries snorted again and led Towser away. He had great faith in Towser's judgment, and, indeed, if the juniors had known more of the facts, they would have realised the dog's instinct had not been at fault on that occasion.

CHAPTER 8.

Held a Prisoner!

TOM MERRY awoke.

There was a strange buzzing in his ears, a sensation of swimming in his head. His eyes, as they opened, were fixed upon the blank whiteness of a ceiling. His limbs felt strangely heavy.

Where was he? What had happened to him? Even in the first moments of wakefulness he was oppressed by a sense that some misfortune had come to pass.

He raised himself upon his elbow, and sank back again weakly.

"Lowther! Manners!" he muttered.

"What's this? Is it rising-bell yet?"

No sound came to his ears.

Yet it was broad daylight. The rising-bell should have been ringing. The fellows should have been up by this time.

He turned his head and looked about him. Then he remained still, struck with amazement mixed with a strange alarm.

He was not in the Shell dormitory!

That much was evident at a glance. He was in a room about ten feet by ten, with a single small window which was protected by iron bars.

There was a door opposite him, as he lay on the bed—closed.

Where was he?

He dragged himself from the bed, his



Clavering sat up in the mud, gasping and spluttering. "Grooooooh!" "Have you had enough?" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Grooogh!" "You'll have the same again if you don't clear off," went on Tom. "Grooogh! I'll stay away!" gasped Tom Merry's double. "I—I'll do anything you like!"

head aching, his legs trembling under him. Where was he? What had happened to him?

Gradually his head became clearer. He realised that there was a faint, sickly odour clinging to him—an odour that puzzled him at first, but which he knew that he had smelt before somewhere. It came to him with a sudden flash what it was—the odour of chloroform.

He had been drugged.

"Great Scott!" muttered the junior, with blanched lips. "What has happened? Who has done this? Where am I?"

He sat down on the edge of the bed to think. It was a new day. The sun was shining in at the window, but from the window he could see nothing, for the panes were of ground glass. But the heat of the sun told him that it was late in the morning, if not already the afternoon.

He had slept long in the grip of the drug.

It was some time before he could collect his scattered senses. He had gone to sleep the previous night in the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's; he remembered that clearly enough. He had awakened—here. During the night he must have been drugged in his sleep, and taken from his bed and brought to this place. That much was clear.

But why? And where was he?

The room was barely furnished—a bed, a chair, a table, a few articles of furniture. The bars across the

window told their own tale. The room was designed as a prison, and it must have been prepared carefully in advance. Houses are not built with barred windows. Whoever had brought him there had planned it carefully in advance, and this room had been made ready for his reception. He was a prisoner. In whose hands? That he could not guess.

But why should he be kidnapped? He remembered that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been kidnapped once by a gang of blackmailers for ransom. But, then, D'Arcy was the son of a rich nobleman. Tom Merry was not rich. His old governess and guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, was far from rich. Since Miss Fawcett's loss of fortune, indeed, Tom Merry's fees at school had been paid by his uncle in America. There was nothing in the shape of a ransom to be gained by kidnapping him. That idea was not to be entertained for a moment.

Then why?

He rose again and inspected the room. His coolness was returning now, and with it his anger was growing.

He tried the handle; it was secured on the outside. He shook the handle in vain. It did not even rattle the door.

Then he moved to the window. The bars inside were semicircular in shape, thick and strong, and so arranged that it was impossible to reach the glass through them. And the ground glass was thick and opaque. He could not see

through it, and he could not reach it to make any attempt to break it.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

He was a prisoner—a helpless captive. And there was no clue to his whereabouts that he could discover. He might be near St. Jim's, or a hundred miles from the old school. It was impossible to tell.

He had been laid upon the bed fully dressed. And as he glanced down at the clothes he wore, he realised that they were not his own.

With a hope of discovering some clue to their real owner, he plunged his hands into the pockets and searched them. But the pockets were empty. Save for a few loose matches and a broken cigarette, he found nothing.

Whose were the clothes?

It came into his mind like a flash.

The broken cigarette aided his thought. Whose clothes were likely to fit his limbs as if they had been expressly made for him—whose but those of his double, Reggie Clavering? His enemy and his double—Clavering? A suit of clothes taken by chance would not have fitted him so well. He was dressed in Clavering's clothes. And Reggie Clavering and Goring were the only enemies he had—the only persons who could have played this trick upon him.

He knew it!

He had fallen asleep the previous night wondering whether there was any fresh move of the cowardly game in

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store. And while he slept the move had been made. He had been chloroformed in his sleep and taken away. And as it was necessary to dress him, a suit of Clavering's clothes had been used.

Of so much he felt certain. But what was the object? The rascals could not intend him personal harm. If that had been intended, it would have been done already. He was safe, so far as life and limb were concerned. It was his liberty that had been taken away. But why?

He became conscious that he was hungry. It was probably noon by this time, or past noon.

He went to the door and hammered upon it with his fist. If he could make his gaolers come, he might learn more. At all events, they could not intend him to starve.

Thump, thump, thump!

The blows on the door rang through the silent building. He heard the sound of footsteps outside the door at last; the sound of a drawing bolt, and of a key being turned back in the lock. The door opened.

Tom Merry stood ready to make a spring for liberty, if a chance presented itself; but there was no chance. A thick-set man blocked up the doorway. He had a heavy cudgel in his hand. His face Tom Merry could not see. It was covered by a cloth drawn tightly over it, and fastened at the back of the head—the most complete kind of a mask that could have been devised. Holes were cut in the cloth for the eyes and nose and mouth. Through the eyeholes two sharp eyes glittered.

"So you're awake, young 'un?"

It was a hoarse and husky voice—a voice Tom Merry did not know.

"Who are you?" asked the junior.

"I ain't here to answer questions!"

"Where am I?"

"Find out!"

"Am I a prisoner here?"

The man chuckled behind the masking cloth.

"Looks like it, don't it?" he said jeeringly.

Tom Merry clenched his hands, and the masked man made a threatening motion with the cudgel.

"You lift a finger," he said in a tone of unmistakable menace, "and I'll lay you on the floor so quick you won't know wot 'it you!"

Tom Merry breathed hard. The man was a powerful fellow, and in conflict with him the junior would not have had much chance, and the weapon he carried made the attempt hopeless. But it was as much as the enraged junior could do to restrain himself.

"What have I done to you?" he said, between his teeth. "What have you brought me here for?"

"Don't you ask questions, and I won't tell you no lies, young 'un!"

"How long am I to be kept here?"

"You'll see!"

Tom Merry scanned him. The short, thick-set ruffian was certainly not Gerald Goring. But that he was an accomplice of Goring, Tom Merry felt certain. Only to Goring and Clavering was it possible that he owed his imprisonment.

"Look here," said Tom Merry slowly, "you'd better let me go. I shall be missed from St. Jim's this morning. I shall be searched for. I'm bound to be found sooner or later, and then you will get into trouble. Don't you understand that? Kidnapping is a serious thing."

The man chuckled.

"I reckon you won't be found," he remarked.

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"They will search for me until they find me."

"Will they?" The man chuckled again. "Well, they're welcome! Look 'ere, young 'un, you ain't going to be treated badly. You'll 'ave food and drink, and a comfortable room to sleep in. Wot more do you want? Twice a day I'm going to bring you your meals; you can't want more'n that. Only behave yourself! Try to cut up rusty, and I'll brain yer as soon as look at yer!"

"Twice a day!" repeated Tom Merry. "Then they intend to keep me here for some time?"

"That's as may be."

"Goring and Clavering have employed you to do this?"

The man started a little.

"Don't know them names," he said.

Tom Merry knew that he lied.

"Look here—" began the junior again.

"Nuff said! 'Ere's your feed!" The man stepped out of the room, and lifted in a well-laden tray from the landing outside. Tom Merry had a glimpse of a staircase through the open doorway. "Now you eat, and shut up! If you 'ammer on the door you'll miss your next meal—savvy? Behave yourself, and every day I'll come here at twelve, and again at six, with a good meal for you. Make any trouble, and I'll bring you to reason through your stummick—see? A day or two without food will make you see sense, I reckon! That's enough."

He stepped backwards from the room and pulled the door shut. The key clicked in the lock. Tom Merry heard the bolt shot on the outside.

He was alone again—a prisoner in solitude. But he was hungry, and he ate the ham, the hard-boiled eggs, and the rolls with which the tray was laden. And as he ate he evolved plans in his mind for gaining his liberty.

CHAPTER 9.

A Rift in the Lute!

MONTY LOWTHER'S brow was clouded.

He was sitting alone in the study in the Shell passage, gazing moodily at the fire. Lowther hardly knew why he was moody and depressed.

It was Thursday, two days since that visit to the Feathers, when Reggie Clavering and Gerald Goring had been so soundly ragged by Tom Merry & Co.

On Wednesday some of the juniors had cycled down to the Feathers to inquire after Reggie Clavering, and they had discovered that he was gone. They were satisfied that they were done with Tom Merry's double. The ragging had evidently scared him away from the neighbourhood.

It was not of Clavering that Lowther was thinking now as he sat alone in his study. He was thinking of Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three had always been inseparable. True, there had sometimes been little rows in the study—they were only human. But all differences had always been made up, and had left no impression behind.

But now—

Monty Lowther realised that there was a difference now. He had not spoken about it to Manners, but he knew that Manners realised it, too. There was an unspoken but well understood secret between them.

Something had changed,

Lowther hardly knew what it was; but Tom Merry was not the same as of old. It was only during the last two days that there had been a difference; but the eyes of friendship are quick to see.

Perhaps there had always been a side of Tom Merry's nature that his chums had not seen; it was possible. They were seeing it now. Perhaps he was not quite himself just now. Yet that would not fully account for the change.

There was a change—that was undoubted.

In the first place, his chum had developed a ratty temper. The kind, good-humour of old was gone. Short and sharp answers, unpleasant sneering remarks, sarcastic references to other fellows when their backs were turned—that was the order of the day now. The old peace and harmony no longer reigned in Tom Merry's study.

And the captain of the Shell had taken up with Crooke and Mellish—that was very curious, too. Crooke and Mellish were the black sheep of the School House, and Tom Merry had always despised them heartily. Now he was seeking their society—and Lowther knew that he smoked with them, and played cards with them. It was such a change that he could not have believed it unless he had seen it. But he had seen it.

And when he had ventured a remonstrance he had received a curt and sneering reply that came very near to breaking off his friendship with Tom Merry on the spot.

Lowther was thinking this over as he sat alone in the study.

There was a footstep at the door, and he looked up. It was Manners. Manners' face was cloudy, too.

"Hallo!" said Lowther listlessly.

"Tom not here?" asked Manners.

"No."

"Know where he is?"

Lowther smiled bitterly.

"In Mellish's study, I think."

Manners knitted his brows.

"He seems jolly fond of Crooke the last two days," he said. "He never could stand him, any more than we could."

"Lots of things have changed the last two days," said Lowther. "Manners, old man, what do you make of it? What's come over old Tommy?"

Manners shook his head.

"Blessed if I know!" he said. "I haven't spoken of it, Monty; but—but there's a change in him. He doesn't seem like the same chap."

"Just what I was thinking."

"In fact, it's occurred to me once or twice that he's getting fed-up with our friendship," said Manners abruptly. "I don't like to think so, but—"

"We've been chums a long time," said Lowther slowly. "We don't want to break it in a hurry now, Manners, old man. It's up to us to be patient a bit. I dare say he's been worried and bothered by that rotter Clavering's tricks."

"But Clavering is gone now; and he wasn't like this before."

"It's odd," said Lowther.

"Jolly odd!"

Monty Lowther rose to his feet and stretched his long limbs.

"Well, it's tea-time," he said. "Tom ought to come to tea. If he's with Mellish and Crooke we may as well go down the passage and call him. He's in Mellish's study."

Manners looked doubtful for a moment.

"All right," he said, after a pause.

The chums of the Shell went along the passage and stopped outside Mellish's study, and knocked. The door was locked.

"Who's there?" called out Crooke.

"Us—Manners and Lowther!"

"Oh, come in!"

Crooke unlocked the door, and the chums of the Shell stepped in. There was a haze of cigarette smoke in the study. Crooke and Mellish were there. Lowther and Manners looked at their chum—the fellow they believed to be Tom Merry. He was seated at the table, a cigarette between his lips, shuffling a pack of cards. He glanced at them carelessly.

"Hallo, you fellows! What's up?" he asked.

"A good deal would be up if Kildare or the Housemaster caught you like that, Tom," said Monty Lowther quietly.

The Shell fellow shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, they won't catch me," he said.

"Tom, chuck that up!" said Manners. "I don't understand what's come over you! Don't play the rotten blackguard like that. It's good enough for Crooke and Mellish, but it's not good enough for you!"

"Thanks!" said Crooke sarcastically.

Manners turned on him, with flashing eyes.

"Hold your tongue, you cad!" he broke out. "For two pins I'd take you by the neck and bang your caddish head against the wall! Shut up!"

Crooke's eyes gleamed, but he shut up. He knew that Manners was quite ready to be as good as his word.

"Tea's ready, Tom," said Lowther.

"I don't want tea now; I'm busy."

"Busy playing cards?" said Lowther, with a bitterness he could not repress. "Blessed if I ever thought that of you before, Tom!"

"I suppose I'm my own master?"

"Yes," said Lowther, with a gulp; "if you like to put it like that you certainly are!"

"Then let me alone!"

"But—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake give a fellow a rest! If you don't like it you can get out. Crooke didn't ask you in here."

"Hallo! What's this?" Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth came into the study and coughed as he caught the cigarette smoke. "Mellish, you blackguard, I'll punch your head if you turn my study into a blessed tap-room! Why—Tom Merry!" Lumley-Lumley broke off in amazement.

"You!"

"Well?"

Lumley-Lumley regarded him curiously.

"I don't want to preach to you, Tom Merry," he said. "I suppose you can do as you like, and if you want to play the giddy ox I guess it's none of my bizney. But you won't do it in my study! Get out!"

"Look here—" began Mellish.

"Shut up!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"Tom Merry, you can get out of this study, and if you don't go jolly quick I'll put you out on your neck!"

He jerked the pack of cards out of the Shell fellow's hand as he spoke, and tossed them into the fire. The junior rose, his eyes burning; but he did not resent Lumley-Lumley's words or his action.

"I'll go!" he said sullenly. "Go and eat coke! I'll see you later, Crooke. I'll come to tea now if you fellows have got it ready."

And he left the study with Manners and Lowther.



CHAPTER 10.

Left Alone!

THE three Shell fellows entered Tom Merry's study in silence. Manners and Lowther were gloomy and depressed, and their companion was frowning unamiably. In glum silence they prepared tea—in contrast to the usual cheery chat and good-fellowship.

What had come over Tom Merry?

That was the question Manners and Lowther asked one another miserably. The scene in Lumley-Lumley's study worried them. Tom Merry had been there smoking and playing cards—enough to get him expelled from the school if a master or prefect had seen him. Lumley-Lumley had been fully within his rights in ordering him out of the study; Manners or Lowther would have done the same in his place. And Tom Merry had gone quietly, under the threat of being pitched out "on his neck" if he did not go.

Of course, he had no right to act in that way in Lumley-Lumley's quarters. But to allow himself to be ordered about by a Fourth Former, to take threats quietly—What had come over him? If he felt ashamed of what he had been doing that would have been different. But he was not ashamed. He had yielded to Lumley-Lumley's threat. Why? Not because he was ashamed, not because Lumley-Lumley was in the right. Because he was afraid to resent the Fourth Former's conduct.

It could only be that; and yet Manners and Lowther knew from old experience that Tom Merry was as brave as a lion—that he hardly knew the meaning of fear.

Had they, after all, been deceived in their chum? Was he the blackguard he now seemed to be? Had he been blinding them for a long time, and now thrown off all disguise because it was growing too irksome to him?

And had his rotten habits sapped away his nerve and his courage and left him what he now appeared—a wretched funk?

With those thoughts in their minds, Manners and Lowther were not likely to be cheerful. They did not speak,

and they did not look at their chum as they prepared tea. The three Shell fellows sat down to the meal in glum silence.

Lowther made an effort to break it at last.

"Plenty of time for some cricket practice after tea," he remarked.

"Yes, we'd better knock the ball about a bit," said Manners. "You haven't been doing much practice the last two days, Tom. There's the Grammar School match on Saturday."

"I'm not going to play."

Manners and Lowther stared at him. "You're not going to play!" repeated Lowther.

"No!"

"In the first important match of the season!" said Manners.

The captain of the Shell shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I'm fed-up with cricket," he said.

"You haven't had much yet to get fed-up with," said Lowther. "You're captain of the junior eleven, Tom, and captain of the Shell; the fellows will expect you to play."

"Then they'll be disappointed."

"But why?"

"I'm fed-up with it. I'm going out with Crooke, too, on Saturday afternoon," said the junior defiantly.

Lowther's brow became very black.

"You're getting very chummy with Crooke lately," he said.

"Well, why shouldn't I if I choose? Crooke's all right, and I get on with him!"

"You used not to."

"Well, I do now, and that's enough. He's good enough for me. I like him better than those rotters in Study No. 6, anyway."

"Those what?"

"Rotters! I can't stand Blake, if you can; and as for Herries, he's a stupid idiot with no more brains than his bulldog; and Digby is a duffer. As for D'Arcy, he's a tailor's dummy, and I can't stand him at any price. They were going to come to tea with us to-day, but—"

"We asked them," said Lowther. "I'm surprised they haven't come."

"Well, I told them I'd prefer their room to their company."

"You did, Tom!"

"Yes, I did!"

"Why?" asked Lowther quietly, but with a glint coming into his eyes.

"I'm sick of them."

"We're not sick of them, anyway. You might have consulted us before you insulted them."

"If you want to chum with that Fourth Form crowd you can do it, Lowther; I'm not going to."

"I shall certainly explain to Blake as soon as I see him that we had nothing to do with what you said!" exclaimed Lowther hotly. "It was a rotten thing to do, Tom."

"Thanks!"

"It will mean trouble between us," said Manners uneasily. "I remember how D'Arcy passed me without speaking in the quad just before I came in. I thought there was something queer in his look."

"He's a queer beggar, anyway. He thinks of nothing but the fit of his trousers and the cut of his clothes—the silly idiot!"

"He's a good sort," said Lowther.

"Oh, rats!"

There was a grim silence in the study after that. To Manners and Lowther it was clear that their chum and study leader was making himself intentionally disagreeable. Did it mean that now he had taken up with Crooke he wanted to

drop his old friend? It looked only too much like it. And Manners and Lowther were beginning to feel very angry now. Their patience with their chum was growing exhausted.

The captain of the Shell pushed back his chair from the table, felt in his pocket for a cigarette, inserted it in a holder, and lighted it.

"Don't do that here, Tom," said Manners quietly.

"I can do as I like in my own study, I suppose," was the defiant reply.

"It's our study, too."

"Well, I don't object to your smoking," said the junior, with a sneering laugh. "I'll give you some cigarettes if you like."

"Keep them! Look here, Tom, you may be caught in this!" said Manners, really distressed. "Kildare may look in. He said he'd drop in and tell us whether he wanted us to bowl to him at the nets after tea."

"I'm not going to bowl to him."

"It's jolly good practice bowling to the best batsman at St. Jim's. And he gives us tips about our play. It's very useful to us, and very kind of Kildare."

"Oh, hang Kildare and his kindness!"

"I tell you he may come in, Tom. Will you chuck that cigarette away?"

"No, I won't!"

"It's asking for trouble. Kildare's a good sort, but he's head prefect of the House, and he couldn't pretend not to notice it if he wanted to."

"Oh, rot!"

There was a tap at the door, and it opened, and Kildare's handsome and good-natured face looked in.

"Hallo, kids!" said the captain of St. Jim's in his genial way. "I've looked in to—hallo! What's this?"

Manners and Lowther looked red and uncomfortable. Kildare's genial look faded as he fixed his eyes upon the junior who was smoking. And the smoker did not cease as the St. Jim's captain looked at him. He retained the cigarette between his lips, and blew out a little curl of smoke almost in Kildare's face.

Kildare's face became hard as iron, and he made a stride towards the junior, gripped him by the shoulder, and swung him out of his chair.

"What does this mean, Merry?" he asked sternly. "I never suspected you of this sort of thing! Throw that cigarette into the fire!"

The junior shrank from Kildare's blazing eyes. The cigarette fell into the embers, and was consumed.

"So you've been taking me in, you young cad!" said Kildare grimly. "You've kept up appearances pretty well, I must say. How long has this kind of thing been going on?"

The junior looked sullen, and did not reply. But the defiance was gone out of his manner. The look in Kildare's eyes scared him.

"It's the first time he's smoked here, Kildare," said Manners awkwardly. "We—we wouldn't have it in this study! Let him off this time, there's a good chap!"

"If it were the first time," said Kildare. "Have you smoked anywhere else, though, Merry?"

"Yes, I have!"

"Then it's a habit of yours, eh?"

"Yes, it is," was the sullen reply.

"Then it's a habit I'll cure you of," said the captain of St. Jim's grimly. "You'll take two hundred lines, Merry—do you hear? And if I catch you again I won't give you lines, I'll thrash you. Understand that!"

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And Kildare strode from the study, his brow very dark, without having said anything more on the subject of bowling. Tom Merry's study was in disgrace now.

"Hang him!" muttered the junior, rubbing the shoulder where Kildare had gripped him. "Hang him! I'll pay him out for that!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Lowther savagely. "What business have you to get the study in disgrace?"

"Oh, shut up!"

Monty Lowther's eyes glittered. His anger was at boiling point now. He clenched his hands involuntarily, but Manners caught him by the arm.

"No good scrapping, Monty," he muttered.

"I've had enough of it," growled Lowther. "Look here, Tom Merry, we may as well have this out. You've changed a lot lately, and you've got new friends—precious pals, I must say. You seem to be doing your best to get yourself and the study into disgrace. You've been trying to quarrel for the last half-hour. Does that mean that you don't want to pal with us any longer? If it does, you've only got to say so, and we won't trouble you with our friendship any more—you can bet on that!"

"Hang your friendship—and hang you!"

Lowther drew a deep breath.

"Do you mean that, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, I do!"

"That's enough!"

Monty Lowther turned his back on his studymate and walked out of the room without another word. Manners made a movement to follow him, but lingered, looking almost beseechingly at the captain of the Shell.

"Tom, old man—" he began hesitatingly.

The junior coolly took another cigarette from his pocket and lighted it. Manners bit his lip and followed Lowther from the study. The door closed, and the captain of the Shell was left alone.

A cynical smile hovered over his lips, and he grinned through the tobacco smoke. It was the breaking of an old friendship, but that did not trouble the unscrupulous rascal who was playing the part of the captain of the Shell.

CHAPTER 11.

Parted Friends!

ALL the School House knew that evening that there had been a quarrel in Tom Merry's study. Manners and Lowther said little about it, but their actions spoke for themselves.

They did not do their preparation in the study as usual. They did it in a corner of the Form-room by themselves. They had been seen removing their books and other personal belongings from the study. The quarrel was evidently of a serious nature, and the two Shell fellows refused to "dig" with their Form captain any longer.

There was much talk and surmise on

the subject among the Shell fellows and the juniors of the House generally. Some curious persons inquired the reason of Manners and Lowther, but met with decidedly curt replies, and went away with their curiosity unsatisfied.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seemed really concerned about the matter. Arthur Augustus took a fatherly interest in the Terrible Three, and he asked Blake's opinion as to whether it was an opportune moment for a fellow of tact and judgment to chip in and attempt to heal the breach.

Blake shook his head positively. "Let 'em alone," he said. "No good meddling."



"Hallo! What does this mean, Merry?" said Kildare.
"I never suspected you of this sort of thing!" said

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass reproachfully upon him.

"I was weally not thinkin' of meddlin', deah boy," he said. "I was thinkin' of chippin' in and healin' up the bweach."

"Same thing!" said Blake.

"I do not wegard it as the same thing at all, Blake. I am vewy sowwy to see old fwiends fall out in this mannah. I dare say it is weally nothin' at all, you know—only a bweach once made goes on widenin', you know."

"I dare say they're fed up with Tom Merry," said Blake abruptly. "I'm fed up with him, too, for that matter. We've been mistaken about him—that's jolly clear now."

"I told you so!" chimed in Herries. "You can trust Towser. You noticed the way Towser growled at him the other morning."

"Oh wats! He's all wight—suffewin' fwom an attack of nerves, or somethin', that's all," said Arthur Augustus

sagely. "That affair of his beastly double wewried him."

"That didn't make him take up smoking, I suppose," said Blake tartly. "And he plays cards for money with Crooke and Mellish—"

"Yaas, that's wathah wotten, I know. Howevah—"

"And he's been trying his hardest to make himself obnoxious the last two days," said Blake. "Lowther asked us to tea in the study this afternoon, and Tom Merry told me we were not wanted. I'd have punched his head, only—well, I wish I had punched it now!"

"Certainly, his manna's leave some-
thin' to be desiahed," admitted

"Bai Jove! Gwooh!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

Three juniors were there—the captain of the Shell had company. He had soon replaced Manners and Lowther. Crooke and Mellish, the black sheep of the School House, were sitting at the table with him. All three were smoking, and they were playing cards. There were little piles of copper and silver on the table.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's famous monocle dropped from his eye with the shock he received as he beheld that scene. The three juniors looked at him far from amiably.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Shut that door, can't you?" growled Crooke. "We don't want every fool in the House to be looking in."

"Oh, let 'em look!" said Tom Merry's double coolly. "I don't care."

"Perhaps you want to be sacked!" growled Crooke. "I don't! Shut that door, D'Arcy, and get on the other side of it first."

"I came here to speak to Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, don't bother now!" said the Shell fellow.

"I am sowwy to see that you are on bad terms with your old pals, deah boy. I trust I may be able to—"

"Nap, Crooke!"

"Get it!" said Crooke.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I—"

"Hallo! Are you still there?"

"Yaas, I am here!" said Arthur Augustus, his anger beginning to rise. "This is weally not a polite way to weceive a fwiend, Tom Mewwy."

"You're no friend of mine," said the Shell fellow brutally. "For goodness' sake go back to your tailor's shop, and don't worry!"

And Crooke and Mellish cackled gleefully. It was a triumph to them to see Tom Merry on bad terms with his old friends.

Arthur Augustus stood almost speechless with indignation for a moment or two. The three juniors went on playing cards as if he were not there. D'Arcy found his voice at last.

"You uttah wottah!" he gasped.

"Oh, get out!"

"I will get out with pleasuah, you feahful wottah, and I wilt certainly neyah come to this studay again!"

"Thanks!"

"Before I go, I will tell you my opinion of you, Tom Mewwy. I wegard you as a wottah and a blackguard! I have been deceived in you! I thought you were a decent chap, and I was mistaken. You are an uttah cad! I wefuse to know you aftah this!"

"Hurrah!"

"Pway don't speak to me when you see me again," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall ignore your existence, you uttah wottah!"

And Arthur Augustus retired from the study, trembling with indignation, and closed the door with quite unnecessary force. He heard the mocking cackle of Crooke and Mellish as he stalked away down the passage.

His chums noted his ruffled look as he came back into the Common-room, and they grinned.

"Well, what luck?" demanded Blake.

"Did Tom Merry listen to the voice of the charmer?" grinned Digby.

Arthur Augustus snorted.

"Pway don't mention that wottah's name to me again, deah boys," he said. "I've dore with him I wegard him as an awwant blackguard. I wash my hands of him entiahy."

"Hear hear!" said Blake heartily.

A little later Talbot of the Shell came into Study No. 6, where Blake & Co. were doing their preparation. He was looking puzzled and troubled.

"What's all this about Tom Merry?" he asked. "I hear that Manners and Lowther have rowed with him, and won't dig with him any longer, and he's taken up with Crooke and Mellish, and they're having a beano in his study. Has he gone dotty?"

"Looks like it," said Blake gruffly.

"But it's simply asking for the sack," said Talbot. "Why, anybody might drop on him while he's playing the giddy goat. Knox of the Sixth would be glad of the chance."

"Serve him right if he does!"

"You chaps quarrelled with him, too?" asked the Shell junior.

"Not exactly; but we're not speaking to him any more. Fed up!" explained Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Fed wight up to the chin."

"Well, I don't understand it," said Talbot thoughtfully. "I've spoken to Manners and Lowther, but they're grumpy, and won't jaw about it. Still, Tom Merry was always a pal of ours, and I think it's up to us to stop him pleying the fool and getting sacked."

"I wefuse to have anythin' to do with him."

And Blake shook his head.

"But he's simply asking for the sack!" urged Talbot.

"Let him get it, then, and a good thing, too!" snorted Herries.

Talbot looked at them rather curiously, and quitted the study. He passed Tom Merry's door, and paused. The voice he knew well was speaking, loudly enough to be heard in the passage.

"I go nap!"

"Not so loud, Merry," came Crooke's voice. "Dash it all, suppose somebody should pass!"

"I don't care!"

"Well, 'o do!"

Talbot opened the door. The study was thick with smoke. The scholarship junior looked grimly at the three players.

"Pretty set of young blackguards, I must say," he remarked. "I'm not surprised at you, Crooke, but I must say it beats me to see you doing this kind of thing, Tom Merry."

"Can't you mind your own business?"

Talbot seemed to swallow something with difficulty, but he left the study without another word. He did not want to row with Tom Merry; they had always been friends. But, like the other fellows, he was "fed up."

CHAPTER 12.

A Shock for Mr. Linton!

TOM MERRY was going to the dogs—to the giddy bow-wows, as Blake expressed it.

There could be no doubt about that.

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entered the study. The junior went on coolly smoking. Jim's captain. "Throw that cigarette in the fire!"

Arthur Augustus. "He has been quite rude to me on several occasions."

"Well, let him alone, then."

"Pewwaps it is up to me to see if I can do anythin'," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "A word in season, you know—"

"Oh, bosh!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Blake turned away with a grunt. The Shell fellow had got on the wrong side of Blake now, and Blake resented it keenly. He was not a fellow to bear malice; but deliberate and disagreeable rudeness, without offence given, was hard to forgive. Tom Merry seemed to be on the way to losing all his friends in the School House.

Arthur Augustus meditated for a little while, and finally made his way to Tom Merry's study. He knocked politely at the door, and opened it, and then coughed. The study was thick with smoke.

All the School House juniors knew it, and the news spread to the New House. Figgins & Co. were amazed. They were "up against" Tom Merry as rivals of his House, but in a friendly sort of way. They were sorry to hear of the new line he had taken, and they were quite concerned about it.

Figgins, in the goodness of his heart, ventured a mild remonstrance and a word of warning. But the reception his kind remonstrance met with discouraged him so effectually that he did not venture a second time.

The captain of the Shell was openly scornful and sneering, and but for Figgins' unwillingness to quarrel with a fellow he had always liked hitherto, there would have been a row. But Figgins left the School House with flushed cheeks and glittering eyes, and when he rejoined his chums in the New House he spoke very much to the point.

"The fellow's an utter cad," he said. "Either he's changed very much, or else we've been taken in up till now. I've done with him. I came jolly near giving him a dashed good hiding!"

"He must be off his rocker!" said Kerr.

"Looks like it."
"Quite changed, anyway," said Fatty Wynn. "He was unconvincing to me to-day when I saw him in the tuckshop. I asked him to join me with some jam tarts, and he said he wasn't a guzzling pig. As much as to say, you know, that I was one!" added Fatty Wynn, much aggrieved.

"He seems to be wanting to quarrel with everybody lately," said Kerr. "Lowther and Manners have chucked up the study; they're not on speaking terms now. Study No. 6 don't speak to him. Talbot's dropped him, and Kangaroo, Dane, and Glyn, too. He seems hardly to have a friend left in his own House."

"He won't have any here, either!" said Figgins grimly. "I'll never speak to the rotter again—I know that—unless it's to tell him what I think of him!"

"He's chucked up cricket, too," said Kerr. "He's not going to play in the Grammar School match. I hear he's resigned as cricket captain."

"All the better!" growled Figgins. "He's not wanted!"

But it was very puzzling. It was not only that Tom Merry seemed to be determined to go to the "bow-wows"; his recklessness was as amazing as his curious change of character.

The blackest of black sheep might have been expected to take some care not to be found out, when expulsion from the school was the certain penalty.

But the captain of the Shell did not seem to care whether he was found out or not. In fact, he seemed to be asking for trouble.

Crooke and Mellish had greeted the change in him gleefully. They were only too glad to score over their old enemies by helping Tom Merry into the downward path; but after a few days Crooke and Mellish both began to get scared by the utter recklessness of their new associate.

They were ready for any black-guardism, but they were not ready to take the risk of being expelled from the school.

And so by the end of the week even those two black sheep began to be a little shy of his society.

On Saturday came the cricket match with the Grammar School; but Tom Merry was not in the St. Jim's junior team.

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The fellows who know how he had been looking forward to the cricket were amazed. Some of the juniors with whom he had not yet quarrelled spoke to him on the subject, but his answers were not agreeable.

"Sure, and what's come over ye?" Reilly of the Fourth demanded, coming up to the junior skipper as the Shell came out after morning lessons on Saturday. "Is it true that ye're not playing this afternoon, Tommy?"

"Quite true."
"But why not?"
"I don't care to. I've chucked up cricket!"

"Sure, Gordon Gay and his team are in great fettle, and we need ye, Tom Merry!" the Irish junior said reproachfully.

"Hang Gordon Gay and his team!"
"Don't ye really care for the game at all?" Reilly asked, in astonishment.

"No, I don't!"
"Well, it's a silly ass ye are, then!"
"Oh rats!"

Reilly's eyes glittered.
"And if ye says 'Rats!' to me, I'll wipe up the floor wid ye, Tom Merry!" he exclaimed angrily. "I don't know what's come over ye, but I'm not going to stand your cheek!"

The Shell fellow muttered something, and turned away. And the other fellows, looking on, exchanged significant glances. It was another case of funk. The captain of the Shell had not ventured to resent the angry words of the Fourth Former.

Reilly stared at him in blank amazement. He had expected a "scrap" to follow, but evidently there was to be no scrap. The Belfast junior shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and swung away, and did not speak to the Shell fellow again.

Tom Merry had once been the most popular fellow in the school. It was safe to say now that he was the most unpopular. There was hardly a decent fellow at St. Jim's who would speak to him now; and even Crooke and his set, though they chummed with him, did not like him.

The captain of the Shell had developed a sneering tone and an unpleasant manner, which nobody could be expected to stand patiently. But for his backwardness in resenting insults, he would have had many a fight on his hands in those days. But, although he was unwilling to enter into personal scraps, he had developed a bullying manner towards smaller boys.

Wally D'Arcy of the Third Form related with burning eyes how Tom Merry had cuffed him in the passage, and larruped him with a cricket stump when he hit back.

Tom Merry had always been the champion of the fags, and had often stood between them and the bullying of fellows like Gore. But he had outdone Gore now, and his popularity with the fag Forms was quite gone.

If he had deliberately set out to make himself thoroughly disliked by the whole of the Lower School, he could not have done better than he was doing.

The seniors, too, had noticed that he was not like the Tom Merry of old. Ever since Kildare had caught him smoking he had been cold to him, and had kept a sharp eye on him.

He had caught him a second time and cased him, and more than once the other prefects had cuffed him for impertinent answers. He had even been impertinent to the Housemaster, and Mr. Railton had cased him for it.

If any mischance should happen to the fellow now, it was certain that he would receive no sympathy from anybody at

St. Jim's. Indeed, most of the fellows, utterly disgusted with him, wished heartily that he would be found out and expelled.

And most of them felt that it could not be long before it happened. His rotten conduct was only equalled by his recklessness. The climax seemed to be coming at dinner that day.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was at the head of the table in the dining-room in the School House, and the unpopular junior was near him. When the Shell master gave the signal to rise, the catastrophe came. As the captain of the Shell rose from his chair, a pack of cards slipped from his inside pocket, and shot down to the floor in a stream.

Mr. Linton stood petrified. There was a gasp from all the juniors.

The cards streamed over the floor at the very feet of the Form-master. Mr. Linton gazed at them blankly. Cards were strictly forbidden in the school, even for a harmless game. And for a fellow to be carrying a pack of cards in his pocket—well, it was the limit.

Mr. Linton, as soon as he recovered from his astonishment, assumed a stern expression.

"Merry!"
Mr. Linton's voice was like the rumble of distant thunder.

"Yes, sir," said the junior sullenly.

"Those cards are yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pick them up and hand them to me!"

The junior obeyed. Mr. Linton took the cards, and he could not help noticing the aroma of tobacco that hung about them.

"Merry, I will not say how shocked I am! This accidental discovery shows how much I have been deceived in you. You are accustomed, then, to playing cards—and to smoking at the same time, as the smell of the cards plainly shows."

The junior was sullenly silent.

"You will come with me to the Head!" said Mr. Linton.

The junior followed him silently from the room. There was a buzz among the other fellows.

"Well, that's a clean bowl-out, if you like!" murmured Manners. "The ass! The duffer! It's the end, Lowther!"

Lowther nodded moodily.

But it was not the end yet, though very near it. Mr. Linton told the story to the Head, and Dr. Holmes gazed sternly at the guilty junior. But he remembered the good record Tom Merry had always had in the school, and there was kindness mingled with his sternness.

"I am shocked and surprised, Merry!" he said. "I cannot say how this grieves me! But I shall give you another chance. I feel you have acted foolishly rather than wickedly. Probably you have been led into this folly. You deserve to be expelled from the school, but I shall clemency you this time. But I warn you, Merry, that I shall not be so lenient on another occasion!"

And the junior was cased, and dismissed from the Head's presence.

CHAPTER 18.

The Stake!

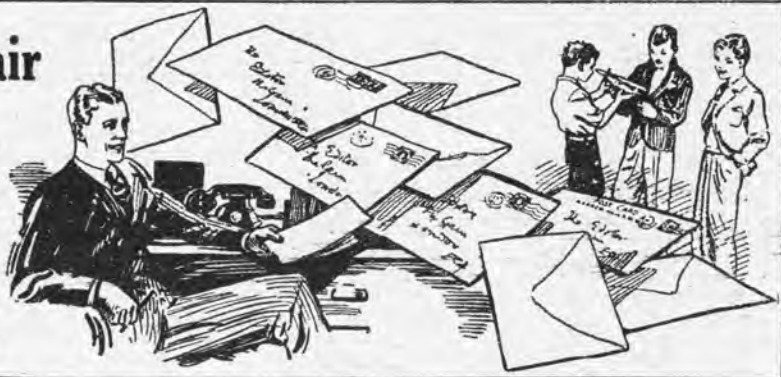
GERALD GORING sat upon a log in Rylcombe Wood, with a cigar between his teeth. He was waiting in a secluded glade at a distance from the road—waiting for Reggie Clavering.

It was Saturday afternoon. At St. Jim's the junior cricket team, minus their skipper, were playing the

(Continued on page 18.)

The Editor's Chair

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



HALLO, Chums! As you have probably seen announced on another page, the next number of the old paper will be out a day earlier—that is, Tuesday, the day before the Coronation. This is all to the good, for you will be able to read your GEM sooner than usual—and I know some readers cannot read it soon enough!

Of extra-special interest in this issue will be an article, illustrated with splendid photos, on the Coronation. It gives many interesting facts about this great event in our history, and I am sure every Gemite will greatly enjoy reading it.

"HE WANTED TO BE EXPELLED!"

This is the title of the third yarn in the "Tom Merry's Double" series, and without a doubt, it is the most thrilling and dramatic yarn of the year.

With Tom Merry a prisoner, his double is in no danger of exposure in carrying out Goring's plot to disgrace the captain of the Shell. He has earned expulsion already, but thanks to Manners and Lowther, the Head rescinds his sentence, and he is publicly flogged—which is not at all to the liking of Master Clavering.

Nevertheless, he is still free to carry on his rascally impersonation. Will he succeed in completely disgracing Tom Merry's name before he can be exposed? If he does, Tom Merry will find it very hard afterwards to establish his innocence.

Readers will follow with eager interest every exciting scene in this powerful story, and will regret coming to the end of the yarn, so enjoyable is it. It is school-story writing at its very best, as only Martin Clifford can do it.

"BUNTER THE HYPNOTIST!"

Bunter's exploits in hypnotism have not so far met with very great success. True, his "wonderful powers" have brought him a feed which to William George Bunter is the best thing the world can offer. But as the Owl has learned before, and as he learns again, after the feast comes the reckoning! And the reckoning happens to be much more than he can meet, which is a source of worry to Bunter.

But he is not dismayed in his efforts to show Greyfriars what a marvellous hypnotist he is. How far he succeeds I will leave Frank Richards to describe to you, in his best style, next week.

Don't forget, chums! Ask for the GEM next Tuesday; and, to make sure you get it, place your order early.

Scores of readers' letters are rolling in day after day, and the postman is beginning to give me dark looks. I don't know whether he thinks I'm

causing the increase in mail for his "benefit." However, I don't mind a scrap how many letters I get—even if the postman does!

I should like to point out now that I am receiving many requests for seniors' and juniors' ages, and there is a constant repetition of some. So I must ask readers to make a note of them as they appear, as I cannot keep repeating them.

Now for this week's

REPLIES TO READERS.

R. Roberts (Watford).—The permanent reformation of Levison will be dealt with in due course. Yes, Tom Merry & Co. have always been the chief characters of Martin Clifford.

R. Tett (Hendon, N.W.4).—Thanks for your selection of the best 1936 stories. Try again to win 2s. 6d.

M. Taylor (Walsall).—Pleased to hear from a reader who has been associated with the GEM since it started and to know that you get more enjoyment from the old paper now than when you were a boy. The characters you mention will be coming along in course of time.

"A Reader" (Stourbridge).—The story dealing with Lumley-Lumley's reformation passed out of print a long time ago. Thanks for your selection of the best 1936 stories. I'm sorry, but your jokes didn't lend themselves to illustrations.

N. Beswick (Selly Oak, Birmingham).—What happened to your joke? It wasn't in your letter. Talbot is sixteen years and one month. Write to the Back Number Dept., The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Miss D. Price (Margate).—Tom Merry is sixteen years; Manners, sixteen; Blake, fifteen and four months; D'Arcy, fifteen and three months; Herries, fifteen and a half; Digby, fifteen and four months. I will remember your suggestion. Thanks!

N. Rose (Tadworth, Surrey).—Levison is fifteen and a half years; Wally D'Arcy, thirteen and a half. The other juniors' ages are given in the previous reply. The ages of the masters are not divulged. So one of your schoolmasters reads the GEM? I'm pleased to know he says it's "the best book a boy can read."

Miss D. Curran (Seaford).—Write to our Back Number Dept. The address is given in Reader Beswick's reply.

B. Ravenscroft (Tiptree, Essex).—Thanks for your letter. There's a great deal in what you say, but space forbids

me to deal at length with such a controversial subject.

E. Booker (Raheny, Co. Dublin).—Glad to hear that you have become a GEM and "Magnet" reader. I haven't the space at present to publish the list you want, but perhaps it will be possible later on. Your joke didn't quite score. Try again!

J. Tostevin (Southsea).—The GEM was first published on March 23rd, 1907; the "Magnet" on February 15th, 1908; and the "Schoolboys' Own Library" first appeared in April, 1925.

Miss R. Watling (Walton-on-Thames).—Thanks for your interesting letter. I am pleased to hear that you are such a keen reader of the GEM. Figgins and Cousin Ethel have always had a strong regard for each other.

F. Parr (Wallasey).—Thanks for your selection of the ten best 1936 stories and the ten most popular St. Jim's characters.

D. Cohen (Stirling).—I should like to accede to your request, but I am afraid it's impracticable. Many thanks for your good wishes. You can rely on Martin Clifford to keep up the present high standard of GEM stories. Have another shot at winning 2s. 6d.!

A. Bowen (Maidenhead).—Write to our Back Number Dept. for the issue of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" you want. The address is given in Reader Beswick's reply.

R. Kellough (London, W.11).—So you are keen on writing stories. Keep it up; practice makes perfect. I'm afraid I cannot publish longer instalments of the Greyfriars stories. Yes, Martin Clifford will sign your autograph album.

J. Adams (Edinburgh).—Glad to hear that you are now a staunch GEM reader. Yes, Wharton's age was a misprint. He is, of course, fifteen years four months. I will publish the list you want when I can find room. I cannot give you any more news regarding the Greyfriars film at the moment. Sorry, your joke was not quite suitable.

K. Hughes (Wallasey).—Tom Merry is sixteen years old. My chat was crowded out of the number you state. I cannot tell you when the series dealing with Levison's reformation will appear. It will be some time yet.

Miss C. Egan (Dublin, S.E.4).—Yes, St. Jim's and its characters are fictitious. Pleased to know you enjoyed those "Schoolboys' Own Library" yarns. Thanks for your suggestion.

W. Knight (Gidea Park, Essex).—The master of the Second Form is Mr. Percy Carrington. Mr. Railton takes the Sixth Form. Skimpole is fifteen years and five months. Send along another joke.

THE EDITOR.

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PEN PALS COUPON

8-5-37

Grammarians. The junior whom all St. Jim's believed to be Tom Merry was sauntering through the wood, on his way to keep his appointment with his confederate.

Goring looked up and nodded as the junior came through the trees.

"I've waited for you," he said.

Clavering nodded and scowled.

"I've been caned," he said sulkily.

Goring laughed.

"Well, that won't hurt you. That was part of the bargain."

"The old beast laid it on hard!" grunted the impostor. "Look here, I'm not going to stand much more of it! I'm more than sick of St. Jim's!"

"Is St. Jim's sick of you? That's more to the point!"

Clavering grinned involuntarily.

"I fancy so. They don't know what's come over Tom Merry. I think I've paid the rotter out now for what he's done to me. He hasn't a friend left in the school!"

"Good!"

"And as for his reputation, he hasn't one left!"

And Clavering proceeded to give an account of the late happenings at St. Jim's.

Goring listened with a sardonic grin on his face. He could not have chosen a better tool for his purpose than this young rascal who so strangely resembled Tom Merry. He nodded with satisfaction as Clavering finished.

"Good enough, Reggie! It's pretty near time to finish now. Strike the iron while it's hot, you know. There won't be much sorrow among the fellows there when Tom Merry gets the sack—what?"

"I fancy they'll all be jolly glad!"

"That's exactly what I want—nobody to regret him, or to believe him afterwards when he tries to explain. Not that he'll have much chance to explain, either. I shall keep him safe for a few months."

Clavering opened his eyes.

"Months!" he repeated.

"Certainly! It's safer, on full consideration," said Goring coolly.

"But it's impossible! When he—I mean, when I am sacked from St. Jim's, Tom Merry will be expected home. His guardian—"

"Exactly. You'll go and make Miss Priscilla Fawcett dislike you as much as the fellows at St. Jim's do. The idea is to make him thoroughly disliked all round. You can take Miss Fawcett in as easily as the rest."

"I suppose I can," said Clavering slowly. "But about my remaining away from home so long? That's not easy."

"Easy enough! You're supposed to be staying with your friends in Sussex. Well, write to your uncle that they're going on a holiday in Scotland, and want you to go with them. Your uncle isn't anxious to get you home—what?"

Clavering scowled.

"He's glad to be rid of me," he said viciously.

"Exactly! It's all quite easy."

"I suppose it is," assented Reggie, "and the longer it is before Tom Merry tells his story, the safer it will be for us. You've got him quite safe?"

"Safe as houses."

"Where is he?"

"Twenty miles from here, in a lonely house on the hill near Luxford, and Gates is looking after him."

"I should think Gates would get pretty fed-up with it."

"He's satisfied so long as he has plenty of beer and tobacco. Besides, he stands a whack," said Goring. "It's worth a hundred quid to him. But now

about bringing matters to a climax at St. Jim's. It's time."

"That's what I want to speak to you about," said Clavering coolly, sitting down on the log and lighting a cigarette. "So far I've acted under your orders and gone blind. I've had enough of that. I'm going to be in the know."

"I've told you as much as you need know."

"I think not. After I've played this game through I shall be under your thumb. You could give me away if it suited you, and it would mean bad trouble for me—a reformatory, very likely, as I'm too young to go to prison," said Clavering. "I've been waiting for matters to reach this stage, so that I could tell you point-blank that I've got to know the whole game from start to finish, or—"

"Or what?" demanded Goring, with a scowl.

"Or I won't go on with it," said Clavering coolly. "No good scowling at me, Goring; you can't go on without me. There's still time for me to go to the Head at St. Jim's and confess that I've impersonated Tom Merry just for a lark. That would see me clear. And I'll do it, too, unless I know the whole game from beginning to end. I'm going to have just as strong a hold on you as you've got on me—see?"

And Clavering blew out a cloud of smoke.

His companion regarded him with savage eyes. Hitherto Goring had given the orders, and Clavering had obeyed them unquestioningly. But it was evident that the worm was turning, just at the moment when it was impossible for Goring to dispense with his services.

There was a long silence. Clavering smoked cigarette after cigarette, while Goring gnawed savagely at his cigar.

"You may as well tell me, Gerald," said Clavering at last. "I'm not going on with the game till I know it—every bit of it. You can trust me. I intended all along to get to know the whole game. And now I mean business!"

"You young rascal—"

"Cheese it! Are you going to tell me, or not? If you're not, I may as well be going back to St. Jim's." And Clavering rose to his feet.

Goring gritted his teeth.

"Sit down!" he said.

"You're going to tell me?"

"Yes."

Clavering sat down on the log again, and lighted another cigarette.

"Go ahead!" he said tersely.

"What do you want to know?" asked Goring.

"You've said it's worth fifty thousand pounds to you if Tom Merry is disgraced and sacked from St. Jim's. I want to know how. It sounds like a fairy-tale; but, as you're spending money on it, and risking getting sent to prison for kidnapping, I suppose you must know what you're talking about. Where is the money coming from?"

"From a man in South Africa," said Goring. "Look here, Reggie, it's got to be kept dark. You understand that? I'll explain—there's not much to tell. Have you ever heard the name of Brandreth?"

"I think I've heard you mention it."

"He's a big gun in Cape Colony; rolling in money. My father was his partner out there. They had clummed up in the diamond-fields in the early days—pals, and all that. He thought a lot of my father—and, in consequence, of me."

"He didn't know you!" grinned Reggie.

"Never mind that. He's a grim old brute—distrustful and suspicious. I dare say his experiences in South Africa made him like that. He's pretty old now, and in bad health—may go off the hooks any minute. And he's made his will."

"And you're in it?" asked Reggie, getting interested.

"No," said Goring, between his teeth. "I'm not in it! I was, but when I got into disgrace at college I was cut out of it. He refused to have anything more to do with me. He's old-fashioned, a regular Puritan, and can't make allowances for a young fellow. I didn't think it would turn out so bad; but it did. His lawyer is a friend of mine, and he did his best for me. But it was no use; I was cut right off."

"Hard cheese?"

"The old brute hasn't kith or kin of his own. But he had a great chum long ago—now dead. It was Tom Merry's father. He was killed in India. He was Captain Merry then. Old Brandreth was awfully cut up when he was killed, and when he had done with me, he remembered that Captain Merry had left a son. He's never seen the kid. He was in South Africa when he was born, and he's never been to England since. He knows nothing about him, excepting that he's at school in England—never even communicated with him in any way, so far as I know. But when he threw me off he made a new will, and made Tom Merry his heir for his father's sake."

"My hat! I wish my pater had been his old chum!" said Clavering, with a chuckle. "But I don't see how this has anything to do with your little game."

"You will! Old Brandreth considered that he was taken in by me. He thought I was what he calls decent, and that I've turned out to be what he calls a scoundrel. He's afraid it may be the same with Merry, and he's suspicious. So he's made it a condition in his will that if Tom Merry should turn out as I've done, he's not to have the money. He's not to have it till he's twenty-one, anyway, but the old man doesn't expect to live till then. If Tom Merry should be disgraced and expelled, as I was, then he's cut off without a red cent."

"Oh!" said Clavering, with a deep breath. He began to understand.

"And, in that case, it comes back to me," said Goring. "I've had it all from my solicitor, who's my good pal, and stands to get something, too, if I should prove to be the old man's heir. There's nobody in the world old Brandreth cares a jot for, excepting Tom Merry and myself; and I had first place in his affections till I came a nucker. His idea is that if Tom Merry's a kid after his own heart—upright and decent, and all that—he's the fellow to have the money. But if he should turn out to be a rotter, too, and the old man's only got a choice between two rotters, then he's going to let the fortune go to his old partner's son—that's me. Understand?"

"And how much is it?"

"Fifty thousand at least, though it's going to be tied up so that I can't make ducks and drakes of it!" growled Goring. "Still, there it is. It all depends on how Tom Merry turns out. I was sacked from college, and if Tom Merry is sacked from school, that settles it. And the old man is in a rotten state of health; his death may come any day. When he's dead the terms of the will will be known, and after that, you can bet, Tom Merry will play his cards carefully, and won't do anything before

he's twenty-one that will lose him the money."

"I should say not!"

"But if he's sacked from the school now, that settles it. I shall take care that old Brandreth hears it—in a round-about way. As for Tom Merry making any explanation, that's impossible. He hardly knows about the old man's existence—probably never even heard his name. Besides, Brandreth wouldn't believe him. I know how hard he is to convince, from my own experience. Of course, when I was done in I tried to explain to him—"

"The facts?" grinned Clavering.

"Well, my version of the facts. But it was no use; he wasn't taking any. It would be the same with Tom Merry."

Clavering nodded thoughtfully.

"I understand now," he said; "and I'm jolly glad I made you tell me. You said this would be worth five hundred to me, Goring."

"That's right."

"It will be worth a good bit more than that," said Clavering coolly. "It's worth five thousand, at the very least."

"You confounded young black-mailer—"

Clavering laughed.

"I like that! But we needn't quarrel about terms. You haven't got the money yet. After you've got it I can give you away at any time I should choose, and you'd have to disgorge it again. You know that. I'm going to stand a good whack, and you may as well make up your mind to it."

The look that Gerald Goring gave his youthful accomplice was not a pleasant one. But he nodded sullenly. His cunning plot was impossible to carry out without the aid of Tom Merry's double. He was in the young rascal's hands.

Clavering rose and threw away the stump of his cigarette.

"Nuff said!" he remarked. "I'm satisfied. Now, about getting to the finish. It's time I got done at St. Jim's."

"Quite so! Let it get finished on Monday, then; you can cap all you've done already," said Goring. "It must be something serious, of course—something that can't be wiped out, such as theft."

"Phew!"

"You'd have nerve enough?"

Clavering shook his head.

"I might have nerve enough, but it's not good enough," he said. "I can't do that. They might do something worse than expelling for that!"

"It would be hushed up to save a scandal!"

"I'm not taking chances like that," said Clavering decidedly. "Besides, if it should ever come out that I'm not really Tom Merry, they'd rake it up against me to get even with me. I'll think of something else. What about punching a Form-master?"

"That would get you the sack, certainly, but it's not disgraceful enough. It might be put down to hot temper. Look here, if you are found intoxicated in your study—"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Clavering. "That's it! And I'll take care to let it be quite genuine."

"That settles it!" said Goring, rising. "Make it that! Don't bungle it, and don't get really squiffy, or you might blurt out too much. You can act the part. Take enough to make it easy to put on the rest."

"All serene!" said Clavering, chuckling.

"Now, good-bye! We don't want to risk being seen together."

And they separated.



As the captain of the Shell rose from his seat, a pack of cards slipped from his inside pocket and shot down on the floor in a stream—at the feet of Mr. Linton! "Merry!" The Form-master's voice was like distant thunder. "Yes, sir!" said the junior. "Those cards are yours?" said Mr. Linton. "Yes, sir!"

Gerald Goring strode away in one direction, Clavering in another. He was grinning as he took his way back to St. Jim's.

Probably he would not have felt so satisfied if he had seen a white, seared face that peered from the thickets into the glade after the plotters were gone.

It was the face of Crooke of the Shell.

The cad of the School House had been there, crouching in the thicket, a prey to mingled curiosity and terror, while the schemers talked, and he had heard every word. Crooke had followed the junior he believed to be Tom Merry from the school, supposing that he was bent on some errand of questionable pleasure, and intending to join him. The stealthy manner in which Clavering had entered the wood had excited his curiosity, and he had taken care to watch him without being seen. But never had Crooke dreamed that his spying would bring him such knowledge as this.

He understood now, understood the supposed deterioration in Tom Merry. It was not Tom Merry who was at St. Jim's, but his double.

It was all clear to Crooke now.

He was almost frightened by his discovery. It placed Clavering in his power, but it made him a party to a lawless scheme, if he did not reveal his knowledge. Crooke thought deeply as he made his way from the wood with great caution.

The real Tom Merry he hated, with the false Tom Merry he could get on very well. And to have the fellow under his thumb—a fellow who would soon be rich—Crooke's eyes glistened at that thought. And then the thought of the risk came to chill him. Crooke resolved to keep silent, for the present at least,

and to think very deeply and very carefully before he acted.

CHAPTER 14.

Monty Lowther's Last Word!

"WELL bowled, Fatty!"

"Bravo, Porpoise!"

Clavering smiled sneeringly as he heard the shouts from the playing fields, as he came in at the school gates.

The junior match was going strong. Fatty Wynn of the New House was bowling in his best style. Gordon Gay's wicket had just gone down, to the delight of the St. Jim's crowd.

Tom Merry's double paused for a few moments to watch the play, and to look round in the crowd for Crooke. He joined Mellish, who was leaning on the pavilion while he watched the cricket.

There were two gloomy faces in the St. Jim's field—Manners' and Lowther's. The chums of the Shell were not enjoying the match.

They had cut themselves off from Tom Merry and all his works, and they felt that they had been right to do so. But, somehow, on the cricket field that afternoon, they could not help thinking of their old chum.

They missed him sorely.

Tom Merry should have been in his place there, playing up for St. Jim's. And where was he? Out probably at some blackguardly occupation that might get him expelled from the school. It was impossible to feel friendship for such a fellow as he had turned out to be, and yet, somehow, that sunny afternoon their hearts misgave them. They were thinking more of their old chum than of the Grammarian batsmen, as a

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matter of fact, and once or twice they missed chances in the field, which made Kangaroo glare at them. Kangaroo was captaining the junior eleven in the place of Tom Merry.

Lowther caught sight of the captain of the Shell lounging by the pavilion, and chatting with Mellish. He had come to watch the cricket, then, at least. Was that a sign of returning grace?

Even as the thought passed through Lowther's mind the Shell fellow strolled away with Mellish, turning his back on the cricket ground. Lowther sighed.

"Look alive!" roared Kangaroo, as the ball from Frank Monk's bat shot past Lowther. "Going to sleep, fat-head!"

And Lowther dismissed his old chum from his mind, and gave attention to the game.

He was glad, however, when the match was over.

The Grammarians won by a narrow margin, and they departed from St. Jim's in a mood of great satisfaction at having pulled off the first cricket match of the season.

The Saints were far from satisfied.

It was the loss of Tom Merry's steady batting and his influence over the team that had given the Grammarians that narrow margin of runs. They all felt that. Tom Merry had chosen to play the giddy goat instead of playing the game. The feelings of his one-time followers towards him were bitter enough. Never had his popularity been at a lower ebb.

"Seen Tommy?" Lowther asked, joining Manners a little later.

Manners shook his head.

"No. Do you want to speak to him, Monty?"

Monty Lowther coloured and hesitated.

"I—I've been thinking of it," he said at last. "Look here, Manners, we've been Tommy's pals for a long time, and—it's worth trying to save him from ruining himself. He seems to be asking for trouble. He used to be a decent chap enough."

"Used to," said Manners.

"Well, he can't have changed utterly, and in a few days, too! Dash it all, it was only last Tuesday he came with us to the Feathers to rag that cad Clavering. He was his old self then. He seems to have changed natures with Clavering since then. Do you know what some of the fellows are saying, that those rotten tricks that were put down to his double were very likely done by Tommy himself after all, for he's doing the very same things now himself?"

"I've heard the chaps saying so," admitted Manners.

"It can't go on long. He'll get the sack. Why, he hasn't the sense of a baby. Crooke and Cutts and those rotters know how to cover up their tracks, but Tom seems almost to want to be found out."

"I can't understand it."

"He's not very pleasant to speak to now, I know," said Lowther awkwardly. "But—but it's worth while eating humble pie a bit to save an old pal from being kicked out of the school. Don't you think so?"

"I'm with you, Monty; not that I think it will do any good."

"Let's find him, anyway."

The chums of the Shell entered the School House. They learned that Tom Merry was in his study, and proceeded thither. The study door was half-open, and Mellish's voice could be heard.

"Not for me! You must be dotty to drink that stuff, Tom Merry! It'll make you sick, for one thing, or, worse still, squify!"

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Manners and Lowther exchanged a hopeless look, and stepped into the study. The captain of the Shell was seated at the table with a bottle before him. Mellish stood by the table, his face startled and scared.

"What's this?" said Lowther gruffly.

"Hallo! I thought you had done with this study!" exclaimed the captain of the Shell, with a sneering laugh.

"You'd better stop him, you chaps," said Mellish, who was evidently scared. "He's actually going to booze whisky here! He must be potty. Don't run away with the idea that I've led him into it. He's offered it to me, and I won't have any. I don't want to be sacked, if he does."

And Mellish hurried out of the study. Evidently he did not consider Tom Merry's study a safe place, or Tom Merry a safe companion. And the Shell fellows realised how low their old chum had fallen, when the cad of the Fourth avoided his company because it was too bad for him.

The junior at the table deliberately poured out the spirit into a glass. He seemed to take a curious pleasure in the horror and dismay in the faces of the two Shell fellows. Lowther closed the door quickly, and turned to him.

"Tom Merry—"

"Here's your health!" The junior raised the glass. Lowther struck it from his lips with a fierce hand.

Crash!

The glass smashed into a dozen pieces on the floor, and the liquor soaked into the carpet. Lowther fixed his eyes, blazing with anger and scorn, on the fellow he had once regarded as his best chum.

"You rotten blackguard!" he said, in measured tones.

"Mind your own business, confound you!"

"We came here to speak to you," said Monty Lowther bitterly. "To ask you if you wouldn't think better of it, and chuck up this kind of thing. We're willing to be friends again, if you are."

"Say the word, Tom, old fellow," said Manners softly.

"Keep your friendship till I ask for it," was the sneering retort. "It will be long enough before I ask."

"You don't want it?"

"No, I don't."

"You want that filthy stuff, and the sack to follow?"

"That's my business."

Monty Lowther picked up the bottle from the table. The captain of the Shell made a clutch at it, and grasped it, too.

"Give that to me!" he shouted. "It's mine."

"Let go!" said Lowther, in a tone of concentrated rage and scorn. "Let go, or I'll knock you across the study."

"It's mine, you hound!"

"Let go!"

Lowther clenched his free hand. He was in such a rage that he was ready for anything, and if the captain of the Shell had shown anything of his old spirit, there would have been a fight in the study then. But he did not. He let go the bottle, muttering a curse, and backed away.

"Do as you like!" he said sullenly. "I can get more if I choose."

"You won't touch this, anyway."

There was a loud crash of breaking glass as Monty Lowther hurled the bottle, with all the force of his arm, into the grate. The liquor ran in a hissing flood over the warm embers.

"There, you cad! After this, don't be afraid that I'll interfere with you!" panted Lowther. "You can go to the dogs your own way, and welcome."

He strode out of the study, and

Manners followed, without a glance behind. The captain of the Shell shrugged his shoulders, and kicked the door shut after them. In the passage, Manners and Lowther exchanged one look.

"That's the finish!" said Lowther shortly. "The sooner he's sacked the better. St. Jim's will be better off without a blackguard like that."

Manners nodded without speaking.

And in those very hours, in a lonely house upon Luxford Hill, the real Tom Merry was pacing to and fro, with clenched hands and knitted brows.

For four days now he had been a prisoner—a helpless captive, seeing no one but the masked man who brought him food and drink, and spoke hardly a word.

Not a word from the outside world had reached him. What was happening at St. Jim's—whether he was being searched for—he did not know.

Why he was a prisoner—what his fate was to be—remained a mystery.

He was desperate, but he was helpless.

And as the darkness of another night descended upon the prisoner in the lonely house, something like despair crept into his breast. Would he never be found—never be rescued? But he drove the despairing thought away. If there was to be no rescue, he would escape, and once more, wearily but resolutely, Tom Merry of St. Jim's set his thoughts to that problem—to escape from the hands of the scoundrels who were holding him in hidden captivity.

CHAPTER 15.

The Finish!

TWO more days had passed, and life at St. Jim's was more irksome than before to the unscrupulous young rascal who was playing the part of Tom Merry.

He had done his work only too well. He had alienated all Tom Merry's friends, one after another. He had disgusted every decent fellow in the House. He had gone so far on the downward path, that he had scared off even "rotters" like Crooke, who avoided him now, fearful of being dragged into the ruin which the Shell fellow was evidently drawing upon himself.

For all the fellows knew that the end must come soon.

It was no longer a secret of the Lower School. There had been whispers, rumours. The seniors knew it, also the prefects. Something had reached the Housemaster's ears, and Mr. Railton looked very coldly and sternly upon the boy who had once been in his good books.

The incident of the cards had opened Mr. Linton's eyes, and his manner towards Tom Merry's double was freezing.

Juniors and seniors, prefects and masters, looked upon the Shell fellow with dislike and suspicion.

He was like an outcast in the House.

His work was done, and cunningly done, but he began to feel the unpleasantness of it himself. He did not like being a pariah.

It was time to finish.

And on that Monday Reggie Clavering had resolved to finish. The plan he had concocted with Gerald Goring was ready to be carried out, and when that was done there could be no doubt about the result. The Head had forgiven him once; he would not, and could not, forgive him a second time.

Indeed, it was part of Clavering's plan to make the offence so serious that it would be impossible for the Head to pardon him.

Then he would be gone from St. Jim's, and in Tom Merry's name he would go to the junior's old home at Huckleberry Heath, there to continue his vile scheme, and to turn Tom Merry's guardian against him, as all others had been turned. In the long run, Tom Merry would be sorry for that ragging at the Feathers. Reggie Clavering promised himself that.

Kangaroo came in from cricket practice, and came up the Shell passage with his bat under his arm, whistling. He ceased to whistle as he caught a curious sound from Tom Merry's study.

It was the clink of a bottle on a glass, and the sound of a hiccupping voice singing.

Kangaroo stood petrified. "The fool!" he muttered. "The crass, silly fool! He's simply asking for it!"

He hesitated a moment. Disgust was strong within him, but he thought of the scene when the reckless junior should be expelled—of old Miss Fawcett's sorrow and anguish—and he relented, and opened the door of the study.

The sight that met his gaze gave him a shock, although the Cornstalk junior's nerves were pretty strong.

A bottle of whisky was overturned upon the table, and the liquor was flowing from the table to the floor. A broken glass lay on the carpet. The room was foul with the fumes of the spirit. The captain of the Shell was holding on to the table dazedly. He blinked stupidly at the Cornstalk.

"Hallo, old flow!" he stuttered.

Kangaroo drew a deep, quick breath. "Tom Merry! What have you been doing?"

The junior burst into a wild laugh.

"Keepin' it up!" he muttered thickly.

"Have a drink, ol' chappie. Have 'nother with me. What?"

"You filthy rotter!" exclaimed Kangaroo, seizing him by the shoulder.

"Do you know what you've done? You're squiffy!"

The junior reeled in his grasp.

"Lemme alone!" he stuttered. "You lemme alone! Hands off! Where's that bottle?"

"Tom Merry!"

"You clear off! Whadder mean by shoving yourself in a chap's study—what? You lemme 'lone!"

He staggered away from the Cornstalk, and reeled into the doorway, holding on to the doorpost to keep himself from falling. His face was flushed, and his eyes had a dull gleam. He had swallowed enough of the vile liquor to make it easy for him to act the part of drunkenness.

"Good heavens!" Kangaroo muttered aghast. "He'll be sacked now—that's a cert! Tom Merry, you idiot, come in. Keep out of sight!"

He tried to coax the junior into the study.

"You lemme 'lone!"

"Manners—Lowther!" called out Kangaroo, catching sight of the chums down the passage. "Come here, quick!"

They hurried up.

"He's tipsy!" muttered Kangaroo hurriedly. "For goodness' sake, manage to keep him out of sight somehow."

Lowther hesitated a moment, but even yet the old friendship was not quite dead in his breast. He caught the junior by the arm.

"Tom—Tom, old man. Come in! Be quiet!"

Smack!



A clenched hand caught Lowther full in the face, and he staggered back with a cry of rage.

"Hands off," muttered the wretched junior.

"Don't touch him, Lowther. He doesn't know what he's doing," muttered Manners hurriedly. "What on earth's to be done? He must be got out of sight somehow."

But that was not so easy. A crowd was already gathering in the passage to look on at the miserable sight, and there were exclamations of disgust and contempt on all sides.

There was a sudden alarm that a prefect was coming.

"Shove him into the study, quick!" panted Lowther.

But it was too late!

Kildare of the Sixth was striding through the crowd, his face stern, his eyes gleaming under his knitted brows.

The juniors made way for him; but even then Manners, Lowther, and Kangaroo and a few others formed a ring round the captain of the Shell, with a faint hope of yet saving him.

"What's this?" rapped out Kildare.

"It—it's nothing!" stammered Lowther. "Tom Merry isn't quite well, and—"

"Let me see him!"

"It—it's nothing, and—"

"Stand aside!"

And as Lowther did not move Kildare shoved him angrily out of the way.

Then he stood looking at the captain of the Shell.

The disgust and scorn in Kildare's face were not pleasant to see.

"Come with me, Tom Merry!" he said quietly.

"I won't come! Go an' eat c-coke!"

Kildare did not speak again, but he drew the junior away down the passage, through the crowd that opened to make room. Straight to the Housemaster's study Kildare dragged the dazed and reeling junior.

He knocked at the door, and Mr. Raiton's voice bade him enter. The School House master started to his feet as he saw the senior and the junior.

"Kildare, what is wrong? What—"

"I've brought Tom Merry to you, sir," said Kildare quietly. "You can see the state he is in. I thought you had better deal with him, sir."

"Good heavens!"

"I think it's been coming to this for some time, sir. This is only the climax."

"I fear so."

The junior gazed dazedly at the Housemaster. Mr. Raiton pushed him to the armchair, and he sank down there in a helpless way.

"Thank you, Kildare! I will bring the Head to see him," said Mr. Raiton quietly. "Remain here with him till I return."

"Very well, sir."

The School House master quitted the study. Outside, in the passage, there was a hushed crowd of juniors. Manners and Lowther were white and worn in their looks.

"It's the sack!" said Blake, as the Housemaster strode away with rustling gown in the direction of the Head's study. "I can't say I'm sorry!"

"I'm wathah sowwy," said Arthur Augustus, in a low voice, uneasily polishing his eyeglass. "It's howwid to see a decent chap come on the wocks like this!"

There was a buzz.

"Here comes the Head!"

Dr. Holmes, stern and majestic, came striding down the passage with the Housemaster.

The juniors crowded back. Never had they seen such an expression upon the Head's face before. Every vestige of kindness was gone; his features might have been moulded in iron. It needed only one look at the Head to know that there was no hope of mercy for the wretched culprit in the study.

The two masters passed into Mr. Raiton's study. Dr. Holmes stood for some moments sternly regarding the half-conscious junior in the chair. Disgust, scorn, burning, withering contempt were written in his face.

"Tom Merry, can you understand me?"

The junior stared at him stupidly without replying.

"Let him be taken to the dormitory," said the Head. "Merry, to-morrow morning you will be flogged in public and expelled from the school! Let him be told this, Kildare, when his mind is clear enough to comprehend. He does not seem to understand me."

And the Head swept from the study.

All St. Jim's knew it within a quarter of an hour. In the School House and the New House it was discussed with bated breath.

Tom Merry was expelled!

The following morning a flogging before the assembled school, and a public expulsion. And the junior upon whom that sentence had fallen lay sleeping like a log in the Shell dormitory, stared at by curious eyes that peered from time to time into the room.

And of all the fellows who discussed that tragic ending of Tom Merry's school career, only one knew the truth—Crooke of the Shell. And Crooke—as yet, at all events—kept his own counsel.

The plot for a fortune had succeeded. Tom Merry's double was to be driven forth on the morrow, disgraced, in Tom Merry's name, unless—The best-laid schemes of mice and men "gang aft agley," and there was still time!

(Next Tuesday: HE WANTED TO BE EXPELLED!) Look out for this powerful yarn—the dramatic climax of the plot to ruin Tom Merry! Order your GEM early.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,525,

HYPNOTISM HAS GOT BILLY BUNTER UNDER ITS SPELL—AND HE'S THE BOY FOR DISHING OUT THE 'FLUENCE!



Bunter suddenly raised his hands and commenced to make a series of mesmeric passes, his eyes at the same time being intently fixed on Mr. Quelch. The Remove master was so utterly astonished that he stood as if petrified. The young hypnotist thrilled with excitement. The 'fluence was evidently "on."

Bunter Tries It On!

"BUNTER!"
Billy Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove made no reply, neither did he look up. The afternoon sun was slanting through the tall windows of the class-room, and it was nearly time for the Lower Fourth to be dismissed, when Mr. Quelch, the Form-master, suddenly rapped out Bunter's name.

"Bunter!"
Still Billy Bunter did not look up. Several of the fellows craned their necks round to look at Bunter, wondering what could possibly be the matter with the fat junior to make him ignore the Form-master.

Bunter frequently had something under his desk that took his attention off the lessons. It usually took the form of something to eat. Time and again tarts and toffee had been confiscated by the inexorable Mr. Quelch.

But Bunter was not eating this time. His eyes were fixed on something he had on his knees. His jaws were motionless, but his eyes were blinking eagerly behind his big spectacles.

"What's the matter with the young ass?" murmured Harry Wharton. "Quelch is getting his wool off."

"He's reading," muttered Nugent. "Reading! Not the arithmetic book."

"He's got something else there," said Bob Cherry, in an undertone. "Silly ass to start reading the 'Magnet' in class—"

"It's not the 'Magnet'—it's a big book."

"Bunter!"
A third time Mr. Quelch rapped out the name, and his tones had grown louder and deeper.

The rapt junior heard him at last, The Gem Library.—No. 1,525.

and came to himself with a start. He looked up from his book, thrusting the latter under his desk and blinked guiltily at the incensed Remove master.

"Yes, sir."

"I have spoken to you three times, Bunter."

"Have you really, sir? I'm sorry, but I did not hear you."

you reading a book, or were you not reading a book?"

"I were—I mean, I was, sir."

"And the book was not, I presume, Pendlebury's Arithmetic?" said Mr. Quelch, with crushing sarcasm—that being the book from which the present lesson was being taken.

"Pendlebury's Arithmetic, sir?"

"If you repeat my words again, Bunter, I shall cane you!"

"Cane me, sir? I—I mean, I'm sorry—"

"I spoke to you three times. I was about to ask you—"

"Yes, sir. I'm all attention, sir."

"I was going to ask you," said Mr. Quelch sternly, "how many times can point nought one be subtracted from one point one nought one, but instead of that I will ask you what is that book you are reading?"

"The book, sir?"

"Stand out here, Bunter, and bring the book with you."

Bunter hesitated, but he caught the gleam in the eyes of Mr. Quelch, and he thought that he had better obey. Slowly he drew the offending volume out and stepped out before the grinning and curious class.

"Give me that book, Bunter."

The fat junior handed it over.

Mr. Quelch glanced at it and started. It bore the title of "Hypnotism Made Easy," by Professor Foozleum, and it was about the last volume Mr. Quelch would have expected to see in the hands of a Removeite.

"So this is the nonsense which has taken all your attention from the lesson, Bunter?"

"It isn't nonsense, sir. It's a ripping book!"

"I shall keep this volume for a week, as a warning to you not to bring books into the class-room."

BUNTER THE HYPNOTIST!

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

"You were reading, Bunter."

"Reading, sir?"

"You were reading a book."

"Reading a book, sir?"

"Don't repeat my words!" almost shouted Mr. Quelch, still further angered by the irrepressible giggle that ran through the class-room. "Were

THE FAT AND FATUOUS JUNIOR OF GREYFRIARS IS AT HIS FUNNIEST IN THIS SPARKLING YARN OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S EARLY ADVENTURES.

"If you please, sir—"

"You may go back to your seat, Bunter."

"If you please, sir, the book doesn't belong to me. A fellow in the Third Form lent it to me, and I've promised to return it after tea."

"Ah, that alters the case! You will write out fifty lines of Virgil instead. Go back to your place. I will leave the book on my desk, and you may take it as you go out after the lesson."

"Please, sir—"

"Another word, and I shall cane you!"

Billy Bunter slowly returned to his place. There was a gloomy expression on his fat, spectacled face.

He had taken up the subject of hypnotism with his usual enthusiasm. He had imagined himself to have a gift for it, and Professor Fozzleum's book was to impart to him the technical knowledge required. He had been reading the book at every available moment during the day, and he had an assorted mass of knowledge mixed up in his brain as a result.

Levison leaned towards him as he passed. Levison, the most mischievous boy in the Form, and whose mischief was seldom good-natured, saw an opportunity for a joke. Mr. Quelch had turned away to chalk something in decimals on the blackboard, and Levison was unobserved by the master.

"Hold on, Bunter!" he whispered. Bunter glanced at him. "I say, don't take it like that!" muttered Levison. "You were telling me at dinner that you have studied hypnotism—"

"So I have."

"And that you have a great natural gift for it."

"My natural powers in that line are marvellous."

"And that you could hypnotise me if you liked."

"So I could."

"Then why don't you hypnotise Mr. Quelch?"

Bunter started. The idea had not occurred to him. His eyes blinked excitedly behind his big glasses. Levison glanced towards the master. Mr. Quelch was still chalking, and would probably do so for a few minutes.

"Why don't you do it, then?" whispered Levison encouragingly.

"You could make him give you your book back and rescind those fifty lines. Then you could make him let you read through the rest of the lesson."

"By Jove! So I could!"

"But perhaps you haven't sufficient confidence in yourself?"

"Ye-es, I've lots of confidence, only—only I haven't hypnotised anybody yet, and if I failed I should get a licking."

"But would you fail, when you know all about it?"

"No, that's true. I don't see how I could."

"Go it!" muttered Levison. "He'll be turning round in a minute. Look here, you can try on me."

"How do you mean?"

"You can hypnotise me. Then tell me to do something, and if I do it, it will show that I'm under the 'fluence."

"Good!"

"Go ahead, then!" whispered Levison.

Billy Bunter, with one eye nervously on the broad back of the Form-master across the room, commenced to make some mysterious passes before Levi-

son's face, at the same time fixing a steady glare on him.

Levison's eyes half-closed. Billy Bunter almost trembled with eagerness. The influence was making itself felt with amazing rapidity. It was no dream! It was not idle fancy! He was a hypnotist—the real thing!

"Levison!" he whispered.

The new boy in the Remove did not reply. The fellows near at hand were almost choking with suppressed mirth, but Bunter had no eyes for that. It was clear to the simplest there that Levison was shamming. But Bunter was too keen and enthusiastic on the subject to think anything of the kind.

"Levison!" he whispered again. Levison did not move or speak. "Raise your right arm," Billy Bunter whispered eagerly.

Levison slowly raised his right arm. Billy Bunter felt a thrill of triumph. He had succeeded. He was a hypnotist. He made some reverse passes and whispered again:

"Wake up!"

Levison appeared to start out of a dream.

"I—I— Did you hypnotise me, Bunter?" he murmured.

"Rather! You went right off, and I

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**Bunter has tried all ways of getting a feed on the cheap, but he was never more successful than when he tries hypnotising the tuckshop dame!**

~~~~~

made you move your right arm up and then down again."

"Wonderful!"

"Marvellous!" whispered Bulstrode.

"Try it on Quelch, Bunter."

Billy Bunter nodded.

"Rather!"

"You're going to try?"

"Yes. Just you wait till he turns round," said Billy Bunter.

As if he had heard, Mr. Quelch turned round at that moment. He fixed his cold, grey eyes on Bunter.

"Someone was whispering," he said. "Bunter, why are you not in your place?"

Bunter made no reply. But his actions were more amazing to Form and Form-master than any words could have been. Those of the Form who had been near enough to hear understood; the others concluded that Bunter had suddenly gone mad.

For, instead of speaking, or going to his place, Bunter raised both hands and commenced to make a series of mesmeric passes, his spectacled eyes being at the time intently fixed on Mr. Quelch.

The Remove master was so utterly astonished that he stood as if petrified, gazing at Billy Bunter. The young hypnotist thrilled with excitement. The master did not move or speak. The 'fluence was evidently "on."

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**Hard on the Hypnotist!**

"BUNTER, you ass!" Harry Wharton muttered the words in a tone of warning. Every eye in the Remove was fixed on Billy Bunter now. But the amateur hypnotist did not take any notice. The 'fluence was on and Billy

Bunter had no time to attend to anything else.

Really, Bunter was justified in his belief that Mr. Quelch was under the mysterious influence of those mesmeric passes. The Form-master stood quite still, his eyes wide open, his jaw dropping—staring at Billy Bunter in dumbfounded amazement. But this did not last long.

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch rapped out the word like a clap of thunder. Bunter was so startled that he stopped making the passes, and stared in dismay at the Form-master with his hands still in the air. The 'fluence was evidently not on, after all.

"Bunter!"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Are you mad?"

"Mad, sir?"

"What are you doing?" shouted Mr. Quelch. "Are you mad, boy? How dare you perform those ridiculous antics in the class-room?"

Billy Bunter jumped.

"Ridiculous antics, sir?"

Mr. Quelch did not waste any more time in words. He made a dive for Bunter, seized him by the collar, and jerked him out before the class. Then he fixed a glare on him that might have withered a basilisk.

"Now, Bunter, explain yourself."

"Explain myself, sir?" said Bunter, who had an unfortunate habit of repeating words that were addressed to him when he was scared—a most exasperating habit.

"Yes!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Why were you standing there making those absurd gestures?"

"Absurd gestures, sir?"

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath and took a cane from his desk.

"Hold out your hand, Bunter!"

"My—my hand, sir?"

"Yes, and at once!"

"But, sir, if you please—"

"Hold out your hand!"

"I'm sorry, sir—"

"Will you hold out your hand, or shall I send you into the headmaster's study to be flogged?" thundered the Form-master.

"Flogged, sir?"

Mr. Quelch lost all patience. He gripped Bunter by the collar and dragged him with a jerk towards the door. Levison, looking rather pale, rose in his place.

"If you please, Mr. Quelch—"

"Silence, Levison!"

"I can explain, sir."

"Do you mean that you can explain Bunter's absurd conduct, Levison?" said Mr. Quelch, stopping. "Well, you may speak."

"It—it was a joke, sir."

"A joke of Bunter's?"

"No, sir."

"What do you mean, Levison? Explain yourself immediately."

"I—I put him up to it, sir."

There was a murmur of amazement in the Remove. There was not a fellow in the Form who had ever expected Levison to own up like this.

Mr. Quelch stared at Levison. From his observation of the boy's character he had not expected it either. He knew that Levison was suspicious, mischievous, and not good-natured. That there might be a strong sense of honour along with these faults was possible, but one would not have guessed it.

"Levison! So you have imposed on Bunter's simplicity, is that it?"

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"Y-e-es, sir."

"I am glad you have the frankness to own up, Levison. Go back to your place, Bunter. Levison, come here."

Gladly enough Bunter resumed his place. His first experience in hypnotism had not ended favourably, and it was dawning upon him that Levison had been "rotting" in pretending to be under the influence.

Levison stepped out before the class. All eyes were on him.

"You have acted in a disrespectful way towards your Form-master in playing this absurd trick," said Mr. Quelch. "I have before had to warn you that the class-room was not the place for jokes. You will take the punishment I intended to give Bunter."

Levison received three stinging cuts on each hand, and he went back to his place very white and wriggling like an eel.

The lesson was resumed, and the Remove followed their Form-master on a thrilling excursion among decimal fractions. But at last the welcome hour of dismissal arrived.

Bunter ventured to take his book from the Form-master's desk as he passed, and he immediately proceeded to a quiet corner of the Close, where he could sit under a tree and bury himself in his studies.

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh, the chums of Study No. 1, came out together, as they usually did. Bob Cherry hurried off for the cricket gear, while the others walked slowly down towards the junior ground.

There was a thoughtful shade on Harry Wharton's handsome face. Frank Nugent tapped him on the arm with a laugh.

"Penny for your thoughts, Harry—if they're worth it."

"The thoughtfulness is great," remarked Hurree Singh, "and the worthfulness should be terrific."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's nothing. I was only thinking about that chap Levison."

Nugent nodded approvingly.

"It was decent of him to own up like that, and I for one never expected anything of the sort."

"I thought there was some good in him," said Harry quietly. "He isn't an easy fellow to get on with by any means, but he has shown that he's got his good points."

"His manner is against him," remarked Nugent dryly.

Wharton coloured slightly.

"There was a time, not so long ago, when I heard that said of me," he said awkwardly. "I believe in giving a chap a chance."

"He's had chances enough, but he's a carping, suspicious rotter!" said Nugent. "No getting out of that."

"Ratherfully," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, with a nod of assent.

"Well, you know what we agreed on," said Wharton.

"Yes," smiled Nugent. "You're going to bring him to a sane outlook—make a decent fellow of him—but in my opinion you'll need to get Billy Bunter to hypnotise him to make him play the game."

"There's the esteemed rotter," the nabob remarked, nodding towards Levison, who stood under the elms rubbing his hands. "He seems to be still experiencing the painfulness of the castigation."

"No wonder," grinned Nugent. "Quelch laid it on as if he meant it."

"Keep on, you chaps," said Wharton abruptly. "I want to speak to him."

"Oh, all right!"

Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh strolled on, and Harry Wharton

crossed to Levison. The latter looked up at him with an extremely sour expression.

"I say, Levison, it was decent of you to own up like that!" exclaimed Harry Wharton impulsively. "I—"

"Was it?" said Levison sourly. "What else could I do?"

"Well, nothing; but—"

"But you didn't think I would," said Levison, with a sneer.

"Some fellows wouldn't have done it."

"And you thought I was one of them."

"Well, I—"

"You were surprised, of course. You thought I was cad enough to let that ass Bunter take the licking. Thank you for your opinion of me, Wharton!"

Wharton had spoken to Levison in his candid way on a frank impulse. But he realised the next moment that he had made a mistake. There was one thing one could always be sure of about Levison—that he would never attribute a word or an action to the right motive.

"I didn't think you would take it like that, Levison."

"Haven't I stated the facts correctly?"

"Well, yes; but—"

"That's enough."

"I only meant to say that it was decent of you, and—"

"I don't want your commendation, thank you!"

"You're enough to try any fellow's patience, I think, Levison," said Harry, with a burst of anger. "It's very hard to keep civil with you."

"Don't try, then. I don't want you to speak to me—in fact, I'd much rather you didn't."

"Very well," said Wharton abruptly. And he strode away.

### No Cash!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Tea ready, Bunter?"

The chums of the Remove had finished their cricket practice. Billy Bunter, who shared Study No. 1 with them, was waiting for them to come off the ground.

"No, Cherry, tea isn't ready. I was so interested in my book that I forgot all about tea."

"You young villain!"

"Well, you fellows forgot it, too."

"That's different. We were playing cricket."

"The differentness is terrific!"

"Well, I was studying Professor Foozleum's book on hypnotism. I've had to give it back now; but I've made notes, and fortunately I have the whole thing at my finger-tips now."

"That's all very well," Nugent remarked. "But what about tea?"

"You've forgotten something else. There isn't anything for tea," explained Bunter. "That's what I've come down to speak to you about. What do you want me to get at Mrs. Mimble's shop?"

"Nothing, as far as I'm concerned," said Bob Cherry promptly. "I'm stony, and I owe Mrs. Mimble two bob already against my Saturday's pocket-money."

"'Twas ever thus on a Friday night," sighed Nugent. "I'm down to my last twopenny."

"The wantfulness of the cash is terrific. My honourable pockets are crumful of emptiness," remarked the nabob.

"What about you, Wharton?"

"I'm afraid I'm in the same state, Bunter."

"Well, fortunately your credit is good with Mrs. Mimble," said Billy Bunter. "You can run up to any tune you like."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I can't run up to a higher tune than I can pay," he said.

"Oh, that's all right! You have your allowance to-morrow."

"It's booked. I owe Mrs. Mimble three shillings, and two in the village, and there are my subscriptions due. I shall be stony after I get it."

"Look here, Wharton, that's all rot, you know. You have a larger allowance than most of us."

"It's booked, I tell you."

"Well, you can run up an account with Mrs. Mimble, and pay any time."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Can't be done, Bunter. It's all right; we can have tea in Hall for once."

"Of course we can," said Nugent. "Let's get along before it's over. I'm jolly hungry."

"I say, you fellows, wait a minute! We can't have tea in Hall!"

"Why not?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors indignantly through his big glasses.

"Because I can't feed on bread-and-scraps and weak tea, after what I've been accustomed to," he said. "I'm surprised at your thinking of such a thing."

"Seems to me to be no choice in the matter."

"Wharton can run up an account."

"Don't be an ass, Bunter! I couldn't run up an account I couldn't pay."

"You could pay it some time."

"Perhaps—perhaps not."

"Well, suppose it ran up, Colonel Wharton would pay it rather than have Mrs. Mimble complain to the Head, and get you into a row."

"Do you want me to knock your head against the wall, Bunter?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then don't propose anything of that kind again!"

"I don't see anything wrong in my proposition. I'm not the fellow to propose anything dishonest, I hope. I heard your uncle say to you that you were always to let him know if you wanted anything."

"Ass! That's because he can rely on me to keep within a decent limit."

"H'm! Rather rotten to have an uncle offer to let you have anything, so long as you don't ask for it."

"You young ass, it isn't like that!"

"Still, we can fix it up all right," said Bunter eagerly. "You can run up a few shillings with Mrs. Mimble this evening, and pay her in full to-morrow morning."

"But I tell you I shan't have any money."

"That's all right. I'll lend you some."

"You haven't got any."

"That's all you know."

"You young Shylock!" exclaimed Nugent. "If you've got any tin, why can't you stand a feed for once?"

"I didn't say I had any tin. I shall have some to-morrow morning, though. I'm expecting a postal order."

"Oh!"

"You needn't say 'Oh!' in that sceptical way, Bob Cherry, as if you doubted a fellow's word. I'm expecting a postal order by the first post in the morning, and then I will hand

Wharton the money to pay Mrs. Mimble."

"Not good enough," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We know your postal order, Bunter."

"I assure you it's coming in the morning—I'm absolutely certain of it."

"How so?"

"Because it hasn't come to-night. I was expecting it by the evening post; but it hasn't come, so it's bound to be here at breakfast. Then you can cash it yourself, and pay Mrs. Mimble."

"Better get in before tea's cleared off," said Bob Cherry.

"I say, are you going?"

"Yes, we're going," said Bob Cherry, walking away; and the others followed him, laughing.

Bunter blinked after them indignantly.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"What am I to do for my tea?"

"Come in with us," said Nugent.

"Or go and hypnotisefully influence the honourable Mrs. Mimble," suggested Hurree Singh, with a grin. "Perhaps you may be able to runfully extend the account if you influence the charming Mrs. Mimble hypnotically."

Bunter started.

"My hat! I never thought of that!"

He watched the chums of the Remove disappear into the House. Then, with an expression of great determination, he turned his steps in the direction of the school shop.

#### Putting on the 'Fluence!

MRS. MIMBLE, the gardener's wife, had the privilege of keeping a tuckshop within the precincts of Greyfriars, and she had a thriving trade with the boys, especially the juniors.

Billy Bunter, when in funds, was her best customer; but he was seldom in funds. He owed Mrs. Mimble an account which had been standing for more than a term, and the good dame was resolute not to allow it to be added to. All Bunter's blandishments were in vain. Mrs. Mimble was firm as a rock, and the account had remained quite stationary for quite a long time. Bunter never paid anything off it; but the dame had cut her losses in that direction.

Mrs. Mimble came into the shop as Bunter entered, and she did not look pleased. Bunter had been twice in the shop that day, trying to obtain supplies on the strength of a postal order which was coming—or was not coming—on the following morning.

"You again, Master Bunter!" said Mrs. Mimble disparagingly.

"Yes, ma'am," said Billy Bunter.

"I want——"

"I can't let you have anything unless you can pay for it."

"I will settle to-morrow morning."

"Oh, run away!"

"You can run up my account to five bob and take it out of my postal order when it comes to-morrow."

"Oh, I have no patience with you, Master Bunter! I don't believe that you ever will have a postal order."

Billy Bunter looked hurt.

"That's a great deal like doubting a fellow's word, Mrs. Mimble," he said with dignity. "I hope you've always found me an honourable chap."

"Then why don't you pay your account?"

"So I will when my postal order comes. I'll have a rabbit pie——"

"No, you won't!"

"Yes, I will!" said Bunter, beginning to make passes with his hands before Mrs. Mimble's face, at the same time fixing her with a stony stare.

Mrs. Mimble stood petrified.

Billy Bunter was hypnotising her; but the good dame had never heard of Professor Foozleum, or his wonderful book, and she could only think that the fat junior had taken leave of his senses.

It was evidently not a joke, for Bunter's face was deadly serious.

His eyes blinked and blinked behind his glasses with the intensity of his stare, and his hands never ceased their motion.

"My goodness!" gasped Mrs. Mimble.

"Close your eyes," said Billy Bunter in a deep, sepulchral voice.

"Goodness gracious!"

"Hold up your right hand!"

"Gracious me!"

"Obey me instantly!"

"He's mad!"

"Obey your master, slave of my will!"

Bunter, in his intense earnestness, leaned over the little counter.

Mrs. Mimble cast a frightened glance towards her little back room; but she had to pass along this counter to reach it, and Bunter was leaning over the counter with glaring eyes and waving hands. She dared not go within reach of him.

"Woman, obey!"

Mrs. Mimble gasped faintly and staggered back against the wall, and sent a pile of stale buns clattering to the floor.

Her dazed expression was a sufficient proof to Bunter that the 'fluence was on; his eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

"Woman!"

"Dear me!"

"Obey my commands, slave of my will!" said Bunter in a deep voice and in the best style of Professor Foozleum.

"Help!"

"Silence!"

Mrs. Mimble quavered into silence. Her eyes were fixed on Bunter in terror. She feared every moment that he would leap the counter, seize the ham knife, and attack her with maniacal fury.

"Ah, the 'fluence is fairly on this time!" murmured Billy Bunter. "It didn't work well with Quelch, but I wasn't in practice then. You only have to get your hand in. Woman!" he went on aloud. "Do you acknowledge your master?"

"Deary me!"

"Are you the slave of my will?"

"Good gracious!"

"Dare you disobey my commands?" thundered Bunter.

Mrs. Mimble thought of the narrow counter and the ham knife.

"Don't injure a poor woman, Master Bunter!"

"Who wants to injure you?" said Bunter, chuckling at his success—and his chuckle seemed to the frightened woman like that of a maniac gloating over a helpless victim. "Hold up your right hand, woman!"

If anything had been wanted to convince Mrs. Mimble that Billy Bunter was really mad, this would have been enough; but she obeyed and humbly elevated her right hand in the air, trembling in every limb the while.

"Now put it down again."

Mrs. Mimble lowered her hand.

"Now close your eyes."

Mrs. Mimble closed her eyes.

"Now open them again."

The amazed and terrified dame obeyed.



"Woman!" said Bunter, making passes with his hands, his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "Dear me!" gasped Mrs. Mimble, thinking Bunter had gone mad. "Obey my commands, slave of my will!" went on the Owl of the Remove. "Help!" tried the tuckshop dame.

Bunter felt a thrill of triumph. It was the real thing at last, and no mistake about that. He was an accomplished hypnotist. Mrs. Mimble could not be suspected of "rotting," like Levison.

"Very good!" said Bunter. "Listen, slave of my will! Will you obey me?"

"Ye-e-es," stammered the dame.

"Will you trust me with grub?"

"Ye-e-es—oh, yes!"

"To the tune of ten shillings?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Give me that basket."

Mrs. Mimble placed the basket on the counter.

"Now fill it with the things I point out."

The trembling dame, utterly unnerved by the proximity of a dangerous maniac and a sharp ham knife, obeyed unquestioningly.

Billy Bunter did not stint himself.

There was nothing dishonest about running up an account which he was going to pay in the morning—at least, from Bunter's point of view.

As he had been put to the trouble of hypnotising the good dame he meant to have a good feed while he was about it.

Ham and tongue, cold beef, and pickles went into the basket, with a new loaf and a pat of fresh butter.

Then marmalade, jam, cake, biscuits, and various kinds of fruit—as many varieties as Mrs. Mimble's little shop could supply.

Then Billy Bunter, like Alexander, looked round for fresh worlds to conquer.

"I'll have some of the cream puffs," he said, "and als' some of the candied fruits; they're nice."

"Yes, M-M-Master B-B-Bunter."

"And some bottles of ginger-pop."

"Ye-e-es."

"And some lemonade."

"Ye-e-es."

"Can you recommend anything else?"

"N-n-n-no."

"I think that will do. Just shove in some nuts. You can make up the account afterwards; I'm in a hurry."

"Ye-e-es."

"I think that's about all."

Billy Bunter took the basket. It weighed a good deal, but it was a welcome load. Then he made some backward passes before Mrs. Mimble's face in the manner indicated by Professor Foozleum, the hypnotist.

"Awake!" he said. "Awake in five minutes and be silent."

"Ye-e-es."

It seemed rather extraordinary to Mrs. Mimble for even a madman to tell her to wake up in five minutes when she was wide awake already.

Bunter made a final pass, slung the basket over his arm, and walked out of the shop with a grin of triumph on his fat face.

Mrs. Mimble staggered into her little parlour and sank down into the nearest chair, all of a tremble, as she afterwards described it to the cook.

She felt that she had had a narrow escape. Billy Bunter's glimmering spectacles, his waving hands, and the shining ham knife seemed to be still dancing before her terrified eyes.

Bunter entered the house and paused at the open door of the dining-room. The chums of the Remove were taking their places at the Form table.

"I say, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton looked round.

Bunter beckoned to him and pointed to the basket he was carrying. It was enough. As he went upstairs to the study he was followed by the Famous Four.

### Something Like a Feed!

**H**ARRY WHARTON had never been more amazed in his life than when he saw the basket slung on Bunter's arm, and learned from Bunter's expression what it contained. The others were equally amazed. They had not dreamed for a moment that Mrs. Mimble would listen to the voice of the charmer. But the basket was heavy, and Billy Bunter's triumph was evidently genuine.

Billy Bunter frequently felt that he was a fellow born to command, but he had never yet been able to get his claims to leadership acknowledged. But just now, as he marched upstairs followed by the Famous Four, he felt that he was in his proper place at last. He swelled visibly with triumph.

His walk—his waddle, Bob Cherry called it—had become a regular strut by the time he reached the study, and his nose was high in the air as he entered that famous apartment. He set the basket down with a clump, and there was a musical clink of ginger-beer bottles knocking together.

The Famous Four followed him in; they had not spoken a word. They looked at each other and they looked at Billy Bunter. Bunter, with an air of conscious superiority, inserted his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat and looked at them.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," said Harry Wharton, laughing, "what have you got in that basket?"

"What do you think?"

"Old clothes," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Grub, I suppose," said Nugent.

"Right!"

"Where did you get it?"

"At the school shop."

"Anybody there at the time?" asked Bob Cherry.

Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry through his big spectacles.

"Really, Cherry, I hope you don't mean to insinuate that I—"

"Well, I jolly well know that Mrs. Mimble wouldn't trust you," said Bob bluntly. "Nobody who knows you would do so."

"The proof of the pudding's in the eating," said Billy Bunter disdainfully. "Look in the basket."

He opened the basket and displayed to view the good things packed therein. There was no doubt about it!

Billy Bunter had secured a really first-class feed, and the mouths of the hungry Removites watered as they looked at the pile.

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry.

"Spiffing!" exclaimed Nugent.

"The rippingfulness is great," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, "and the spiffingfulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton dropped his hand lightly on Billy Bunter's shoulder.

"I say, Bunt, this is all right, isn't it?"

"All right? I should think you could rely on my taste in choosing grub!" said Billy Bunter, with great dignity.

"I don't mean that. But you were stony—"

"What about that?"

"And these things must come to five or six shillings."

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"Nearer ten," said Bunter, with a fat smile.

"Well, Mrs. Mimble wouldn't trust you for two bob, let alone ten. Before we start on the grub, Bunty, you had better explain."

"I don't see that there's anything to explain."

"Yes, there is, my son. Was Mrs. Mimble in the shop when you had these things?"

"Yes, she was."

"Did she give them to you?"

"Yes."

"Then she has trusted you?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Then how did she come to do so?"

"I hypnotised her," said Billy Bunter calmly.

There were four exclamations in the study.

"Hypnotised her!"

"Yes."

"You young ass—"

"You can call me names if you like, Cherry; but I think my having the grub is pretty plain proof that I hypnotised her."

The chums of the Remove looked at one another blankly. There certainly seemed to be something in Bunter's contention. Mrs. Mimble was known never to give credit to Bunter. She must certainly have been under some strange influence to trust him to the extent of ten shillings, which there was not the slightest prospect of his ever paying, as she could not fail to know.

"Blessed if I understand this," said Bob Cherry. "This hypnotism is all rot!"

"The rotfulness is terrific."

"Looks at it if it were genuine, doesn't it?" said Billy Bunter, with the calmness of one who knew that his position was invincible.

"There's something I don't understand about it," said Harry Wharton. "I don't half like this, either."

"The grub's all right," said Nugent. "And I'm jolly hungry."

"I'll jolly soon have the sausages cooked," said Bunter, who was already greasing the frying-pan. "It's my treat. There's enough this time. You fellows can lay the table."

Further remarks addressed to Bunter were unheard and unanswered. He was busy cooking, and when Bunter was cooking he had no attention to spare for anything else, except for taking snacks.

"Wharton's brow was rather thoughtful."

"I don't understand this," he said.

"What does it matter?" grinned Bob Cherry. "The grub's all right. Mrs. Mimble must have chosen to trust Bunter."

"I suppose so, but it's very strange."

"The hypnotism's all rot, of course."

"Of course."

"But it's curious she should trust Bunter, and to such a tune, too."

"I can't understand it."

"Perhaps that postal order is really coming at last," grinned Nugent. "Somebody said that the age of miracles was past, but it might happen."

"The miraclefulness would be great."

"Well, I suppose Mrs. Mimble knows her own business best," said Harry Wharton. "Anyway, this feed is like corn in Egypt, and it will last some time. As we're scoffing it, we can make it up to Mrs. Mimble if there's any mistake."

"That's right."

"The cashfulness will soon be great," the nabob remarked. "The stoniness is temporaryful."

"Anyway, here's the feed," said Bob Cherry. "How long are those sausages going to be, Bunter?"

"They'll be done by the time you've got the kettle boiling."

"Jolly hot in here with that fire."

"If you can think of a way of cooking sausages without a fire, Bob Cherry, I'll retire, and you can take my place as cook."

"I wouldn't take your place near that fire just now for all the sausages that ever sopped," said Bob Cherry. "I'll go and fill the kettle."

The smell of sausages and bacon was very appetising to the hungry juniors. Bunter's treat looked like being a success.

A corner of the fire was spared for the tin kettle, and it was soon boiling. Nugent made the tea and Wharton cut the bread. Bob Cherry spread the assorted delicacies on the table. There was an array that would have made the Remove's many mouths water if they had been there.

"Done!" said Bunter.

"Good! Now we shan't be long."

Bunter had cooked the sausages and bacon to a turn. The juniors fell to with keen appetites, and the provender disappeared at a great rate.

Bunter, as usual, came out strong. On this occasion he excelled himself, doubtless feeling that he was called upon to do extra justice to his own treat, won by his own wonderful hypnotic powers.

"How do you like it, you fellows?" asked Bunter, beaming round with his glistening spectacles, in a brief interval when he was obliged to rest for a moment before attacking a new dish.

"Ripping!" said Wharton.

"Jolly!" said Nugent.

"Rather!" said Bob Cherry.

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"Glad you like it. I dare say you

will admit now that there's something in hypnotism, and that my wonderful powers—"

"My dear chap, you've shown wonderful powers, and no mistake," said Bob Cherry.

"Ah, you admit—"

"Yes; I've been watching you."

"Watching me?"

"Yes; watching your wonderful powers. A fellow who can put away eight sausages and four rashers of bacon, and then start on rabbit pies, can lay claim to wonderful powers, I should think."

"I wasn't speaking of that."

"Oh, weren't you? I was!"

"I was speaking of my wonderful powers as a hypnotist."

"Pass the jam."

"My wonderful powers—"

"And the cold beef."

"My wonderful—"

"And the mustard."

"Really, Cherry—"

"And another plate."

"You can tell that hypnotic yarn to the marines," said Nugent. "But you can cook—I'll say that for you."

"I think I've proved—"

"You've proved that Mrs. Mimble suffers from temporary attacks of aberration, I think," said Wharton, laughing.

"Oh, really—"

"Pass the jam tarts."

"I'm going to develop my wonderful powers in this direction," said Bunter. "Mrs. Mimble is the slave of my will—"

"The what of your which?"

"The slave of my will. I don't see why I shouldn't make her stand a feed like this every day, by daily exercise of my wonderful powers."

"Who's going to pay the bill?"

"I hadn't thought of that. The chief thing is to get the grub, of course. The account need not be paid—"

"Is that the Bunter variety of honesty?"

"I hope you don't mean to hint that I could possibly be dishonest, Cherry. I don't mean that the account should never be paid. That would be dishonest—extremely dishonest—and I'm surprised at your proposing such a thing."

"What?"

"I'm surprised at your proposing that Mrs. Mimble should never be paid."

"But I didn't, you fat idiot; you did!"

"It's no good shouting at me, Cherry. And I don't see what you want to begin to prevaricate for. There are only friends here, and we shan't tell about you."

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"You—you—"  
"The passfulness of the muscatels would be an obliging service to my worthy self."

"Here you are, Inky."

"I say, you fellows, I hope you don't think for a moment that I could adopt Cherry's suggestion of leaving Mrs. Mumble's bill unpaid indefinitely. It need not be paid at once, though. The account can run up—"

"For a few years, I suppose," grinned Nugent.

"Well, since you suggest a few years—"

"But I don't!"

"Nugent suggests a few years," said Billy Bunter, who could be deaf as well as short-sighted when he liked.

"And I really don't see why the account shouldn't run up till I am grown up, and then I shall have lots of money, and can settle with interest."

"Where will you get the money from?"

"Oh, a fellow of my intellect is bound to get on. When I get into my father's business, I shall make things hum. I've offered advice to my father several times when I've been home for the holidays, in spite of the ungrateful way he receives it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But as I was saying when Cherry interrupted me with that rather questionable suggestion about paying Mrs. Mumble. As I was saying, there are few directions on all sides in which I can develop my wonderful powers as a hypnotist."

"Better try Quelch again."

"I shall certainly try him again, but I think I shall leave him till last, in case of accidents. I shall try on Garberry next. He's the perfect one who puts the lights out to-night, you know, and if I hypnotise him, we can take it out of him for being such a beastly bully. It would be great fun to make him duck himself in water, or go and start fighting, for instance, with that other beast, Cleek."

"There was a tap, and a junior looked in at the door of the study. Billy Bunter looked round."

"You can travel along, Skinner."

"It's not Skinner; it's Hazeldene," grinned the Removee, coming into the study.

"Oh, it's you, Vaseline! Did you smell the sausages cooking?"

"No, I didn't," said Hazeldene indignantly. "I've come here—"

"You can have a feed if you like," said Billy Bunter, waving a fat hand magnanimously. "There's lots, and there's, practically, no limit to the supply I can get in the future. I'm thinking of standing a series of feeds to the whole Form, and I think the fellows will probably give Wharton the push, and elect me captain of the Remove. After all, a captain's business is to look after the commissariat first of all, and I'm the fellow for—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at, Vaseline."

"There will be something to weep about soon, I think," said Hazeldene.

"Mrs. Mumble has been to Quelch."

"Eh?"

"I know jolly well, you're not really mad—"

"Mad?"

"Yes; mad!—You're not?"

"Of course I'm not."

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"Of course, you couldn't keep it up."

"Keep it up?" said the bewildered Bunter. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Oh, come off—you know!"

"What are you driving at, Hazeldene?" said Harry Wharton, who saw that the junior had news of some sort.

"What has Mrs. Mumble been to Mr. Quelch about?"

"About Bunter scaring her in the tuckshop."

"Scaring her!"

"Yes. She's complaining, far and wide."

"I didn't scare her!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "I hypnotised her."

"You whatted her?" howled Hazeldene.

"I hypnotised her."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Hazeldene.

"My only summer hat!"

"It's not a laughing matter."

"Not for you, my fat youth!" gurgled Hazeldene. "Mrs. Mumble has stated distinctly that you were mad, and threatened to murder her with the ham knife!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"What a shocking story-teller!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I tell you I hypnotised her, and there's nothing against that in the college rules, so Quelch ought not to interfere."

"Well, there's nothing in the college rules against murdering old ladies with a ham knife," said Hazeldene. "But it wouldn't be allowed, all the same."

"I say, you fellows—"

"The long and short of it is that Quelch has sent for you, and you're to go to his study," said Hazeldene.

"I've come to tell you."

And he departed, yelling with laughter. The chums of the Remove were laughing, too. The true explanation of the hypnotist's success seemed very funny. Billy Bunter blinked round indignantly.

"Of course, this is all rot," he remarked. "Mrs. Mumble has changed her mind about trusting me, and has made up this yarn. It's all rot on the face of it. How could she have thought I was mad?"

"She may have judged by appearances."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Anyway, you'd better go to Quelch's study," said Nugent. "Don't worry about the feed; we'll finish it while you're gone."

"I suppose I'd better go."

"I suppose you had, or Quelch may come here and yank you along. And let it be a lesson to you never to hypnotise harmless and necessary old ladies."

"If you hypnotise anybody," said Bob Cherry, "let it be Quelch. But, in that case, you ought to give us the tip, and let us come along to see the fun. And it would be a good idea to put some old exercise-books in the seat of your—"

But Billy Bunter waited to hear no more. The master of the Remove was not to be trifled with, and the fat junior hurried away to interview the Form-master in his study, with the feeling he might have had if he had been going to interview a lion in his den.

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