

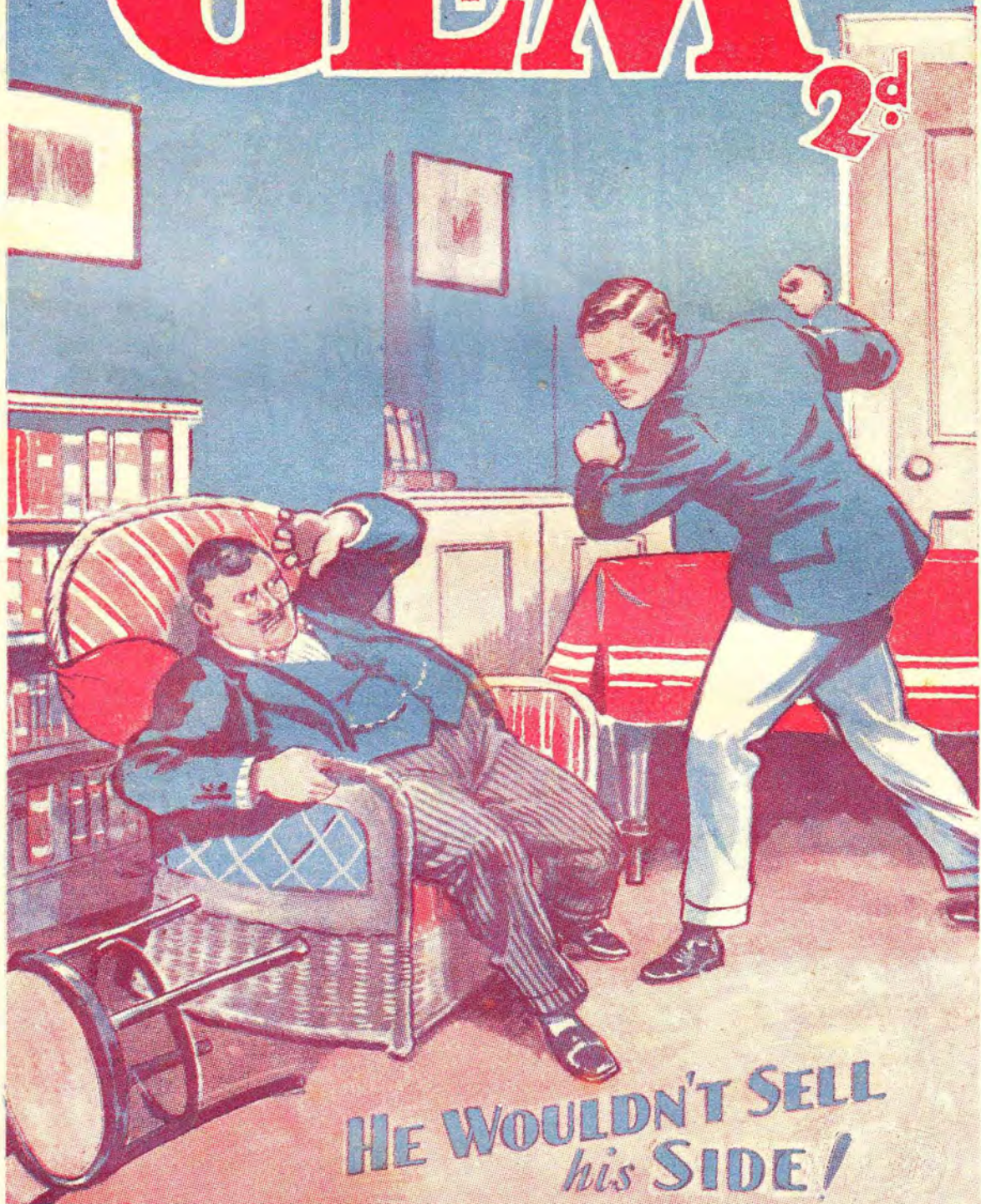
"THE GREYFRIARS VENTRILOQUIST!"

FEATURING
BILLY BUNTER INSIDE.

The

GEM

2d



HE WOULDN'T SELL
his SIDE!

IT WAS THE CRICKET MATCH OF THE SEASON—BUT EVERY RUN KILDARE SCORED FOR ST. JIM'S BROUGHT THE DISGRACE OF HIS COUSIN NEARER!

HE WOULDN'T SELL



"Going to beat Lanchester—wot?" said Mr. Spooner. "Possibly," replied Kildare shortly. The bookmaker's affable smile vanished, and an ugly look came over his coarse red face. "There's still time, you know," he said, sinking his voice to a whisper.

CHAPTER 1.

Caught in the Act!

KILDARE of the Sixth stood at his study window, looking out over the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

His hands were thrust deep into his pockets, and there was a cloud across his brow.

Big, handsome Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, generally looked sunny and good-tempered, and frowns upon his brow were rare.

Buried in troubled thoughts, he did not hear a tap at the door of his study.

The tap was repeated, more loudly, and still Kildare did not heed. He was gazing out at the sunny quadrangle, at the trees, bright in their spring green, but hardly seeing them. His thoughts were far away.

After the second knock his study door opened. A voice, which might have been recognised as that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form, was heard:

"It's all wight, deah boys! He's gone out!"

D'Arcy walked into the study. After him came Blake, Herries, and Digby, also of the Fourth. Then came Tom

Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell.

Then Kildare turned round.

He was in the alcove of the window, and the juniors did not perceive him for the moment. The silence had convinced them that the study was unoccupied.

Some of them were carrying bundles under their arms. All of them appeared to be in a great state of merriment and high good humour.

"Must have gone out without our seeing him," said Tom Merry. "I've been keeping my eyes open, too."

"Yaas; but he's gone," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "and he can't be back till four o'clock, at the vewy earliest. Plenty of time, deah boys."

"He will be surprised when he comes in," chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare's grim brow grew grimmer. He stepped out of the window recess, and there was a general startled gasp from Tom Merry & Co. as they beheld him.

"Well," said Kildare, "what do you want?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Kildare, by gum!"

The seven juniors stared at Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's was frowning more darkly now. He could only conclude that a "rag" had been planned in his study during his absence—only the ragers had arrived while he was still there.

"So you thought I was gone out?" said Kildare.

"Ye-es," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, you'll be late, Kildare!" said D'Arcy. "The twain gets in at half-past three, you know, and it's a long walk to Wylcombe. Your cousin will be waitin' for you at the station."

"What do you know about my cousin?"

"Ahem!"

"We—we heard that you were going to meet your cousin, who's coming to see you, Kildare," murmured Blake, "and—and we—we thought you were gone."

"Yaas; we knocked, you know."

"And what were you going to do in my study while I was gone?" asked Kildare.

"Ahem!"

The juniors looked at one another. Some of them made strategic movements towards the door. Kildare's presence in the study had evidently

HIS SIDE! MARTIN CLIFFORD.

spoiled the whole scheme, whatever it was.

"Well, I'm waiting for an answer," said Kildare, taking up a cane from the table.

Again the juniors exchanged uncomfortable looks, and they looked still more uncomfortable at the cane.

"I twust you are not watty, Kildare?" ventured Arthur Augustus at last.

"What have you invaded my study for?"

"Ahem!"

"Very well, hold out your hand!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"You first, Tom Merry. You are head of the Shell, and you ought to know better than to play tricks in your head, prefect's study," said Kildare sternly.

"It—it wasn't exactly a trick, you know," stammered Tom Merry.

"What was it, then?"

"We were only goin' to surprise you, Kildare."

"In what way?"

"Ahem!"

"What have you got in those bundles?"

"Ahem!"

"What was the little game, anyway?"

"Ahem!"

"You don't seem to have anything to say for yourselves, you cheeky young rascals!" said Kildare. "I give you one more chance. What does this mean?"

"Ahem!"

Kildare made an angry gesture.

"Hold out your hand, Merry! Don't waste my time! I've got to get off! Now, then!"

Swish!

"Now you, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

Swish!

"Oh, wow! Bai Jove, I am sowwy I came here now—bai Jove!"

"My object is to make you sorry," said Kildare. "You next, Blake!"

Swish!

There were seven swishes in all. Seven juniors tucked their hands under their arms and mumbled. Kildare pointed to the door with his cane.

"Get out!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Get out!" roared Kildare.

Arthur Augustus disappeared from the study, propelled by Blake and Tom Merry. The door closed on the juniors.

Kildare, frowning, threw his cane on the table. He looked at his watch; it was exactly a quarter past three. He uttered an exclamation.

"I shall be late, by Jove!"

The captain of St. Jim's picked up his cap and hurried from the study. In the passage seven juniors were squeezing their hands dolefully. Kildare gave them a frown in parting.

"If there are any tricks in my study while I am gone, I shall know which young rascals to call to account," he said. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, when you know I am expecting a visitor."

The big Sixth Former strode on, and disappeared into the quadrangle.

Tom Merry & Co. rubbed their hands and looked at one another.

"I am changin' my opinion of Kildare!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"I have always regarded him as a weally good sort. Now I cannot help regardin' him as a beast. Wow!"

"We're going to give him a surprise," mumbled Lowther. "We've got the surprise. Yow!"

"What was he so quiet about?" growled Tom Merry. "We knocked twice. I suppose he isn't deaf all of a sudden?"

"He looked worried," remarked Blake. "Regular wrinkles in his noble brow. Perhaps his cousin is going to borrow money of him, or something."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "He certainly looked worried, and he doesn't seem so good-tempered as usual. Fancy suspecting us of ragging his study!"

"Well, we might rag Knox's study, or Cutts', but not Kildare's. He really ought to know us better," said Tom Merry, more in sorrow than in anger.

"But we forgive him. The pains are wearing off, and I forgive him."

"That's all vewy well, Tom Mewwy, but I considah—"

"And we're going to give him that surprise, all the same."

"Bai Jove!"

"Good egg!" said Blake. "We'll heap coals of fire on his head, but we'll make jolly sure the beast is off the scene first!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Eric Kildare faces a crisis in his life when he realises that the good name of his family rests in the hands of a rascally bookmaker.

And when they had ascertained that "the beast" was, indeed, well off the scene, Tom Merry & Co. returned to their captain's study to carry out their mysterious purpose, whatever it was.

CHAPTER 2.

Coals of Fire!

"LIGHT the fire!"

"You fill the kettle, Gussy!"

"And get those bundles unpacked!"

"And clear the table!"

Tom Merry & Co. were quickly busy in Kildare's study. Seven pairs of active hands made light work.

Blake knelt before the grate and began to build a fire. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy scuttled off with the kettle, taking great care to keep it clear of his elegant clobber. Lowther, Manners, and Herries began to unpack the parcels, and turn out all sorts of appetising-looking tuck. Digby found a duster and began to dust the study. Tom Merry proceeded to clear the table of the books and papers and other impedimenta that encumbered it.

It was not a "rag."

But Kildare might be forgiven for not guessing what was the real intention of the juniors. They had diffidently declined to explain when he questioned them.

Kildare was just then an object of especial interest to the juniors of the School House at St. Jim's. The big, handsome captain of the school was always popular in both Houses, but in his own House he was quite an idol.

Even juniors whom a stern sense of duty compelled him to "lick" remained devoted to him.

Tom Merry & Co., indeed, had already forgiven him the licking which he had administered to them under so unfortunate a misapprehension.

Kildare was captain of the school and captain of the first eleven.

The great Lanchester match was due on the following Wednesday, and that was a very great occasion. Kildare had been working very hard to get his eleven into top form to meet the Lanchester team, and Tom Merry wondered whether that heavy responsibility was the cause of his worried looks.

He had nothing to worry about, so far as that was concerned, for the St. Jim's First was at the very top of its form, and though Lanchester were a big and famous team, St. Jim's looked forward confidently to the match.

Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. of the New House had agreed to put off their own game for that special afternoon, when the Lanchester match came off, to cheer the first eleven on in the fray, than which there could be no greater honour done to the first eleven.

But it was not on account of Kildare's fame as a cricketer, nor in recognition of his efforts to bring the first eleven up to an unexampled pitch of form, nor even on account of his personal popularity, that Tom Merry & Co. were busying themselves in his study now.

Kildare's cousin was coming.

The juniors had never seen his cousin, and hardly heard of his existence. But it was a great occasion. For Micky Kildare had joined the Royal Air Force; it was, indeed, probable that he would arrive in uniform.

Pilot-officer Micky Kildare was to see that the fags of the School House knew how to appreciate patriotism. He would "feed" with Kildare in the study, of course, and, all unknown to Kildare, Tom Merry & Co. had laid a deep scheme to have a stunning feed all ready when they came in.

That was the little game.

As Kildare was to meet his cousin at the station at half-past three—somebody had heard him tell Darrell so—the juniors had supposed that the study would be empty after three o'clock.

Unfortunately, Kildare had still been there, and had not heard their preliminary knock, being buried in a deep and gloomy reverie; and, caught in the act as they were, the juniors had not cared to explain their intention.

But, as Blake put it, it would be heaping coals of fire on old Kildare's head to carry out the programme, all the same.

So they proceeded to carry it out.

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They calculated that Kildare would get back with his cousin about four o'clock, and, instead of finding a scrappy tea ready prepared by his fag, the captain of St. Jim's would find a first-class feed, stood by his loyal followers at their own expense. It was really a great scheme.

Wally D'Arcy of the Third Form looked in while the juniors were busily engaged. Wally whistled in surprise.

"What are you kids doing here?" he demanded.

Tom Merry pointed to the door.

"Outside!" he said briefly.

"What cheek!" said D'Arcy minor indignantly. "I'm Kildare's fag!"

"We're fagging for him this afternoon."

"But I'm going to get his tea."

"We're getting his tea."

"Look here!" roared Wally. "You're not going to fag for Kildare!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" snapped Wally. "Look here, you cheeky bounders, you can clear off! I'm not having this!"

"Outside!"

"Rats!"

"Chuck him out!" said Tom.

"Hands off!" yelled Wally. "Why, you cheeky rotters—Yah! Leggo! I'll pulverise you! Yaroooh!"

Wally bumped in the passage, and Blake grinned and closed the door on him. Wally's wrathful voice was heard outside for some minutes before he departed.

Tom Merry & Co. went on with their self-imposed task.

Blake soon had the fire going, and the kettle was jammed on it. Lowther unearched the frying-pan and proceeded to clean it. Kildare's fag had left it in a somewhat "mucky" condition after the last using.

Tom was clearing the table, taking up books and papers and letters with great care, and arranging them on the desk. Everything was to be found in apple-pie order when old Kildare returned.

Suddenly Tom gave a start.

An open letter lay among the papers he was removing, and as it was upturned to his gaze, and written in a large, sprawling hand, he had read a couple of lines before he knew that it was under his nose.

"I'm in an awful fix, old man, but I'll tell you about it when I see you. It's money, of course."

Tom Merry hastily turned the letter over.

He had not, of course, had the slightest intention of looking at it. His glance had fallen on it by sheer accident as he was gathering up the papers, and the words in the big schoolboy hand were so prominent that they had fairly hit him. But he could have kicked himself for that accident.

He put the letter with the other papers on the desk and covered it with a book. His cheeks flushed as if he had been guilty of an underhand action, though he knew that he could not blame himself.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, looking at him.

"I've just seen part of a letter by accident," said Tom Merry, his flush deepening. "Of course, I didn't mean—I didn't know—but it's beastly. Kildare oughtn't to leave private letters lying open on his table."

"Well, it can't matter much," said Lowther. "Kildare hasn't any blessed guilty secret, I suppose? Wasn't a love-letter, was it?"

"No, ass!"

Tom Merry proceeded to lay the

cloth. His face was red and his brows were knitted. Quite unintentionally he had become aware of something that he knew Kildare must wish to keep strictly to himself. The words he had so unfortunately seen on the first page of that letter seemed to dance before his eyes.

He could guess that the letter was from Kildare's cousin. And now he could guess the cause of the trouble he had observed in Kildare's face, of that deep and worried thought which had made the captain of St. Jim's stay so late in his study when he ought to have been on his way to meet Micky's train.

That letter had evidently upset Kildare to the extent that he had forgotten the train he was to meet, and then, in hurrying away, he had forgotten the letter itself, and left it lying upon his table where it must have been seen by anyone who entered the study by chance. If Wally had carried out his usual fag duties in the study Wally must have seen it.

It was not the Lanchester match, evidently, that old Kildare was frowning and worrying about. It was the scrape that Micky had got into.

Tom Merry could not help feeling troubled, both because of his concern for old Kildare and because of the unfortunate way he had become possessed of that unwelcome information.

But it was useless to worry about it, and he tried to dismiss the matter from his mind as he went on with the preparations.

The table was laid, and the good things provided by the funds of the juniors were set out in enticing array.

At ten minutes to four Blake began the cooking, and Dig began to make toast. Arthur Augustus was posted at the window to watch for the captain of St. Jim's.

"I hope he won't be late," growled Blake when four o'clock rang out from the old clock tower. "These rashers won't improve by waiting. I won't start on the eggs till he's in sight."

"Sister Gus—Sister Gus, do you see anybody coming?" murmured Lowther.

"He is not comin' yet, deah boy." Arthur Augustus turned his celebrated monocle in the direction of the gates. "Bai Jove, yaas! Buck up with the eggs!"

"Make the tea, Dig!"

"Butter the toast!"

"Buck up!"

And in a moment more the study was simply buzzing and humming with activity.

CHAPTER 3.

Micky's Scrape!

KILDARE'S brow was knitted as he strode down the leafy lane towards Rylcombe. He went down the lane with his quick, springy stride. He had no time to lose. In that gloomy reverie into which his cousin's letter had plunged him he had forgotten the passage of time.

He was halfway to Rylcombe when it occurred to him that he had also forgotten Micky's letter. He had thrown it on to the study table after reading it, and left it there in his hasty departure.

He halted in the lane for a moment with an exclamation. But it was too late to return; his cousin's train was already in, and he did not want to leave Micky Kildare hanging about the station waiting for him.

"Those young rascals won't go into my study again, I imagine," muttered Kildare; "the letter's safe enough. Anyway, I can't go back."

He strode on rapidly to the village. He reached the station. The local train

had come in and gone out again, and he looked round the station in vain for his cousin.

Old Trumble, the porter, touched his cap to the captain of St. Jim's.

"I've got a message for you, Master Kildare."

"Oh, good!" said Kildare, relieved. "My cousin has come?"

"Both gentlemen have gone into the Rylcombe Arms to wait for you, sir," said Trumble. "You'll find 'em in the billiards-room, Master Kildare."

"Both?" said Kildare.

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Trumble!"

Kildare walked out of the station. The Rylcombe Arms was close at hand, and he crossed the road towards the inn. He wondered who his cousin's companion was. He had understood that Micky was coming down to St. Jim's alone.

There was a click of balls from the billiards-room as Kildare came down the passage to the open door. The captain of St. Jim's paused and looked in.

A slim, handsome young fellow of about twenty, very like Kildare, was playing. Very like Kildare in features, but his face lacked the firmness and decision that might have been seen in Kildare's. A good-natured, easy-going, careless lad he looked, full of high spirits and good-humour, and very handsome in his uniform.

A fat man in shirt-sleeves stood beside the table watching the shot, resting a cue on the floor. He was evidently Micky Kildare's companion, for there was no one else in the billiards-room, with the exception of the marker.

Kildare looked at the fat gentleman, and his face set a little. The man was dressed loudly, and wore a large gold watchchain. His fat face was very red, his hair, parted in the middle, reeked with pomade, and his manner was pronounced.

Click!

The ball ran smoothly and touched the red, and rolled into a corner pocket.

"Bravo!" said the fat gentleman.

"You'll run out in one break, Micky!"

"I'm getting my hand in, Spooner."

said the young man, chalking his cue.

"Is that you, Eric?"

He caught sight of Kildare in the doorway.

Kildare came into the billiards-room. Micky shook hands with him, and presented his companion. Mr. Spooner extended a fat hand to Kildare, which the captain of St. Jim's could not refuse to take, little as he liked shaking hands with a man like Mr. Spooner. Billiards sharp and sporting man was written all over Mr. Spooner.

"You weren't at the station, Eric," said Pilot-Officer Kildare. "Spooner proposed a hundred up to kill time. Do you mind if we finish?"

"Oh, don't mind me!" said Kildare.

He stood looking on. He was not surprised to see Micky Kildare run up to ninety-five, leaving Mr. Spooner at sixty, and then to see Mr. Spooner run out in a single break. Micky Kildare paid over a pound; the game was evidently for a "quid."

A slightly bitter look came over Kildare's face for a moment. His cousin was in debt—in an "awful fix," as he described it—but he could afford to play billiards for a pound.

"Well, now we'll come along," remarked Micky. "You've got to get to Lanchester, Spooner."

"Yes; I can get a train here," said Mr. Spooner. "By the way, I think you mentioned that your cousin, Master Kildare here, is captain of the team playing Lanchester on Wednesday."

"That is so," said Kildare.
 "A big team, Lanchester, for your school eleven," Mr. Spooner remarked, with a very curious look at Kildare.
 "We hope to keep our end up," said Kildare shortly.
 Mr. Spooner smiled.
 "I'm interested in cricket," he remarked.
 "Really?" said Kildare.
 He was surprised to hear that a man of Mr. Spooner's description was interested in anything so clean and decent as cricket.
 "Professionally," explained Mr. Spooner.
 "Oh!"

Kildare might have remarked that it was a matter of principle, but politeness forbade him, especially as his cousin had just been betting with Mr. Spooner.
 "You really think you can beat them?" pursued the bookmaker thoughtfully. "Well, well, if you do, it will be bad for somebody—very bad!"
 "Do you mean there are bets on the game?" asked Kildare.
 "Yes, rather—eaps!"
 "Then I shall be glad to hear that the money has been lost," said Kildare deliberately. "Anybody who would bet on cricket matches ought to lose his money!"

Lanchester," said Mr. Spooner discontentedly.
 Kildare burst into a laugh.
 "Well, it's 'ard," said Mr. Spooner—"I call it 'ard!"
 And, having delivered that statement, Mr. Spooner put on his coat and took his leave.
 Kildare's brow was grim as he left the Rylcombe Arms with his cousin.
 "Surely that blackguard isn't a friend of yours, Micky?" he exclaimed, as they took the road to St. Jim's.
 Micky coloured.
 "No, of course not; only an acquaintance," he said. "He happened to be



Kildare stared into his study in amazement as he arrived with his cousin. The room looked like a pandemonium, as Tom Merry & Co. and the fags fought amidst the wreckage of the furniture and tea-things. The juniors had planned a surprise for the captain of St. Jim's. They had succeeded—with a vengeance!

"But county cricket ain't what it was for us sort," added Mr. Spooner. "So I'm takin' a bit of interest in smaller matches, hoping to make a bit, you know. Suppose I was to ask you, as a friend, Master Kildare, whether you can beat Lanchester?"
 Micky Kildare was looking very uneasy. He knew well enough that Kildare did not approve of Mr. Spooner, and he was anxious for the interview to be over. But Mr. Spooner was in search of information. To Micky's relief, the captain of St. Jim's replied civilly.
 "We hope to beat Lanchester," he said.
 "If you'd like to put something on it—" began Mr. Spooner.
 "Thank you; I don't bet!"
 "No? Matter of taste, I suppose," said Mr. Spooner.

"By George!"
 "That kind of thing ought to be put a stop to, unless cricket is to be degraded to the same level as racing."
 Mr. Spooner laughed.
 "Come on, Eric!" said Micky uneasily.
 "It's time we got along, and you'd better look after your train, Spooner."
 "That's all right," said Mr. Spooner.
 "Have you heard from Lanchester lately, Master Kildare? I've heard that three of their best men have joined the county side."
 "That's true," said Kildare.
 "Then you'll have an easier thing than you expected in the match."
 "They've got good men to replace them, I think."
 "But it makes it mighty uncertain for fellows who have put their little bit on

coming to Lanchester, so we travelled together. I fancy he will be hard hit over the Lanchester match if your school pulls it off. There's a lot of betting on it, you know, and some knowing dogs seem to have done Spooner brown. Is your team in great form?"
 "First rate."
 "Well, I suppose the other party wormed that out, and also got information that some of the Lanchester men were leaving to join the county," remarked Micky. "They've led Spooner on to give them odds. He was willing to lay three to one against St. Jim's, looking on it as a dead cert; but this new development seems likely to put him in the cart. If you win, he will be in a hole. I doubt if he could pay out."
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CHAPTER 4.

Kildare Gets the Surprise!

"Serve him right!" said Kildare. "What right has he to bring his disgraceful racing custom into cricket?"

"You were always a solemn old fogey," said Micky, laughing.

"Look here, Micky. I'm over two years younger than you are, and it isn't my place to give you advice, but the less you have to do with fellows of that kind, the better!" said Kildare abruptly. "You can't afford to lose money, for one thing. Your pater can't help you if you get into debt."

"No, worse luck!"

"Then give that chap the go-by."

"I can't."

"Why not, Micky?"

"Because he's the chap I owe money to," said Micky.

Kildare compressed his lips.

"How much?" he asked quietly.

"Fifty pounds."

Kildare's eyes opened wide.

"Fifty pounds!" he exclaimed.

"Micky, you can't pay it!"

"I know I can't."

"Have you told your pater?"

"What would be the good? Where's a poor country parson to get fifty pounds from to give me?"

"But—but what are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

Kildare halted in the lane, and looked blankly at his cousin.

"I was going to ask your advice about it," said Micky. "Spooner is a good-natured sort of man. I lost the money to him fair and square, and it's a debt of honour. No good telling me I was a fool to bet—I know that. But it was certain, and I wanted money, and—and— Oh, what's the good of talking? I've played the giddy goat, and I've got to pay for it. I've got my commission now, and if I get out of this beastly fix I shall go abroad. But I'm under Spooner's thumb. Unless he gives me time to pay, he can ruin me."

"Micky!"

"He's got my written promise to pay," said Micky moodily. "I gave him that. But every red cent I could raise has gone for my equipment. It was a bit of a twist, anyway. I was a duffer to bet, I know that. A blackguard, too, if you like. Pile it on."

"I don't want to pile it on, old chap," said Kildare miserably. "You know what I think about such things, and you know, in advance, what I would say. But what are you going to do?"

"I think Spooner will give me time. He seems good-natured—so long as I treat him as a friend," said Micky, with a grimace. "I can't grumble at that, I suppose—a man I'm asking favours of. Of course, he couldn't sue me for a gambling debt. That isn't the question. If he could sue me, it wouldn't be so bad. But a debt of honour has to be paid, or it's a disgrace worse than ruin. I couldn't stay in the Air Force if Spooner cut up rusty, and showed me up—unless I chucked my commission, changed my name, and joined up as a private. I could do that."

"There must be some way out of it," said Kildare.

"That's what I want to talk to you about. You've got an awfully long head, kid as you are," said Micky. "But—if I can't find a way out—it all depends on Spooner being good-natured. He would have paid up if he had lost. I can't understand now how it was that Hook Eye didn't pull it off."

"Oh, don't give me any of that, for goodness' sake!" said Kildare.

They walked on in silence to St. Jim's.

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"WAY back up, deah boys!"

"It's all right now!"

"I can see them comin' in at the gate, you know—Kildare and another chap just like him. Looks wathah a nice kid," said Arthur Augustus. "He is in uniform. It must be the chap."

The juniors all looked out of the study window to see Kildare's cousin. There was no doubt that the young fellow who was crossing the quadrangle with Kildare was the expected Micky—a slim, handsome, upstanding young fellow. They paused in the quad to speak to Mr. Railton.

"Well, we're all ready," said Tom Merry. "Everything done to a turn. Mountains of toast, eggs and rashers, tongue, ham, cold beef, pickles, two kinds of jam, two kinds of cake, biscuits, cheese!"

"Bwavo!"

"We'll just say a few words to Kildare when he trots in," said Blake, "and then we'll leave him to his conscience."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes; it'll show him we don't bear malice," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "We wouldn't have it up against Kildare for a licking, especially when he's worried about—" Tom Merry paused abruptly. That unfortunate sentence in the letter he had seen was in his mind.

"About what?" said Dig.

Tom Merry was saved the trouble of answering. The door of the study was flung suddenly open, and Wally reappeared.

D'Arcy minor was evidently on the warpath. He was Kildare's fag, and he keenly resented that high honour being taken out of his hands.

The Fourth Formers and Shell fellows had taken his place in a really high-handed manner, and had ejected him "on his neck." Naturally, Wally was wrathful. He had been gathering his forces. Jameson and Curly Gibson and Frayne and Hobbs and half a dozen other heroes of the Third followed him into the study.

What the fags lacked in size they made up in numbers. And they showed that they meant business.

"Outside, you cads!" rapped out Wally.

"Weally, Wally—"

"I'm Kildare's fag! Like your cheek to come here! Outside this minute, or we'll chuck you out!" roared D'Arcy minor.

"You young ass—" began Tom Merry.

"Kick 'em out!" shouted Jameson.

"Pile in, Third!"

"Shut up!" yelled Tom Merry, as the fags rushed to the attack. "Kildare's coming— Oh, my hat! You—you— Ah! Oh!"

There was no time to explain. Perhaps even the warlike Wally would have deferred his attack if he had been aware that even at that moment Kildare and the distinguished visitor were striding towards the School House. But he wasn't aware of it, and he was on the warpath. There were a dozen fags, and they all piled in at once to eject the interlopers from the study.

"Bai Jove! Stop it, you young wascals! Kildare will—"

"He'll come in and see—"

"Will you chuck it?"

"I tell you—"

"Give 'em socks!" yelled Wally.

"Hurrah!"

Crash!

The well-laid table, loaded with so many good things, went over as the struggling juniors bumped into it. There was a terrific crash of crockery-ware and jampots. Wally and Jameson had Tom Merry round the neck, and the three of them rolled into the fender together, and the results to the mountain of toast piled in a dish before the fire was ruinous.

"Out with 'em!"

"You young idiots!"

"Pile in!"

"Yaroooh!"

Crash! Crash! Bump!

The fight raged in a wild and whirling style. Excited juniors rolled among the wreck of the tea-things, among spilt milk and butter and jam. Chairs were overturned, the carpet rucked up, the fender kicked out of place, and the clock descended from the mantelpiece with a smash.

The study looked like a pandemonium when Kildare and his visitor arrived at the open doorway.

The captain of St. Jim's gazed into his study in amazement.

"What the dooce—" began Micky

Kildare in wonder.

"Oh, my hat!"

Crash! Crash! Bump!

Yell!

Tom Merry & Co. had planned a surprise for the captain of St. Jim's when he came in. They had succeeded—in a sense. Certainly Kildare was surprised. He was astounded. It was the first time that the captain's study had been a battleground for fags and juniors.

Kildare stood transfixed for some moments.

Then he strode furiously into the study.

"You young sweeps!" he shouted.

"Kildare, bai Jove!"

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The combat ceased as if by magic at the sound of Kildare's voice. The combatants drew apart and scrambled up—dusty, dishevelled, jammy, sticky, buttery. They blinked at Eric Kildare.

"You—you young scoundrels!" gasped Kildare. "How dare you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared his cousin. "Faith, and it's a surprise party for ye, Eric. Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare, his face set with anger, glared round for a cane. There was a general strategic movement to the door.

"I—I say, Kildare," panted Wally,

"it's all right. We—we came here to fag for you, you know, and these cheeky cads—"

"We came here to fag for you, Kildare and these impertinent young wascals—"

"Get out!" shouted Kildare. "I'll deal with you later, the lot of you! Clear off at once!"

"But weally, Kildare—"

Blake dragged Arthur Augustus away. The juniors did not need telling twice to clear off. It was not the time for explaining to Kildare what their really excellent intentions had been.

Kildare looked round his wrecked and dismantled study. Micky stood in the doorway and chuckled. In spite of the troubles he had brought upon himself, Micky seemed a very cheerful young gentleman, and he seemed to see something funny in that surprising welcome to St. Jim's.

"Upon my word, it's too bad," said Kildare.

"Sure, they're a lively set of beggars you've got here," said Micky. "What was the row about entirely?"

"I haven't the faintest idea—or why they should choose my study for their free fight. Looks as if they've been

having a feed here, to judge by the amount of muck on the carpet," said Kildare, angry and mystified. "We can't have tea here. I'll ask Darrell to lend us his study."

Darrell of the Sixth cheerfully lent his study, and Kildare called his fag to get tea. Wally came, with a somewhat flustered face.

"I say, Kildare—" he began. "Don't jaw!" growled Kildare. "Get the tea, and don't talk!"

"But I want to explain!" said Wally indignantly. "Your cousin will think we were just scrapping in your study, and—"

"Faith, and what were you doing?" grinned Micky.

"Turning those cheeky bounders out!" exclaimed Wally. "I'm Kildare's fag, and those fellows had the cheek to come there to get his tea."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we started turning them out, of course," said Wally. "I'm afraid there have been some things broken."

"Looked like a few!" chuckled Pilot-officer Kildare. "Eric, this is the price of popularity. I should let the young beggars off."

Kildare burst into a laugh, in spite of himself.

His study was a wreck; but he understood now that it was because he was a person whom the juniors delighted to honour. Popularity had its drawbacks.

Wally's indignant explanation was cut short, however, and when tea was ready he cleared off, and Kildare and his cousin were left alone. Then the cheery smile faded from Micky's face.

He was there to discuss his situation with his cousin, to see if, by putting their heads together, they could find any way out of the difficulty.

"Something's got to be done," said Kildare. "You can't remain at the mercy of that man. You can't go on knowing that man Spooner, Micky."

"Something—but what?" said Micky. Kildare wrinkled his brow.

"The only thing is to pay him the money. But your father can't help you."

"He couldn't, if I asked him; and I can't ask him," said the young man moodily. "And I'm not asking you, Eric; I know you've got nothing like such a sum."

But Micky's glance lingered for a moment inquiringly on his cousin's face. Kildare shook his head.

"I might raise three or four," he said. "By gad!"

Kildare sat with a grim brow. Though he was younger than his cousin by over two years, he had a older head of the two. Micky had always been careless and happy-go-lucky, always getting into scrapes, always falling under the influence of worse fellows than himself, and suffering the consequences. This time he appeared to be fairly "landed."

"But—but if you can't pay the man, Micky—"

"He will wait," said Micky. "He was rather sharp about it, but, for some reason or other, he toned down when he found that you were my cousin. I don't see why he should, but perhaps it's because he hopes to pick up a pot over the Lanchester match."

"He won't," said Kildare. "We shall beat Lanchester."

"You think so?"

"Yes. As a rule, they're a better team; but three of their best men are playing for the county now, and they're not such a tough proposition at present. We're at the top of our form. I have hardly a doubt about the game."



"That will make him ratty, because he stands to lose over a hundred."

"Serve the brute right for betting on the game!" said Kildare bitterly. "I don't see why it should make him harder on you, Micky. The fact is, he must give you time, as you can't settle. It wouldn't benefit him to ruin you. He will have to give you time, and we shall have to think of some way out of it."

Micky Kildare nodded gloomily. Somehow, almost without thinking about it, he had had faith in his cousin to help him out of the scrape his wilful recklessness had led him into. His cousin was only a schoolboy, but his was the stronger nature of the two, and the weaker nature had instinctively relied upon him.

And he had failed. There was nothing he could do. The handsome face of the young pilot-officer was very gloomy now.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Merry's Cheque!

"WHAT a rotten muck-up!"

"Oh, rotten!"

"Ghastly sell!"

Tom Merry & Co. had adjourned to tea in Study No. 6. The ghastly failure of the pleasant surprise they had intended for Kildare worried them. They gathered round the hospitable board in Study No. 6 with glum faces.

"And there'll be a row when that chap's gone," remarked Blake.

"Oh, nevah mind the wow! It's the fearful disappointment!"

"All the fault of your beastly minor!" growled Manners.

"Well, Wally was weally only standin' up for his wights as Kildare's fag," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "It would weally have been bettah to consult Wally about the mattah in the first place."

"Consult a fag of the Third!" snorted Herries.

"Oh, wats!"

There was a tap at the door, and Toby, the page, put his head in. He had a letter in his hand.

"Master Merry 'ere?"

"Here you are," said Tom.

"Letter for you, sir."

Tom Merry took the letter carelessly, and Toby vanished. The letter was stamped with American stamps, and

bore the U.S. postmark. Tom Merry threw it on the table.

"You may open your lettah, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't mind us."

"It's from my uncle in the States, I suppose," said Tom.

"Bai Jove! A whackin' tip, vewy likely!"

Tom shook his head.

"No."

"Then you needn't trouble to open it," said Monty Lowther. "What does the man mean by writing to you from America unless to send a tip? What the dickens are uncles coming to in these days? In my young days," said Lowther solemnly, "uncles were better brought up than this!"

Tom Merry slit the envelope and opened it. A letter came out, and with it a cheque. There was a howl from the juniors as they caught sight of the cheque and the amount written upon it.

"Fifty pounds!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"And you said there wasn't a tip!"

"I withdraw my statement about your uncle, Tommy!" said Lowther. "Mr. Poinsett is living up to the very best avuncular traditions."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It isn't for me, fathead," said Tom Merry laughingly. "Do you think my uncle would send me fifty pounds?"

"Well, he's rolling in money, isn't he?" said Lowther. "And I dare say he knows you've got a lot of pals to help you spend it. I would do my little bit with pleasure. I would never fail a personal friend at such a time. The claims of friendship before anything."

"Hear, hear," said Manners. "You're making a mistake, Tommy. That cheque is for you, all right. I haven't the slightest doubt about it. Your uncle knows how expensive tuck is, and he's handing the money out like a man and a brother. Long live Tommy's uncle."

"Rats!" said Tom. "I wrote to him for some money, but I never expected him to whack out like this. I thought it might be a fiver, perhaps. He's a jolly decent old boy to send me fifty. But not a bob of it is for me."

"Then—what—how—which—" said Lowther.

"You see," said Tom Merry, colouring a little, "my uncle's very rich, and when he was in England he told me that if I ever wanted money, over my allowance, I was to ask him for it. Of course, I've never asked him. But now I want to stand something towards the School House Amateur Dramatic Society, you know, and—and so I thought I would write to him and ask for something for that. So I wrote, and put it plainly, you know, and told him I'd like to make a contribution to the society, so that we could buy some new 'props,' and that if he cared to send me a fiver for that purpose I'd be awfully grateful."

"Oh!"

"And he's sent fifty," said Tom, his eyes glistening. "It's ripping!"

"Read the letter," said Lowther solemnly. "Perhaps there's a whack in it for you, my son."

Tom Merry read the letter, and then read it again aloud to his chums.

"My dear Nephew,—I was very glad to receive your letter and your request. I enclose a cheque for £50. You may write to me afterwards, and tell me how you have used the money, if you like. You have never yet asked me for anything for yourself. Why not?—Your affectionate uncle,

"J. POINSETT."

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"Bai Jove! I wegard your uncle as a weal wippah, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall wite to my patah, and suggest that he does the vewy same thing."

"It's topping!" said Tom Merry. "But I want you fellows to keep this dark. Not a word about it outside this study."

"Certainly, deah boy—but why?"

Tom coloured again.

"Well, it would look like swank," he said.

"Pewwaps so. Not a single whispah, if you like," said Arthur Augustus. "You can get Railton to cash the cheque—"

"No; I'll take it to the bank in Wayland," said Tom Merry. "It's drawn on a London bank, so it will take them only a few days to get the money. And you chaps can help me decide how it is to be spent."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove! I'll make up a list of things we need if you like," said D'Arcy. "What you want for that task is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"We'll all help, Gussy."

And so it was agreed.

CHAPTER 6.

A Friendly Call!

TOM MERRY & CO. gathered on Big Side the next day to watch the first eleven at practice.

Tom Merry was feeling very cheerful that afternoon. He had cycled over to Wayland and paid in the cheque in the local branch of the London bank it was drawn upon. In a few days he would have fifty pounds in banknotes in his possession.

Already the chums of the School House had made up a list of things required by the Amateur Dramatic Society.

But just now the matter was dismissed, as their interest was very keen in first eleven cricket.

The Lanchester match was a big affair for St. Jim's—even for the first eleven. The Lanchesters were a well-known team, who played such elevens as M.C.C., and so it was a cheek for a school senior eleven to take them on at all. The St. Jim's First always gave them a hard tussle when they met them, but it had to be admitted that they had never beaten them yet.

But on this occasion matters were quite different. The ranks of the Lanchester club had been depleted by the loss of three of their star players. Those who remained, however, made up a very strong side.

But the big team were not in overwhelming superiority for once, and the schoolboys had the chance of their lives.

Kildare felt certain of winning, but he was not given to overrating chances. He kept his men well up to the mark, determined that nothing should be left to chance.

The first eleven were, indeed, at the top of their form, as the juniors gleefully remarked as they watched them at practice.

"Kildare is topping to-day," remarked Talbot of the Shell, who was a good judge. "But he seems rather down in the mouth, doesn't he? Nothing wrong with the team, surely?"

"Bai Jove! They look all wight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Did you see Monteith make that catch? I could not have made that catch bettah myself."

"Go hon!" murmured Lowther.

"I am speakin' quite sewiously, Lowthah. It was a wippin' catch, though Monteith is only a New House boundah."

"Best bowler and field at St. Jim's, and chance it," said Figgins of the New House, with a snort. "Nothing in the School House to equal Monteith in the field. I give in that Kildare's the best bat."

"I should jolly well say so," said Blake. "And Darrell's as good a fielder as your blessed prefect."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Figgins, you ass—"

"Look here, Blake, you fathead—"

"I say Darrell—"

"I say Monteith—"

The argument was growing warm when there came a diversion. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered a surprised ejaculation.

"Gweat Scott! What is that boundah doin' here?"

The juniors looked round to see the "bounder."

A fat gentleman, in somewhat loud check clothes, and a bowler hat, was strolling on the field, with a cane under his arm, and smoking a big black cigar. The playing fields of St. Jim's were open to the public, and men interested in cricket often came in to see the matches; but this flashy-looking gentleman was not the kind of visitor that was welcome.

Mr. Spooner—for it was Micky Kildare's undesirable acquaintance—stopped near the group of juniors and ejected a thick stream of tobacco smoke almost into Arthur Augustus' aristocratic face. Perhaps the expression on that aristocratic face did not please him.

The swell of St. Jim's choked and coughed violently.

"Excuse me!" said Mr. Spooner politely. "You don't like smoke?"

"Owl! Gwoogh! Certainly not!"

"Sorry! Is this here a match going on?" asked Mr. Spooner, with a nod towards the cricket ground.

"Not a match," said Tom Merry; "the first eleven are at practice."

"The team that's going to play Lanchester or Wednesday?" asked Mr. Spooner.

"Yes—with the red-and-white caps."

Mr. Spooner looked at the cricketers with great interest.

"Master Kildare batting?" he remarked.

"Yes; that's our captain."

"Splendid bat!" said Mr. Spooner.

"What ho!" said Tom, feeling a little more kindly towards the flashy visitor after that remark. "First rate! He will give Lanchester beans!"

"Beat 'em, p'raps," said Mr. Spooner.

"Not much 'perhaps' about it!" said Blake.

"No; I suppose they've often beaten Lanchester, young gentlemen?"

"Not so far; but circs are different now. We're pretty certain to pull it off this time."

"I've seen Lanchester at practice to-day," remarked Mr. Spooner.

"How are they shaping?"

"Hardly up to this, I should say, speaking as a man who only knows cricket from looking on."

"Oh, good!" said Blake.

"My eye!" said Mr. Spooner. "It will be a feather in the cap of this school to beat Lanchester, and 'ard on the blokes who have put their money on Lanchester, wot with their reputation, an' not knowing that their best men were booked for the county."

"Serve 'em jolly well right!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Anybody who bets on cwicket matches ought to be scawwaged!"

Mr. Spooner smiled.

"How well Master Kildare keeps up his wicket!" he remarked. "The bowling can't touch him—and the bowling's good, too!"

"You know something about cricket," said Tom Merry, thawing still more.

"Kildare's the best bat in the team, of course! Without him, it would be a bit different when the match comes off."

"Yes," said Mr. Spooner, very slowly and thoughtfully. "Yes, I s'pose so. Without Master Kildare it would be very different. Likewise, if he was to score a duck's egg—that would make all the difference in the world, wouldn't it?"

"It would—but it's not likely to happen," said Tom, laughing.

"Such things do 'appen," said Mr. Spooner. "I've knowed good players, with big reputations, score a pair of spectacles, afore now. Yes, a duck's egg in each innings. Them things do 'appen sometimes."

Mr. Spooner continued to watch the cricket practice in thoughtful silence. He was evidently a stickler, for the practice went on for another hour, and Mr. Spooner did not move from the spot. He was lighting a cigar when the first eleven finished practice and came off the field.

Then the sporting gentleman moved and walked towards Kildare.

The captain of St. Jim's started as he saw him, and frowned a little. He had met the man in Rylcombe, and, as he was in company with Kildare's cousin, Kildare had had to show him civility. But if Mr. Spooner presumed to continue the acquaintance, he was likely to be brought up very sharply. Kildare did not like betting men, and made no bones about letting his opinion be known.

"Afternoon!" said Mr. Spooner affably. "I've been watching your cricket, Master Kildare. You'll be playing for your county when you're a little older."

"Thank you," said Kildare coolly.

It was against the grain of the good-natured Irish lad to be cold to anybody, but he simply could not stand Mr. Spooner.

"I called in to see you," said Mr. Spooner. "I had the pleasure of meeting you yesterday."

Kildare paused.

"You have something to say to me?" he asked.

"A little friendly call," said Mr. Spooner.

A glint came into Kildare's eyes, and the bookmaker added hastily:

"I got something to say to you about your cousin, too—rather important."

"What is it?"

"You'd like to have it out 'ere?" asked Mr. Spooner, with a glance at the crowded ground.

Kildare bit his lip. Certainly he did not want to have it out there that his cousin was in debt to a bookmaker.

"Come into my study," he said, as civilly as he could.

"Pleased!" said Mr. Spooner.

And he sauntered away with Kildare towards the School House.

Many curious eyes followed them. To see that flashy-looking man chatting and strolling with Kildare was a surprise to the St. Jim's fellows.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally don't want to c'witicise old Kildare, but I must remark that he is a weckless ass!"

"No business of ours," said Tom Merry. "Let's get in to tea."

The juniors went towards the School House. As they came in, they saw Kildare and his companion halted in the Hall. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, was there, and his brow was grim.

"Is this gentleman a friend of yours, Kildare?" the Housemaster was asking.

His look expressed grim disapproval. Bookmakers—and such Mr. Spooner evidently was—were not the kind of

acquaintances that St. Jim's fellows were allowed to have.

Kildare coloured painfully.

"Mr. Spooner has brought me a message from my cousin, sir," he said.

"Oh, very well!" said Mr. Railton, his brow clearing.

He went into his study.

"Uffy old gent—what?" remarked Mr. Spooner.

"This way," said Kildare.

The bookmaker, not in the slightest degree perturbed by the disapproval he had read in the Housemaster's looks, followed the captain of St. Jim's to his study.

Tom Merry & Co. went on up the stairs. Mr. Spooner was evidently a friend of Micky, not of Kildare, and they were glad to know it.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Spooner Asks a Favour!

KILDARE stood in his study, his eyes fixed upon his visitor.

He had asked Mr. Spooner to be seated, and the fat bookmaker sank into the armchair, and crossed one plump leg over another, and bit the end off a new cigar.



Dentist: "One tooth extracted, sir?"

Judge: "Yes, the tooth, the whole tooth, and nothing but the tooth!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Ellsdon, 34, Avenue Road, Belmont, Sutton, Surrey.

Kildare did not sit down. He was anxious to be rid of his visitor, and it was as much as he could do to be civil to him.

Very handsome the captain of St. Jim's looked as he stood there in his cricket flannels, the westerling sun shining in at the study window upon him. But his face was clouded, his eyes troubled.

He felt instinctively that the visit of Mr. Spooner boded no good either to Micky or to himself.

"You have a message from my cousin," said the captain of St. Jim's at last, as Mr. Spooner seemed too busy with his strong cigar to open the conversation.

"Not exactly."

"I understood you to that effect, and I told Mr. Railton so when he spoke to me," said Kildare, frowning.

"Interfering old gent—what?"

"You will excuse me, Mr. Spooner, but you must be aware that fellows in this school are not allowed to receive visits from betting men!" said Kildare bluntly.

"Very particular, I must say," remarked Mr. Spooner, utterly unperturbed. "I've got a friend who does business in these parts, name of Banks, who does a little bit sometimes with young gents 'ere. I know that."

"Then it is very secret," said Kildare. "If I knew the names of the fellows you speak of, I should report them to the headmaster!"

"You would?"

"Yes; it would be my duty as a prefect."

"As a which?" said Mr. Spooner.

Kildare smiled slightly.

"A prefect—a kind of monitor," he said. "But we need not speak of that, as I do not want any information from you. Let us come to business. To be frank, this visit places me in a very awkward position. It isn't nice to let people here know that my cousin is a betting man."

"Mighty particular 'ere about putting a little money on a 'orse!" said Mr. Spooner, in surprise. "Why, everybody does it!"

"Not quite everybody, I think," said Kildare. "But never mind that. It happens to be against the rules here."

"You have never put a little bit on a gee-gee yourself, Master Kildare?"

"Certainly not!"

"Nor don't want to?"

"Of course not."

"Not if a man in the know could put you on a really good thing—a good tip, fair straight from the horse's mouth?" hinted Mr. Spooner.

Kildare laughed impatiently.

"No! I suppose you mean to be obliging, Mr. Spooner, but that isn't in my line at all. Let's come to business."

"Well," said Mr. Spooner, a little sulkily, "about young Micky."

Kildare closed his lips a little. It went against the grain to listen patiently while this sporting "bouncer" referred to his cousin as "young Micky." But Pilot-Officer Kildare had given the bookmaker the right to familiarity.

"Well?" said the captain of St. Jim's quietly.

"I understand that you know how Micky is fixed?"

"With regard to his debt to you, do you mean? Yes; he has told me about it."

"It's fifty quid."

"I know."

"And Micky can't pay, seemingly."

"I understood that you were going to give him time to pay you?"

"I've done that," said Mr. Spooner. "It's near a fortnight old now. I'm 'aving a 'ard time of it. I did badly out of football last season. It's a case of money wanted, young sir."

Kildare did not speak. He might have asked the bookmaker what he was telling him all that for. It was not his debt, and he was sick of hearing about it. Mr. Spooner's manner seemed to imply that Micky had referred him to Kildare.

"Course, I'm willing to go easy with Micky," said Mr. Spooner. "I'm willing to go as easy as poss, and in suttin circumstances I could let Pilot-Officer Kildare's bit of paper stand over till next winter."

"That would be first-rate!" said Kildare.

"Yes," said Mr. Spooner, with a nod; "if I could wait, that is."

Kildare kept his patience. It was up to him to conciliate the man if he could, and make things easier for his reckless cousin. Micky's fault was a serious one, and he deserved to suffer for it; but he was, after all, only a lad.

"I've been watching your cricket," said Mr. Spooner, changing the subject with startling suddenness. "It looks as if you'll beat Lanchester, after all."

"Yes, we hope so," said Kildare.

"But, to keep to the point—"

"I'm keeping to the point, young sir. I'm fixed on that Lanchester match. I've been led astray," said Mr. Spooner dejectedly. "Fellows who were in the know led me on, and I made a book on it. I knew their record, and I reckoned it a dead cert. And when some of the boys offered me bets on it, of course I booked them fast enough. Why, I'd have given five to one on Lanchester, and I was able to book bets at two and three to one—a dead sure thing—so I thought. But as it happened, they were in the know, and I was out in the cold. So it stands now that I stand to win fifty of the best if Lanchester pulls it off, and I stand to lose a hundred and thirty if you win, Master Kildare."

"I'm sorry," said Kildare politely.

"Yes; but being sorry don't 'elp. I can't afford to lose that there money," said Mr. Spooner. "If I lose I shall have a regular job to pay up. I shall have to get in money from every quarter where I got any, and Micky will simply 'ave to pay up on the nail if Lanchester are beaten."

"Oh!" said Kildare.

"That's 'ow it stands," said Mr. Spooner. "I told young Micky that you were able to do me a favour, and that if you did, he could take till next Christmas, if he likes, to settle his little bill. He said that you'd do everything in your power to save him going on the rocks."

"So I would," said Kildare.

"You see, if I have to come down on him, and he can't pay, or won't pay, it's bad business for him," said Mr. Spooner. "An officer and a gentleman who don't settle up a debt of honour ain't considered as a gentleman any longer, and he can't remain an officer. He would be posted up everywhere as a swindler."

"What!"

"I'm only putting it in plain English," said the bookmaker coolly, as Kildare flushed with anger. "Far be it from me to say that Pilot-Officer Kildare ain't as honest a young gentleman as you are yourself, sir—as honest as me, Joe Spooner, for that matter. But if he had won that bet on Hook Eye he would have fingered my money, and he knows it. He lost, and it turns out that he hasn't the money to settle. I s'pose you know how his superior officers would look on that?"

Kildare nodded; he knew well enough.

"He would have to leave the Air Force, just when his career's beginning," said Mr. Spooner. "It would be ruin for him, as you know, to be posted up as a defaulter."

"I know—I know, but he is not that," said Kildare. "He was reckless, thoughtless, and he expected to be able to pay when he made the bet. But he had ill-luck in other directions at the same time, and was left without resources. But it will be no benefit to you to ruin a fellow who has never hurt

you. It would pay you better to wait for the money."

"What's the good of that, if I'm ruined myself?" demanded Mr. Spooner. "A bookie who doesn't pay up is ruined; he can't make a book again, neither on a race nor footer nor cricket match. He ain't trusted. I've got my reputation to think of as well as your cousin, Master Kildare. And I tell you straight, if Lanchester loses that match on Wednesday, Pilot-Officer Kildare has got to pay up on the nail, or he's got to go under along of me."

"Well I—I can't help it," said Kildare restively. "What's the good of telling me all this, Mr. Spooner? You don't suppose a boy in the Sixth Form has fifty pounds locked up in his desk, do you?"

"Hardly," agreed Mr. Spooner. "But as I said, you can do me a favour and your cousin one at the same time, and then I 'old over Micky's paper as long as he likes. In fact," said Mr. Spooner, in a burst of confidence, "I'd 'and it over to you, sir, and trust to your honour to see it paid when convenient."

Kildare's face brightened a little.

If Mr. Spooner did that, certainly Micky was well out of his fearful scrape. Once that paper was in Kildare's hands, with the condition that it was to be paid when convenient, he would see that the condition was kept.

"You can depend on me to do anything I can, Mr. Spooner. I haven't the faintest idea what favour I can do you, but you have only to name it."

"Now you're talking!" said Mr. Spooner, rubbing his fat hands. "Now we've got to business. I would work it for you to bag twenty of the best, if you like, once it's agreed upon."

"I don't want to bag anything, and I don't understand you."

Mr. Spooner chuckled.

"No 'umbug," he remarked. "Of course, you kn— what I'm getting at!"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Kildare impatiently. "If I can do any service to help my cousin out of his fix, I'm ready and willing to do it. But I repeat that I simply cannot imagine how I can be of service to you. What is there I can do to serve you?"

The bookmaker stared at him.

"Meantersay you don't know?"

"I've said so."

"Either you're pulling my leg, or you're in a very innocent frame of mind, young fellow," said Mr. Spooner suspiciously. "However, I'll tell yer, if you want it out plain. Lanchester have got to win the match on Wednesday."

Kildare stared at him.

"They may win," he said, "but it's not likely. In the circumstances, the advantages happen to be on our side. I expect to win."

"Well, I expect you to lose, and I expect you to make sure of losing. Now do you savvy?"

Kildare looked at him, almost dazedly, for a moment. He understood at last. The bookmaker was asking him to betray the match, and give it away to the opposing team, so that he could win his bet.

Kildare stood motionless, colour surging into his face, his heart throbbing.

"You savvy?" said Mr. Spooner.

Then Kildare burst out.

"You scoundrel! You confounded villain!"

"Wot!"

"You—you hound!"

Kildare made a stride towards the bookmaker. Mr. Spooner started to his feet in alarm. The next moment, to

his utter astonishment, he found himself taken by the coat collar and shaken like a rat.

CHAPTER 8.

Nothing Doing!

"YOU hound! You cur!" Kildare shook the rascal savagely as he shouted the words.

The fat bookmaker simply curled up in the powerful grasp of the captain of St. Jim's. His red face became purple.

"Oh! Ow! Leggo!" he gurgled.

"You're choking me, you young villain! Leggo!"

"You scoundrel!"

"Elp!"

Kildare controlled his rage, and he flung the fat man back into the arm-chair, and stood over him, his hands clenched and his eyes glittering.

Mr. Spooner sprawled back limply in the chair, gasping for breath.

"If you were a younger man I'd give you the hiding of your life," said Kildare, his voice trembling with anger. "How dare you make such a proposition to me, you infamous scoundrel?"

"Groogh!"

Kildare stepped back, breathing hard. He repented a little that he had laid hands on the man. The wretch was probably only following his business according to his custom. Probably it was the hundredth time he had laid such a scheme for "pulling" a horse or "nobbing" a player. But that he should bring his shameless rascality to St. Jim's was a little too much. Kildare felt his wrath rise at the sight of him. He pointed silently to the door.

Mr. Spooner sat up in the chair, gasping for breath, choking with rage.

"You've laid 'ands on me!" he stammered. "All right—all right! We'll see! You are insulted—eh?—insulted at me asking you to do what's done every day in racing and professional football! Shocked, ain't you? Shocked, by gum! You ain't shocked at your precious cousin swindling an honest bookie! Oh, no! That's a 'orse of quite another colour!"

"I don't want any words with you," said Kildare. "You'd better go."

"Oh, I'm going as soon as I've got my breath!" said Mr. Spooner, snorting. "I'm going. I'm going straight to Mr. Swindler Kildare to ask him for my money, and if he don't pay on the nail I'll 'ave no mercy on him. I'll 'ave 'im known as a swindler in every club in London!"

Kildare's heart sank. Truly he had not improved matters for the unfortunate Micky.

"My cousin did not know the kind of favour you came to ask me," he explained.

The bookmaker sneered.

"What do you think?"

"I don't believe it."

"You can believe what you like. I know wot I'm going to do."

Kildare made an effort.

"I'm sorry I handled you, Mr. Spooner. I ought not to have done that. I can see that you don't understand what a dirty caddish thing you've asked me. I suppose you're used to that kind of swindling. But you ought to have known better."

"I've asked you what I've asked others, and I ain't never been assaulted over it yet," sneered Mr. Spooner. "A dirty swindler, am I? And wot's your precious cousin, then? He was going

to finger my money if he won, but he won't pay me now he's lost!"

Kildare was silent. There was a difference between reckless improvidence, however culpable, and deliberate swindling. But it was useless to argue with the enraged Mr. Spooner.

The bookmaker set his collar and tie straight. He did not seem in a hurry to go. Infuriated as he was, he had not lost sight of business. If he could bring Kildare round to his way of thinking he was willing to forgive that ebullient of temper.

The result of the Lanchester match was of great importance to Joe Spooner. If he could corrupt Kildare, and count upon a Lanchester win as a certainty, there was a golden harvest to be reaped. He had only to double and treble his bets, in that case, to make a really good thing out of it.

There was a short silence in the study. Kildare was waiting for the man to go, but he did not want to turn him out. He had made matters bad enough for Micky already.

It went against the grain to temporise with such a rascal, but for Micky's sake he would have been glad to send Mr. Spooner away in a good humour.

"S'pose you think it over?" said Mr. Spooner, at last. "Tain't such a surprising thing as you seem to think. It's done every day."

Kildare was silent.

He had resolved to keep his temper now, whatever Mr. Spooner might say. The bookie misunderstood his silence, and went on eagerly:

"Wot's the importance of this match

to you—only a schoolboys' match? You want to win, of course, but it ain't a matter of importance to you."

"It isn't that," said Kildare, at last.

"You don't understand."

"What is it, then?"

"It would be dishonest."

"You mean that the coves that had bets on St. Jim's would lose? They take their chance on that. Bless your little heart, they'd play me the same trick if they needed to, and if they had the gumption."

"I'm not thinking of anybody who's betted on the match. They're nothing to me, and they deserve to lose their money."

"Then where does the dishonesty come in? 'Tain't dishonest, if you come to that. You jest lose your wickets; you don't score any runs; you put on poor bowlers instead of good ones. You lose the match. Well, you've always lost the Lanchester match afore. It won't hurt you once more."

"Can't you see that it would be a dirty, dishonest trick to play?" said Kildare, in wonder more than anger.

"Can't you see that, if I did as you asked, I should be a scoundrel, and should despise myself for the rest of my life, and all the other fellows would despise me, too, if they knew."

"They needn't know."

"But can't you see that I don't want to deserve their contempt, whether they know or not?"

"That's all splitting hairs," said Mr. Spooner sullenly. "I tell you it's done every day."

"Not by decent fellows."

"It would be a good thing for you, too. I'd put ten quid on for you; twenty, if you like. Hang it all, fifty, if you give me your word there's no risk!" said Mr. Spooner eagerly. "You won't appear in the matter at all—you simply bag the winnings."

"Steal them, you mean!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Mr. Spooner rudely. "'Ow much racing is done on the square, do you think? This 'ere is a wicked world, young fellow, and we've got to look out for ourselves!"

Kildare looked at him moodily. Into the clean, wholesome atmosphere of St. Jim's, Mr. Spooner seemed to bring a breath from another world—an underworld of darkness and trickery, and cunning and baseness. It gave the captain of St. Jim's a feeling almost of physical sickness.

There was a tap at the door, and Langton of the Sixth came in. Langton paused as he saw the visitor, and Kildare did not fail to note the surprise in his face.

"Excuse me, I didn't know you had a caller!" said Langton.

And he retired at once, wondering. Kildare made an irritable movement.

"You'd better go, Mr. Spooner! It's no good talking!"

The bookmaker rose.

"You refuse to do me that little favour, then?"

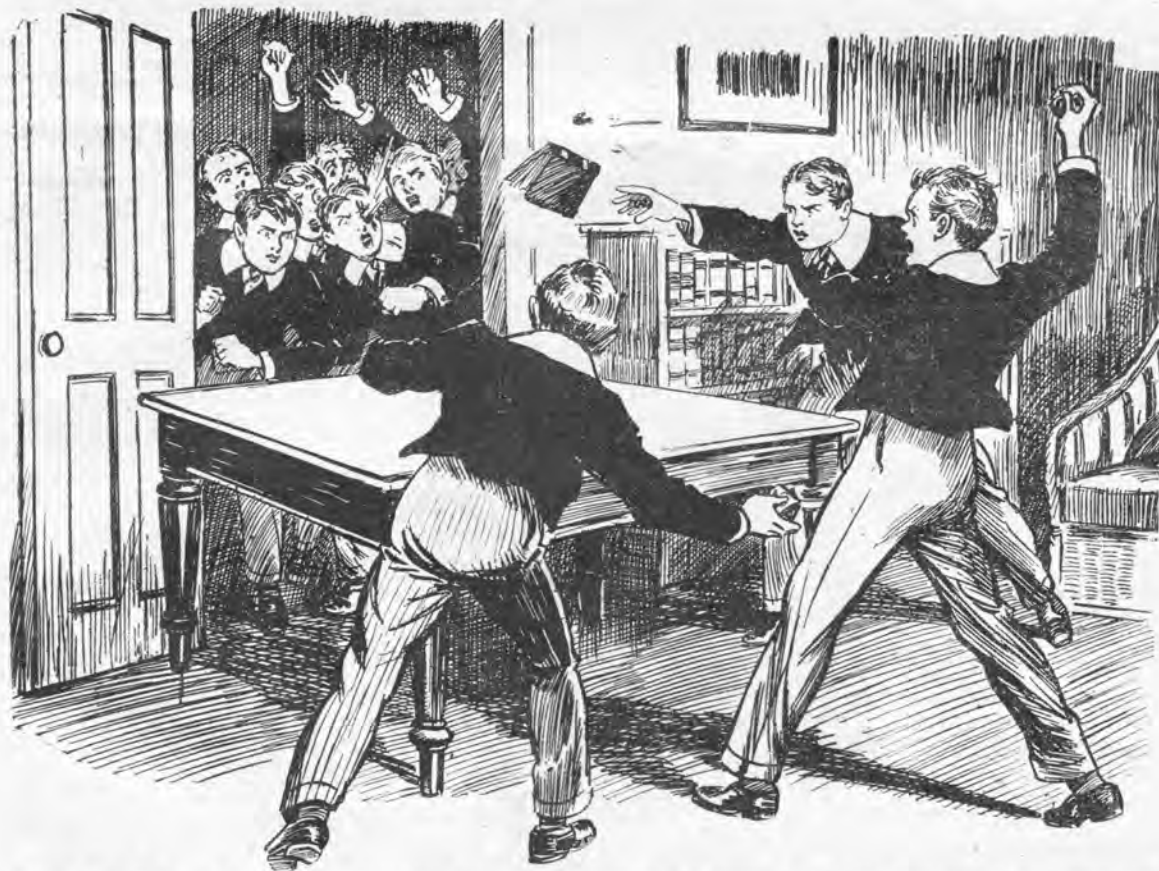
"Yes."

"Won't you take a day to think it over?"

"That would be useless."

Mr. Spooner gritted his teeth.

"You give me your word to 'elp me



When Wally & Co., on the warpath, visited the Terrible Three's study the chums of the Shell gave them a warm reception. Barricaded behind the study table in the doorway, they kept up a steady fire of ink-soaked missiles, books and soot-balls—much to the discomfort of the fags!

out, and I could bag 'undreds on that match!" he said. "I've got to let that slip. But I can't afford to lose wot I've got at stake already. Mind, if I'm ruined, your cousin goes under along of me!"

"I cannot help it."

"I'll tell him who he's got to thank for it!" said Mr. Spooner.

He made a movement towards the door.

"Mr. Spooner"—Kildare spoke with an effort—"I cannot do as you ask; that is impossible. But it wouldn't be fair to make my cousin suffer for it. You ought to think of that."

"Why don't you think of it?" sneered Mr. Spooner. "Elp me out of my fix, and I'll elp your cousin out of his. I tell you wot—I'll get your cousin to come and speak to you about it."

"Micky would never dream of asking me to play the rascal."

Mr. Spooner shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll see about that. It's his neck that's under the chopper, not yours! P'raps you wouldn't be so mighty particular if you was in danger of disgrace and ruin instead of young Micky!"

"It would make no difference."

"P'raps—p'raps not. Let it rest till you've seen Micky. He can get leave before Wednesday, and he'll come and see you. I'll 'old my 'and till then."

Kildare was about to make a hot retort, but he checked it. The longer Mr. Spooner held his hand the better.

Without another word, the bookmaker left. Kildare flung himself into a chair, his face dark and harassed, when he was alone.

Not for a moment did he think of yielding to the insidious proposition of the bookmaker. That was impossible.

The hot Irish blood boiled in his veins at the thought of a dishonourable action.

But his refusal meant ruin to Micky.

There was only one way of saving him—raising the money so that he could settle his debt. But that was impossible. Where was fifty pounds to come from? For the want of that sum the young pilot-officer was to be covered with disgrace—to be forced to quit the Air Force!

But think of it as he would, Kildare could see no way out.

He could not sacrifice his own honour to save Micky's, and it was the only way.

CHAPTER 9.

Wally on the Warpath!

THERE was civil war in the School House—civil war in the figurative sense; as a matter of fact, the war was extremely uncivil.

Wally & Co. were on the warpath. The sublime cheek, as Wally regarded it, that Tom Merry & Co. had shown in seeking to fag for Kildare—D'Arcy minor's own inalienable rights—was not to be forgotten or forgiven.

The distinguished visitor had arrived to see Kildare's study turned into a pandemonium, instead of getting the reception that both Tom Merry and Wally had intended for him. Tom Merry & Co. had felt it their duty to teach the Third Form manners after that. Even Arthur Augustus admitted that Wally required instruction in respect to his elders.

The juniors, therefore—strictly from a sense of duty, of course—raided the fags in the Third Form Room, and Wally & Co. were ragged and bumped severely.

as a warning to be good little boys on another occasion.

This duty fulfilled, the juniors were willing to allow the matter to drop, especially as Kildare had not cut up rusty, as expected, and had, indeed, made no further reference to the matter at all.

But Wally & Co. were not in the least disposed to let it drop. Wally & Co. breathed nothing but vengeance and slaughter.

Excited meetings of the fags were held in the Form-room, in the box-room, and the woodshed, and in all sorts of odd corners where their uncommon and unpardonable wrongs were discussed. Warlike speeches were made, and the iniquities and blessed cheek of the Fourth and the Shell were denounced in suitable terms.

Drastic measures followed. When Blake & Co. were at cricket on Saturday the Third Form raided Study No. 6. The study was simply a wreck when the four juniors came in after cricket.

They came in to tea, but there was not much chance of tea then. Everything the study contained had been piled in a heap in the middle of the room, with the study carpet draped on top of the pile. Tea and sugar, and milk and jam, and pickles had been swamped recklessly on the heap, mixed with a generous allowance of soot and ink.

The hand of the Third Form had fallen heavily upon Study No. 6. Naturally, the hand of Study No. 6 fell heavily on the Third in return.

There was another raid on the fags' quarters, and, as Wally had called together all his forces, ready to resist reprisals, there was a battle royal, in the midst of which the Housemaster arrived on the scene, and quite tired himself out causing the whole party, and finished by giving them all two hundred lines each.

The Terrible Three, of course, had backed up Study No. 6 in exacting these reprisals. Tom Merry had brought away a swollen nose from the conflict, but he had done great execution among the fags.

So matters remained till Tuesday, when Wally & Co. visited Tom Merry's study in force. They made the mistake of supposing that the Terrible Three had gone down to the cricket. As a matter of fact, they had stayed in to do their lines, and the fags found them at home.

The chums of the Shell gave them a "warm" reception. They barricaded the doorway with the table, and over the barricade they kept up a steady fire of books, ink-soaked missiles, and soot-balls—the last-named being composed of soot kneaded up with treacle.

When the noise brought a master up the Shell passage he found the attacking party looking like a set of disreputable chimney-sweeps, and Wally & Co. had to "go through it," with painful results.

After the infliction they retired to the Form-room to rub their hands and hold a meeting, at which terrific speeches were made.

While the meeting was on, the Terrible Three, having finished their lines, went down cheerfully to the cricket ground.

The civil war was still raging, however. Wally & Co. wanted vengeance, and they wanted it badly.

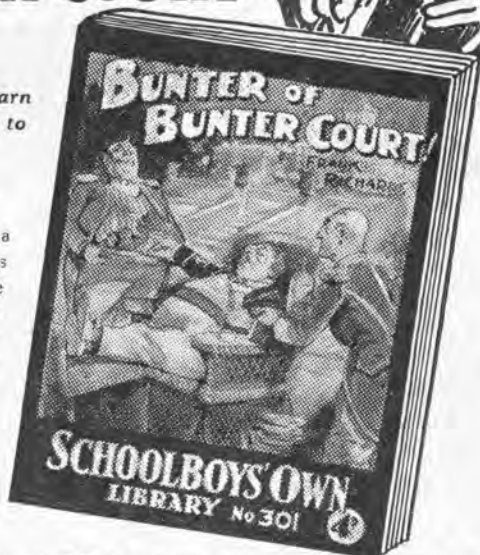
It was, as Wally declared in a telling speech, a question of standing up for the honour of the Third. The Third had had bad luck so far, though they had certainly made Study No. 6 "sit up." But the Terrible Three remained to be dealt with, and Tom Merry

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especially, as the leader of the obnoxious trio.

"The cheek of it!" said Wally, with breathless indignation. "Fagging for Kildare, you know! Why, the Shell brag that they don't fag for anybody. And then to try to bag my fag-master! My only Aunt Jane! Why, if we put up with this we might as well give up fagging once and for all."

"Hear, hear!" chorused the Third.

"And Kildare's threatened not to let me fag for him any more," said Wally, more in sorrow than in anger. "He hasn't made a row about what happened last Wednesday, but he was waxy. It must have made a bad impression on his cousin. His cousin's a ripping chap, too."

"Hear, hear!"

"I've got a new idea. We'll tackle the rotters one at a time. That's really a better idea."

"Safer," remarked Jameson.

"Better," said Wally. "And we'll begin with Tom Merry."

"Hear, hear!"

"Sure, and he's a baste to tackle," said Rourke.

"I suppose we're not afraid of him?"

"Bedad, no. But—"

"We're going to tackle him first," said Wally. "We'll make an example of him. And I've got a dodge."

"Go it, Wally!"

"Kildare's gone out," said Wally. "I saw him start for Rylcombe. Those Shellfish won't have noticed it; they were in their study. One of you kids cut down to the cricket ground—"

"Who are you calling kids?"

"Oh, don't jaw! You can go, Rourke; you've got an innocent-looking chivvy. Tell Tom Merry he's wanted in Kildare's study."

"But he isn't," said Rourke.

"Yes, he is. We want him," explained Wally. "Kildare's out, so it's quite safe. You see, the rotter won't suspect anything. No good telling him he's wanted in the Third Form Room. He wouldn't come along; if he did, he'd bring the gang along with him."

"Ha, ha, ha! Most likely!"

"But he'll go to Kildare's study without a suspicion," grinned Wally; "and we'll be waiting for him there."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We'll collar him and we'll have a rope ready and tie him up!"

"My hat!"

"And gag him—bound and gagged, you know, like the chaps in adventure stories," said Wally, warming to the idea.

"Hurrah!"

"Then we'll ink his chivvy—"

"Bravo!"

"And stick him in Kildare's cupboard and—"

"What!"

"And leave him there. He's fond of Kildare's study, and rather set on giving Kildare surprises and things. Well, that will be a surprise for Kildare when he looks into his cupboard and finds a Shellfish there as black as a nigger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fags yelled with delight at the idea.

"Buzz off, Rourke! And mind you don't let him smell a rat."

"You rely on me!" grinned Rourke. "I'll bag the baste!"

Rourke and half a dozen selected followers proceeded cautiously to Kildare's study. The coast was clear, as they had seen the captain of St. Jim's leave the school gates. Most of the Sixth, too, were down on the cricket



"Me speeding, officer? Nonsense! But I've just passed someone who was!"

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ground at practice; the whole passage was deserted.

The heroes of the Third ensconced themselves in the study, three of them hiding under the table, two behind the curtains of the bed, and two behind the door, so that it would conceal them when it opened. Then they waited, with subdued chuckles. Wally's opinion was that, when all was over, Tom Merry would be fed-up with Kildare's study for good. And, doubtless, Wally was right.

Meanwhile, Rourke had cut down to Little Side. Tom Merry had been batting, but Lowther was at the wicket now, and Manners was bowling to him, and the captain of the Shell was looking on.

"You're wanted, Tom Merry!" called out Rourke.

Tom looked round.

"Hallo! What's wanted?"

"Kildare's study!"

And Rourke sauntered away with his hands in his pockets, whistling.

Tom Merry put down his bat, and walked away to the School House. He was only too willing to obey a summons to Kildare's study. If Kildare sent for him to carry a message or to fag, it showed that the captain of the school had quite forgiven the unfortunate happening of the previous week.

So Tom Merry looked very cheerful as he came along the Sixth Form passage in the School House, and tapped at Kildare's door. There was no reply to the knock, but he heard a movement in the study, and opened the door.

"You sent for me, Kildare?" said Tom as he stepped in.

Then he looked round in surprise. Kildare was not visible. Tom stepped towards the window alcove to look there. As he did so the door slammed, and he swung round, to see Wally and Jameson with their backs to the door, grinning.

"Trapped!" said Wally dramatically.

CHAPTER 10. A Prisoner!

"DOWN with him!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a rush of the fags on Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell burst into a laugh, and faced the four Third Formers, and

would probably have sent them to right and left. But he had not seen the three young heroes under the table, and so he was not on the look-out for them.

But as Wally, Frayne, Gibson, and Jameson rushed on him, and he faced them, Hobbs clutched at his ankles and dragged his feet from under him, and Tom Merry came down on the floor with a bump. Next moment the fags were all over him.

"You young villains!" gasped Tom Merry. "Chuck it!"

"Hurrah! Got the rotter!"

"Down with the Shell!"

Wally jumped up, leaving his six faithful comrades to deal with Tom Merry. There were more than enough of them.

"Secure him," said Wally, in quite the manner of a pirate chief. "Secure him! Bind him hand and foot!"

"You silly young ass!" panted Tom Merry.

"And gag him!" said Wally loftily.

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry struggled furiously.

But the fags were determined, and they were too many even for the athletic captain of the Shell.

Wally had ordered his followers to secure him but that was merely to give a dramatic turn to his proceedings. As a matter of fact, it was Wally himself who uncoiled the rope and proceeded to bind Tom Merry's wrists together.

Jameson and Curly Gibson held Tom Merry's hands helplessly, while Wally knotted the rope. Then his ankles were treated in the same manner, after which the Shell fellow was gagged with a handkerchief, Wally considerably using Tom's own handkerchief. A handkerchief borrowed from any of the heroes of the Third would have made the gagging process much more unpleasant. Third Form handkerchiefs generally had a strong flavour of ink, toffee, and aniseed-balls.

As Tom Merry had not called for help, the gag was really superfluous. But Wally was not a fellow to do things by halves. He rather fancied himself as a sort of lawless chief ordering prisoners to be bound and gagged.

"That's all right," said D'Arcy minor. "You can let him go now. Put some ink in a saucer, young Jameson, and mix some soot in it. I've got a brush in my pocket. This is where we smile, Tom Merry."

Tom glared at him.

After the directions given by the leader of the Third, he knew what to expect, but he was not able to raise objections. He could neither move nor speak. But objections would not have counted, anyway.

Wally still had several yards of rope left, and he did not want to waste it. So he tied it with big knots round the Shell fellow, till Tom Merry could not move; but it looked as if soon he would not be able to breathe.

"This is only the beginning," said Wally pleasantly. "We'll teach you not to cheek the Third!"

"What-ho!" said Jameson. "We'll keep the Shell bounders in their place. They wanted to give Kildare a surprise last Wednesday. Well, Tom Merry can give him one to-day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The ink and soot being duly mixed, Wally dipped his brush into it and bent over Tom Merry. If looks could have withered, D'Arcy minor would have fallen upon the floor of the study in a shrivelled up condition.

But as it was, Wally only grinned. He drew a series of thick lines

down Tom Merry's face, and then a series of cross lines, giving the Shell fellow an appearance as though someone had been playing noughts and crosses on his features.

Then he squeezed out his brush, and dipped it into red ink, and put a red dot into each of the squares marked off by the black lines.

The aspect of Tom Merry's face was extraordinary.

The fags gurgled with suppressed laughter. They would have liked to yell, but they moderated their transports, so to speak, for fear that some prefect might hear them, and look into Kildare's study to see what was going on. That would have interfered seriously with the little game.

"Oh, my hat! Doesn't he look a coughdrop!" gasped Jameson. "Something like the Wild Man from Borneo. Something like a Red Indian with his war-paint on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep a watch from the window, one of you," said Wally. "We don't want Kildare to drop on us while we're here."

Hobbs took up his post at the window. Wally finished his artistic efforts, and then held up a little pocket mirror for Tom Merry to see his face. Tom Merry could not speak; but his looks were expressive. They spoke volumes.

"That's done," said D'Arcy minor. "Open the cupboard door, Curly. Now then, lend a hand. This chap is rather heavy."

Three or four fags lifted Tom Merry from the floor. Tom Merry's glare became positively annihilating; but the heroes of the Third did not mind.

The lower part of Kildare's cupboard was stacked with lumber—old rackets, and stumps, and a broken chair, and several boxes, and so forth. Wally packed the lumber back out of the way, and made room for Tom Merry.

The helpless junior was slid in, reposing on the floor among the lumber.

"You're awfully fond of Kildare's study," grinned Wally. "You're going to get fed up on it now—see? When you get tired of resting you can wriggle about till Kildare hears you, when he comes in. You were planning a surprise for him the other day. He will get a surprise when he sees you like this. What do you think?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused the fags.

"But I'll tell you what," said Wally generously. "If you're willing to come into the Form-room and beg pardon on your bended knees—your bended knees, mind—we'll let you off with a bumping. Nod your head if you mean 'Yes.'"

Tom Merry did not nod his head.

"Then good-bye!" said Wally.

There was a chirrup from Hobbs at the window.

"Kildare's come in."

"Phew!"

"That chap in uniform is with him," said Hobbs.

"Oh, my hat!"

Wally closed the cupboard door hastily, and ran to the window. Kildare was coming across the quadrangle, and Micky was with him. The fags knew the handsome young Irish pilot-officer again. They were not aware that Kildare's cousin was coming down to St. Jim's again. Even as Wally looked from the window, Kildare and Micky disappeared into the porch of the School House.

"Hook it!" said Wally breathlessly.

"I—I say, going to leave him here, when there's going to be a visitor in the study?" said Curly dubiously.

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"No time now! Hook it! Do you want Kildare to catch us here?" snapped Wally.

Wally led the way from the study at a run, and his followers dashed after him. The fags fled down the passage, and quitted it at one end as Kildare and Micky entered it at the other.

Tom Merry lay in the cupboard among the lumber in an unenviable frame of mind.

He had heard what the fags said, and he knew that Pilot-Officer Kildare was coming in. To be seen by Micky in that utterly ridiculous position was a little too much. He could only hope that Kildare would not open the door of the cupboard.

Perhaps they would not stay long in the study, and, sooner or later, his chums would come to look for him. Both Manners and Lowther had heard Rourke's message delivered, and when he did not return to the cricket ground they would suspect something.

Tom Merry lay without a sound in the cupboard, only breathing hard. He heard the study door open, and heard the voices of Kildare and his cousin.

"Faith, you look a bit tidier than the last time I came, Eric, my boy," said Micky, in his jovial tone.

Kildare laughed.

"Yes. There hasn't been a rush to fag for me this time. Hallo, you young sweep, what do you want?" he added, as Wally looked in from the passage.

Wally looked as if butter would not melt in his mouth. Certainly, from his looks, no one would have guessed that less than five minutes ago he had been engaged in a rag in that very room.

"Don't you want me to get tea?" said Wally.

"No; but you can tell Darrell we're here. We're having tea in Darrell's study."

"Oh, all serene!"

Tom Merry was glad to hear it. That meant that Kildare and Micky would not remain long, and his chums would have a chance of coming to the rescue. The Shell fellow lay silent in the cupboard, breathing hard through his nose.

CHAPTER 11.

What Tom Merry Knew!

MICKY KILDARE leaned on the mantelpiece and looked at his cousin, as the captain of St. Jim's closed the door and turned towards him.

"Well, what is it?" asked the young Air Force man, with a somewhat weary gesture. "I could see by your face when you came to the station that there was something."

"You have seen Spooner since he was here?"

Micky nodded.

"Has he told you what he asked me?"

"He told me he had asked you a favour, and that you had refused," said Micky moodily.

"Did he tell you what it was?"

"No—only that it was a thing you could easily do. Dash it all, Eric, you might oblige the man, for my sake. I owe him fifty pounds, and if you could oblige him, he undertakes to give you my little bill to take charge of—a good proof that he will not use it against me. It isn't every bookie who'd do that. The money needn't be paid until after Christmas, if you keep the man in a good temper."

Every word that was uttered in the study was clearly audible to the junior in the cupboard.

Tom Merry simply writhed.

Wally & Co. had never thought about that, of course, but they had planted Tom Merry where he could not help hearing what was said in the study.



Knelling beside the helpless Tom Merry, Wally drew a series of lines on his face, giving the Shell fellow an appearance as though someone had been playing noughts and crosses on his features. "Ha, ha, ha!" grinned Jameson.

Tom made a great effort to eject the gag from his mouth so that he could call out, choosing rather to be found than to risk hearing more said of Kildare's private affairs. But the fags had done their work only too well. The handkerchief was secured with a length of twine passed round and round his head and knotted, and he could not utter even a murmur.

"That's the only thing against me," Pilot-Officer Kildare went on gloomily. "I know I was a fool. I know I was an idiot ever to speak to such a man. But it's rather hard that one false step like that should ruin everything. I'm at the beginning of my career. If Spooner chooses he can make me leave the Air Force."

"I know it, Micky," said Kildare

wretchedly. "But he hasn't told you what he's asked."

Tom Merry lay quite still now. He had thought of wriggling against the lumber in the cupboard to make a sound that would warn Kildare that someone was there. But he felt that he had heard too much.

The bitter humiliation of the young Air Force officer when he found that his disgraceful secret was known to a school-boy—he had to think of that. He could imagine Micky's feelings if he ever discovered that Tom Merry had learned this.

They would be called to Darrell's study soon, and they would never know that Tom had heard anything. It would never pass his lips. After all, it was no more than he already knew from that unlucky glimpse of the letter Kildare had left on his table.

"He has asked me to throw the match away."

"What?"

"He will lose more than he can pay, so he says, if we win," said Kildare. "Then he will have to call on you for that fifty, and if you don't pay, he will ruin you. He's willing to let you off if I sell the match—let Lanchester win, and let him win his filthy bets."

"The scoundrel!"

Pilot-officer Kildare strode to and fro in the study, his eyes blazing, his hands clenched.

"The bound! The rotten blackguard! He has dared to ask you that? I never guessed—I had no idea. Eric, you believe I had no suspicion of this?"

Kildare drew a deep breath.

"I was quite sure of it, Micky. I knew you would never dream of being a party to this villainy."

"Faith, if he were here I'd show him!" said Micky between his teeth. "The thafe of the world! The dirty blackguard he is!" Micky Kildare had a rich accent when he was excited, and it somehow made him seem more boyish than ever. "By thunder, I'll lay my cane about him when I see him again, the thafe!"

Kildare smiled slightly.

"No good doing that, Micky. The brute doesn't know any better. I lost my temper with him, but I was sorry for it afterwards. The wretched blackguard is playing rascally tricks like that every day of his life. He still thinks that I might do it, the miserable blackguard."

"Oh, the thafe!" said Micky, clenching his hands. "Sure, when I see him—"

"Don't see him, Micky. Don't provoke him. He can ruin you if he chooses."

"I tell ye I'll kape no terms with him!" exclaimed Micky violently. "Let him ruin me! Sure, it's me own fault intirely. What did I want to mix up with his dirty betting for? Sure, it's not fit I am to be in the Air Force at all—a gosssoon that can't look after himself better than this!" Then his voice broke a little. "But sure, if I lave the Air Force, it's ashamed I'll be to show my face at home again."

"You can't leave the Air Force, Micky," said Kildare. "We've got to think of a way somehow."

"There's no way," said Micky gloomily. "Me father can't help me, and sure, I'd be cut to pieces before I'd ask the old gentleman. If it was a tenner, I'd ask your pater, Eric, but I haven't the face to ask him for fifty pounds. And he wouldn't stand it. I'd have to tell him what it was for, and you know he's down on gambling. Sure, he's helped me with me outfit already. There wasn't much money at Castle Kildare, worse luck. It's ruin, that's what it is, and sure, I've brought it on meself!"

"If I could only do something, Micky!"

"You can't do anything, sure, unless

it's to betray yere friends, and give away the match to please the blackguard."

"You wouldn't think—"

"Think ye ought to do it? Sure, I'd river spake a word to ye again, Eric Kildare, if ye played such a dirty trick!"

"That's how I thought you'd look at it, Micky. But what is to be done? Spooner is going to leave it till after the match, hoping that I shall carry out his wish. Of course, we may lose," said Kildare, almost hopefully. "If we lose the match, Spooner will go easy with you."

"You won't lose it. Ye'll play the game of yere life!" growled Micky.

"I shall!" said Kildare quietly. "But luck may be against us. Lanchester have always beaten us so far. But, so far as I'm concerned, I shall play up for the school just the same as though Joe Spooner did not exist."

There was a knock at the door of the study, and Darrell of the Sixth looked in with a cheery smile.

"Tea's ready," he said.

Kildare and his cousin followed the prefect from the study. They had no more to say to one another. Kildare was assured now that Micky wanted him to do the right thing, not that he had had any doubts about it. In spite of his recklessness, the Irish pilot-officer was the soul of honour, and he knew it.

The study was left empty, save for Tom Merry. The Shell fellow lay with crimson cheeks in the cupboard. He was glad that Kildare had not discovered him; he was glad that the young pilot-officer had been spared that terrible humiliation of knowing that his secret was known to a third party.

He began to struggle with his bonds now, anxious to escape before Kildare should come back into his study. But the fags had done their work only too well. There was no escape for him. Neither did his chums come near the study.

Half an hour passed, and Tom Merry was feeling cramped and desperate. Then there was a sound of footsteps passing the study door. He guessed that Micky Kildare was going to catch his train; his visit was brief. Doubtless Kildare would go to the station with him.

Ten minutes passed, and then he heard footsteps in the study. Wally opened the cupboard door, and looked in with a disgusted expression upon his face.

"So Kildare didn't find you!" he snorted. "Jolly good mind to leave you there till he comes in again; but I suppose you'd be cramped to death by that time. Not that it wouldn't serve you right!" added Wally grudgingly.

However, merciful feelings prevailed, and the scamp of the Third bent over the Shell fellow, and cut through his bonds with his pocket-knife.

"Now you'd better go and wash your face!" grinned Wally. And he scuttled out of the study before Tom Merry could gain his feet. It wasn't quite safe for the hero of the Third to be at close quarters with Tom just then.

CHAPTER 12.

The Day of the Match!

"HA, ha, ha!"

"It's a giddy zebra!"

"Where did you get that face?"

"Bai Jove! You weally look wathah funny, deah boy!"

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ick lines down his face, and then a series of cross lines, on playing noughts and crosses on his features. "Oh, n't he look a coughdrop!"

He was silent; but it was with bitter, humiliated feelings. It was not pleasant to be driven against his will into eaves-dropping.

"Well, what has he asked?" said Micky irritably. "You've been so glum, he might have asked you to commit a murder. He's told me that if you consent to whatever it is, he'll do as I said. He says he will hold his hand till after the Lanchester match to give you a chance. He is coming down here to see the match, and I'm coming with him, as my leave extends over to-morrow. I guessed from what he said that it is somehow connected with that cricket match, though I can't guess how."

"He has taken a lot of bets against St. Jim's winning."

"Yes, I know that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A howl of laughter greeted Tom Merry. A crowd of juniors had come in from the cricket, and Tom had the ill-luck to run into them as he came scooting out of the Sixth Form passage, after escaping from Kildare's study.

Tom Merry did not pause. He scooted upstairs, and made his way to the nearest bath-room. In his distress of mind, caused by what he had heard in the captain's study, he had forgotten the ink on his face; but the howls of laughter from the School House juniors had speedily recalled it to his mind.

He was soon splashing away savagely with soap and steaming hot water. Lowther and Manners looked into the bath-room, grinning, while he was thus engaged.

"Been on the warpath?" asked Lowther.

"Looking for trouble," murmured Manners, "and finding some?"

"Groogh!" said Tom Merry, through the lather. "You silly duffers! Why didn't you come and find me? Those cheeky fags did this."

"You let the Third handle you like that?" said Lowther.

Tom Merry's only reply to that question was a whizzing cake of soap, which caught Lowther under the chin and bowled him out of the bath-room. Lowther disappeared, with a wrathful yell. Manners judiciously followed him. Tom Merry seemed to be in an unusually excited frame of mind.

But they were waiting for him, with subdued smiles when he came down the passage, clean and sweet once more.

"Tea's ready!" murmured Lowther pacifically.

"Blow tea!"

"Lost your appetite?" said Lowther sympathetically. "Had too much ink?"

"Look here, you silly ass—"

"We'll scrag those fags," said Lowther. "We can't have 'em handling the Shell like this. Let's go and scrag 'em!"

"Blow the fags! I've no time for fags!"

"Where are you going?" demanded Lowther, as the captain of the Shell strode away down the passage.

"To Wayland on my bike."

"What on earth for?"

"For my money, fathead! They told me the money would be ready at the bank yesterday. I'm going for it now."

"What's the hurry all of a sudden?"

"Bow-wow!"

"Well, as a matter of fact—"

"Can't stay jawing! Good-bye!"

"I was going to say—"

"Rats!"

"Oh, all serene!" said Lowther good-humouredly. "Run on, if you're not interested in the fact that the bank closes at three, and that it's a quarter to five now!"

Tom Merry stopped.

"Oh, I'd forgotten that!"

"Yes; I fancied you had," assented Lowther. "Better come and have tea. The money will do to-morrow. It won't fly away. Riches take unto themselves wings and fly away, but not when they're in the bank. Your money will be safe enough till to-morrow morning, unless they bring out a new moratorium overnight. Come and have tea."

"Hang tea!" roared Tom Merry.

"Well, you seem nice and good-tempered, I must say," said Lowther. "I'll scrag the Third for this. I won't have them spoiling your good temper in this way. You ought to be good-tempered, if you can't be good-looking! You can't

help your face, but you can help your temper. Come and have tea!"

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry strode away. Manners and Lowther looked at one another in wonder.

"Seems to have his royal rag out," remarked Lowther. "Let's go and have tea."

Lowther and Manners proceeded to the study, but their chum joined them there, his face clean, within a few minutes.

"Got over it?" demanded Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed constrainedly.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm sorry I was ratty like that, but it's frightfully annoying about the bank being closed. I shall have to cut over in the morning."

"What's the hurry? Going to stand a whacking great feed with the tin?"

"No; I've found a way of helping a man who's in danger of getting the boot unless he gets help."

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther.

"I—I can't tell you fellows about it, because—because the chap would turn simply green if he knew that anybody knew," said Tom. "I simply can't mention his name. I wish I didn't know it myself. But it's come to my knowledge. The fellow's got into an awful fix, but he's as proud as Punch, and a really first-rate honourable chap, only a bit of a duffer. Mind, you're to keep this dark. Of course, he would refuse the money if I offered it to him."

Lowther and Manners regarded their chum in amazement.

"I've got to wangle it somehow."

"I see—mysterious donor—strictly anonymous," grinned Lowther. "Only in this case the name of the generous giver is not to leak out afterwards; you must depart from the rules of the game on that point."

"It's got to be kept frightfully dark," said Tom. "I believe the chap would punch my head if he knew, and if I offered him money he would simply scrag me."

"Well, that's a good reason for keeping anonymous, I must say," remarked Lowther. "Though I don't know that I'd bother about helping a chap who showed his gratitude by scragging me."

"You don't understand the case."

"Admitted. As I haven't the barest idea who or what you're talking about, it's a bit difficult to catch on. However, you needn't blush like a giddy beetroot. I'm not going to ask questions. You'll have to explain to your Yankee uncle, though."

"I can do that without mentioning names."

"Good! Nice, trustful old Johnny won't suspect that you'd blued the quids in riotous living, I suppose?"

"Fathead!" said Tom.

"Well, let's talk about cricket, and see if you can be more polite," said Lowther genially.

Tom Merry laughed, and they talked cricket over tea.

Manners and Lowther refrained from asking questions, though they certainly felt very curious. But the Lanchester match, which was to take place on the morrow, was an interesting topic, and it soon drove other matters from their minds.

Tom Merry did not refer to the subject again, excepting to mention to Study No. 6 that he had decided what to do with the money. And as he told them that he didn't want to mention names, the chums of the Fourth politely did not ask questions.

Tom Merry was very thoughtful that

evening. When Kildare came to the Shell dormitory to see lights out he was looking thoughtful, too, and harassed.

Tom Merry knew what was on his mind, and he would have given a good deal to relieve Kildare of his worry. But that was impossible. He could not venture to say a word. Even if Kildare had not been angry and humiliated at the discovery that Tom knew so much he certainly would not have accepted money from him. That was not to be thought of.

But Tom had laid his plans by this time. When Kildare received that little present anonymously he would never suspect that it came from a junior of St. Jim's. He knew nothing, of course, of Mr. Poinsett's cheque.

The next morning school was dismissed unusually early. The Lanchester team was arriving at eleven, and on that great occasion the Head dismissed the school as well as the first eleven after second lesson.

It was a bright and sunny morning, ideal weather for cricket. The first eleven were in great spirits, with the exception of their captain.

Kildare was in a subdued mood that puzzled his comrades.

Few of the St. Jim's fellows had any doubts about the match, though they knew, of course, that Lanchester would give them a hard tussle. They did not see anything for Kildare to worry about. They did not know what Tom Merry knew.

Immediately school was dismissed there was a rush to the cricket ground and Big Side was swarmed with seniors and juniors.

Figgins & Co. of the New House rushed for the best places, and Study No. 6 rushed to intercept them, and there was the usual scrap. But Tom Merry did not join in it. Tom had wheeled out his bike, and was speeding away towards Wayland Town.

He reached the bank, and a polite official handed him five banknotes for ten pounds each in the most courteous manner—five crisp and rustling tenners.

Tom Merry breathed more freely with relief when he felt the rustling notes in his hand. It was so large a sum for a junior in the Shell that he had had a sort of lurking doubt about it till the banknotes were safe in his hand.

He hurried from the bank to the post office, and there a short letter was written and a registered letter dispatched.

Then Tom Merry rode home to St. Jim's in a contented frame of mind.

CHAPTER 13.

Kildare for St. Jim's!

"WELL bowled!"

"Bravo, Darrell!"

The Lanchester match was already going strong, when Tom Merry, having put up his bike, came down to Big Side.

All St. Jim's were swarming round the field, and other folks had been attracted to the scene by the big match. Lanchester were batting first, and a wicket had gone down to Darrell's bowling.

"How goes it?" asked Tom, as he joined Manners and Lowther, wedged in the crowd before the pavilion, ruthlessly elbowing Wally of the Third out of the way, greatly to the wrath of that young gentleman.

"Two down for eight," said Lowther.

"Oh, good!"

(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! You now have in your hands the first story of the extra-special series which will feature Irish, Welsh, Scotch, and English characters at St. Jim's. I feel assured that readers have—or will—greatly enjoy it. It's a splendid yarn, with a real human interest, and you know that stories of this sort are Martin Clifford's strong suit.

I anticipate that our novel series will beat all records for popularity, and I shall be expecting a flood of letters in praise of it. Don't forget to drop me a line.

In next Wednesday's issue Fatty Wynn, the Welsh junior, takes the leading part, and I know readers in Wales particularly will be very keen to read this grand yarn. It is called:

"THE WAY OF A WELSHMAN!"

"What's the matter with Fatty Wynn?" That's what everybody at St. Jim's wants to know when a sudden change comes over the cheery fat junior.

He becomes very secretive, and starts making mysterious visits to Wayland by himself, returning just in time for call-over at night. He refuses to give any explanation for his strange behaviour, and a story much to his discredit, and started by the cads of the school, spreads among the juniors. He is suspected of going to a low haunt in Wayland and keeping shady companions. His chums are loath to believe such a story of their Welsh chum; but, later, evidence certainly points to its being true.

Another thing that amazes the juniors is that Fatty throws up cricket in order to keep his mysterious appointments in Wayland. He is the champion bowler, and Tom Merry & Co. are rather annoyed when he refuses to play in the match against the Grammarians. Can it be true that Fatty is taking the downward path, or is there some other explanation for his conduct? You will find the answer in next week's great yarn, and, believe me, chums, you will enjoy every word of it.

"BUNTER THE VENTRILOQUIST!"

Billy Bunter's still going strong with his ventriloquism, and his unearthly noises when practising are heard far and wide at Greyfriars. But though the Removites make fun of his efforts, they can't damp the enthusiasm of Bunter for ventriloquism.

In exchange for lessons from a ventriloquist entertainer, the Owl of the Remove has promised to bring a party of Greyfriars fellows to the man's show at Friarale Town Hall, and Bunter is

as good as his word. He gets permission for thirteen juniors to go to the entertainment—and, in his usual way, leaves the expense to others! You'll enjoy another hearty laugh when you read what happens at the entertainment.

Take my tip, chums, and see that your GEM is reserved for you every week. It's the only way to make sure of reading the oldest school story paper in the world.

Now for another batch of

REPLIES TO READERS.

I. Miller (Paisley).—Glad to hear from you again. Thanks for your congratulations and your list of the ten most popular St. Jim's characters. Your joke will be published in next week's issue. Levison was once expelled, but the Head kindly allowed him to return to St. Jim's. A special story featuring Kerr is coming along.

C. Walker (Bellingham, North Tyne).—The issues of the GEM you want are out of print. Your joke was not quite on the lines of those published in the GEM. Better luck next time.

Miss D. Dowding (Weymouth).—Thanks for your selection of the best GEM yarns and the ten most popular characters. The Christian names you want, are: Patrick Reilly, Eric Kerruish, Richard Redfern, Leslie Owen, Edgar Lawrence, Patrick Mulvaney (major), Stanley Baker. The two characters you mention will be introduced some time in the future.

Miss M. Simmons (Weymouth).—Pleased to hear from you that, as a new reader, you think the GEM is the best paper you have ever read. Gordon Gay is fifteen and a half years old. Wootton major is sixteen, and Wootton minor fifteen.

D. Leeco (Douglas, Isle of Man).—Very many thanks for your interesting letter and the description of the Isle of Man it contained. I was gratified to read that you consider the GEM and "Magnet" easily the best school story papers in the British Isles. I'm afraid your Maux cat joke missed the mark. Try again. Tom Merry and Talbot are both 5 feet 5½ inches; Glyn is half an inch shorter.

R. Earnshaw (Belper, Derbyshire).—I will try to include those lists when I have sufficient space. Thanks for your story plot. Why not have a shot at writing the yarn yourself?

J. Balfour (Sydenham, S.E.26).—Glad to hear you think the GEM is the best

boys' paper you have ever read. Yes, you may have the autographs of Martin Clifford and myself. Do you want them in your album? Your joke was not quite good enough.

Miss T. Tickner (Guildford).—Other readers have suggested adapting certain St. Jim's yarns to the screen; but that, of course, is up to the film people. Yes, the quadrangle and Close are similar, and the "Rag" is a slang term for the Common-room. Thanks for your good wishes.

Miss D. Windsor (Blackheath, Birmingham).—Thanks for your poem of "Gussy's Latest Love Affair." It was quite a good effort. If you like composing poetry, keep practising. Sorry your two jokes didn't make the Jester smile.

A. Haworth (Bacup).—Tom Merry is the best boxer in the Shell, and Jack Blake and Figgins are the best in the Fourth Form. There were four stories in the first "Toff" series. Write to our Back Number Dept., The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Your joke just failed to make the bell ring.

D. Colcllo (Hawkes Bay, New Zealand).—Thanks for your letter. I am sorry, but I cannot undertake to send you the stamps you want. But I will put your notice in "Pen Pals," and no doubt a reader interested in philately will oblige you.

"A Reader" (Uddingston, Scotland).—You may have the autographs of Frank Richards and Martin Clifford—but you forgot to sign your name. Your two jokes were not quite suitable.

K. Fairhurst (Edmonton, N. 9).—Pleased to hear that you consider the GEM "Public Paper No. 1," and that you and your friend are such enthusiastic readers of the "Magnet" and "Schoolboys' Own," as well. The most popular master at St. Jim's is Mr. Raiton. The most popular juniors in the Fourth, I should say, are Blake & Co., and Figgins and his chums. Wally D'Arcy is the leader of the Third. St. Jim's was established in the reign of Edward VI, and is therefore nearly four hundred years old. Thanks for your good wishes. Try again to win half-a-crown.

M. Seely (Radcliffe-on-Trent).—Pleased to hear that, in addition to the GEM, you also read the "Magnet" and "Schoolboys' Own." I cannot say if there will be a St. Jim's film. Send along your album, and I will get the autographs of Martin Clifford and Frank Richards for you.

Chin, chin, chums, till next Wednesday!

THE EDITOR.

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PEN PALS COUPON

5-6-37

"They won't be out before lunch, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "They are wathah good, though their best men are not here. Wathah a decent set of chaps, but weally hardly up to our form."

Arthur Augustus might have been captain of the first eleven, by the way he made that remark.

Tom Merry fixed his eyes upon Kildare in the field. The captain of St. Jim's was not looking his usual alert and cheery self; but his play was good. Even as Tom Merry glanced at him, Kildare's hand went up, and the ball rested in his palm, and there was a cheer from the Saints.

"Well caught! Oh, well caught, sir!"

"Kildare is in wathah good form," remarked Arthur Augustus. "He seems to weah wathah a wowwied look, but he is playin' all wight. Wait till he starts battin', though!"

But Kildare had no chance of batting yet. The Lanchester innings lasted over lunch. When the cricketers knocked off for that necessary interval Lanchester was 70 for eight. It was a good score enough, but nothing like what the score would have been for Lanchester's old team. They missed their star men, who had left. But the team was very good indeed, and St. Jim's had all their work cut out to win.

After lunch Lanchester resumed their innings, and finished for an even hundred.

The crowd had increased in size when St. Jim's went in to bat. Darrell and Monteith opened the innings for St. Jim's.

Brown of Lanchester led his men into the field.

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "There comes our old friend the bookie!"

Tom Merry compressed his lips as he looked. A man in loud check clothes and a rakish bowler hat was strolling on the field, with a black, unlighted cigar between his teeth. It was Mr. Spooner.

The bookmaker came round to the pavilion, where the waiting batsmen were looking on.

Kildare did not seem to see him.

Mr. Spooner joined the captain of St. Jim's, and gave him an affable nod, and a steely glitter came into Kildare's eyes. His hands clenched involuntarily. But he unclenched them again. For Micky's sake, he could not afford to knock Mr. Spooner down.

"Going strong?" said Mr. Spooner agreeably.

Kildare nodded.

"How's the other side?"

"Hundred for the first innings."

"Going to beat them—wot?"

"Possibly."

Mr. Spooner's affable smile vanished, and a very ugly look came over his red, coarse face.

"There's still time, you know," he said, sinking his voice to a whisper, so that only the captain of St. Jim's could hear him.

Kildare did not seem to hear. He turned his back upon Mr. Spooner and began to speak to Baker of the New House.

Mr. Spooner's eyes glittered, and he shoved his hands deep into his pockets and stood watching the game.

Mr. Spooner's mind was fully made up. His feelings were bitter. Had Kildare agreed to his suggestions, he could have made a small fortune on THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,529.

the match; but in the state of uncertainty he was in he had not ventured to increase his stakes.

He stood to lose £130 if Lanchester lost. It was his own fault, but that made no difference to Mr. Spooner. If St. Jim's lost the match, whether by chance or intention, he was safe, and he would go easy with Micky Kildare. So long as his money was safe he would not ask questions. If Kildare chose to affect that he had tried to win, it would not matter to him.

That St. Jim's should lose—that was what Mr. Spooner wanted. He was an accommodating gentleman. He was prepared to affect a belief that Kildare hadn't given it away, if that would please Kildare. He didn't mind.

But if Kildare won the match, the chopper would come down on Kildare's cousin. Mr. Spooner would not lose his money unrevenged. If his money were lost Micky Kildare was lost, too!

He could not believe that the captain of St. Jim's would see his cousin ruined merely for the sake of winning a game of cricket—for that was how Mr. Spooner looked at it, considerations of all personal honour not appealing to him at all.

But he was doubtful; and it was in a very unpleasant state of uncertainty that he stood watching the match.

Darrell was out at last, and Kildare went in to bat.

Mr. Spooner watched him grimly. Now was the test! His eyes never left Kildare for an instant.

The first ball to Kildare's wicket was cut away for four, and the crowd roared. The popular captain was beginning well. St. Jim's looked forward to a tremendous innings; it was clear that Kildare was at the top of his form.

Mr. Spooner breathed hard through his prominent nose. Was the captain of St. Jim's merely keeping up appearances at first, or was he playing to win? The bookmaker clenched his fat hand. Let him win—let him!—and he should rue it!

As if the burning gaze of the bookmaker made itself felt, Kildare looked up; his eyes caught Mr. Spooner's; he read the grim threatening glare of the rascal, and a shade came over his handsome face.

His thoughts wandered for a moment. The ball was coming down; but at that moment what Kildare saw was a handsome, distressed face, a young fellow in uniform, disgraced, humiliated, —his cousin Micky!—it floated before his mind like a vision—

Crash!

"Oh!" came in a gasp from the crowd.

It was the crash of his wicket that recalled Kildare to himself. He stared blankly, almost dazedly, at the wrecked wicket.

He was out—down for four! He had come on to the pitch prepared to play the game of his life, and he was out for four! He walked off dazedly.

There was silence in the crowd. All the fellows knew what Kildare must be feeling like for the moment. But Mr. Spooner was grinning with satisfaction.

His fears were at rest now. Kildare was giving the game away, and that was all he wanted. For that was the conclusion the bookmaker had come to.

"Well done!" he whispered, as Kildare passed him. The cricketer's face had closed for a moment convulsively on the cane handle of the bat, as if he would feel the grinning, greasy

scoundrel. But he controlled himself and passed on.

Mr. Spooner shrugged his shoulders. "Cruel luck, old man!" said Darrell. "Better in the next innings."

Kildare nodded without speaking.

The fall of their captain's wicket for 4 runs had damped the spirits of the St. Jim's crowd. The mighty batsman, who had been expected to knock up 50, at least, who might have secured a century, was down for 4. The Saints hardly hoped now that St. Jim's would draw level with Lanchester on the first innings.

Their misgivings were well founded. The batsmen did their best; but the bowling was good, and St. Jim's were all down in their first innings for 70.

Tom Merry had felt a catch at his heart when Kildare's wicket had gone down so hopelessly. But he would not admit the dark suspicion; his faith in Kildare was too well-founded for that. It was a case of nerves, he told himself—knowing how much there was at stake, Kildare had not been himself at that moment.

The other fellows had commented on it in wonder. For Kildare had not even hit at the ball. He seemed to have gone to sleep—gone to sleep standing up like a horse, as Figgins remarked with a sniff.

"Must be off his form, aifah all," was Arthur Augustus' sage verdict. "If he doesn't come wound in the second innings we're done, deah boys."

"Here comes young Micky," remarked Blake.

Micky Kildare joined the captain of St. Jim's while the pitch was being rolled before the Lanchester second innings.

Mr. Spooner gave the young pilot-officer a nod, which Micky did not acknowledge.

"You're in time for the second innings, Micky," said Kildare, forcing a smile.

He was feeling despondent just then. His failure in his innings weighed on his mind. He was furious with himself for allowing the bookmaker's look to exercise so much influence upon him. He bitterly resolved that it should be different in the second innings.

"How's the score?" asked Micky.

"Seventy for us, and a hundred for Lanchester on the first innings."

Micky whistled.

"That isn't what you expected?"

"I had bad luck."

"Eric!"

Kildare flushed.

"It will be different when I go in again, I think," he said. "It was really bad luck, Micky; but I caught that man's eye, and—and— Well, it won't happen again. We'll win yet, if we've got it in us."

"Kick him off the place!"

"We don't want a scene, Micky, nor to start him talking. Besides," added Kildare grimly, "I want him to be looking on when we win—if we do win."

Kildare had to go into the field then, and Micky remained looking on, keeping a distance from Mr. Spooner. The Lanchester men were batting again.

The runs went up, and the wickets went down at a fair rate, and then Kildare went on to bowl. There were loud cheers when the captain of St. Jim's took two quick wickets. Mr. Spooner's face was a study.

"What does the fellow mean by it?" he murmured.

The fat gentleman's hopes and fears, alternately rising and falling, were really like a see-saw.



"Spooner has laid money against St. Jim's winning," said Kildare. "Yes, I know that," replied his cousin. "He has asked me to throw the match away!" went on the St. Jim's captain. "He's willing to let you off if I sell the match!" Bound and gagged in the study cupboard, Tom Merry was driven against his will into eavesdropping.

Mr. Spooner was not enjoying himself that afternoon. He mentally resolved to make somebody suffer for it.

Lanchester fought hard to the finish, however, and they scored 90 runs for their innings. St. Jim's were left with 120 to get to tie with Lanchester, and after their first score Lanchester did not think they would get them.

The St. Jim's fellows had very strong doubts. It was pretty clear that it all depended on Kildare. If his innings was what his friends hoped, all was well for the school. But if he failed again—

"Bai Jove! I'm feelin' quite in a fluttah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally wish they would not stop for tea just now."

But they did stop for tea, and the crowd had to contain their impatience. Mr. Spooner was still more anxious than the St. Jim's fellows. He munched a sandwich from his pocket, and refreshed himself from a flask, in a savage and discontented mood.

The St. Jim's second innings came on at last, after what seemed an age to Mr. Spooner and to the eager juniors. The innings opened again with Darrell and Monteith. This time Darrell had bad luck, being caught out in the first over for 2. St. Jim's almost groaned.

Darrell was their next best man after Kildare. And Darrell was down for 2.

It was cruel luck. Was that long-expected victory over Lanchester not to materialise, after all?

"Here comes Kildare," murmured Tom Merry.

Amid breathless expectancy, the captain of St. Jim's walked to the vacant wicket. All eyes were upon him. Was he to fail his side again—or to play up as the school longed to see him play?

Mr. Spooner watched him like a hawk; but the captain of St. Jim's had pulled himself well together, and he was impervious to Mr. Spooner's glances now.

Micky Kildare watched him with a tense gaze. In Micky's heart there was a hope that Lanchester would win honourably. If St. Jim's were beaten, he was safe—his act of folly would not have to be paid for at such a bitter price. It did not matter if St. Jim's lost, if they lost fairly. But not even to save his name would Micky have wished Kildare to play his comrades false.

The ball came down, and slithered away from the bat, and the batsmen were running. Four, and Kildare and Monteith safe again at the wickets before the leather came in. Again it was a good beginning. But would it last?

"I'm on tentahhooks, deah boys," murmured Arthur Augustus plaintively. But the dear boys did not reply;

they did not even hear; they were on tenterhooks, too.

Clack! Again, and the leather sped—a boundary!

"Hurrah!" Old Kildare was getting into his stride at last. He was not to fail again.

"Good for a century, you see!" chuckled Blake.

"Well hit, Kildare!"

"Bravo!"

Over after over was bowled. Monteith went out, and Baker came in. He fell, and Rushden took his place; then Langton, and then North, and then Webb, and then Lefevre of the Fifth. Wicket after wicket, but no duck's-eggs, though the scores were not high. But Kildare was immovable. He saw them in, and he saw them out. And whenever he had the bowling, he was cutting and driving the ball away with his well-known strokes.

Cheers rose and swelled to a roar.

Kildare was set now; the Lanchester bowling could not trouble him, and he gave no chances in the field.

A hundred runs—fifty of them off Kildare's bat. Eight down for a hundred. Twenty more to get for a tie, and Kildare still batting, with two more wickets to fall. And the next over gave him ten. Then four runs for Cutts of the Fifth, his partner, and Cutts was

clean bowled. A hundred and fourteen—and last man in!

The excitement was breathless now. Mr. Spooner was almost green.

Pilot-Officer Kildare was breathing hard. Kildare of St. Jim's was like a rock.

A single run, stolen by his partner, and Kildare had the batting again.

Five more wanted to tie; six to win—and away went the ball for four!

There was a roar as the leather came in too late.

Blake tossed his cap in the air, not caring where it came down, or, indeed, whether it ever came down at all.

Hundred and nineteen!

One wanted to tie, two to win, and Kildare still batting.

"Good old Kildare!" said Tom Merry.

There was a breathless hush as the ball went down. Everybody felt instinctively that it would be the last ball. The glistening bat swept through the air, and the leather sailed away.

There was a throb in every St. Jim's heart as Brown, of Lanchester, leaped for it; but it was beyond the clutch of the fieldsmen, sailing away, and the batsmen were running.

One—two—and a roar!

"St. Jim's wins! Bravo—bravo!"

"Hurrah! Hip-hip-hurrah!"

Kildare walked off the field amid a roar. But the whirlwind of cheering found no echo in his heart. He left Darrell to do the honours for the Lanchester men, and walked away quietly with Micky.

Pilot-Officer Kildare's face was set and hard. Cheers followed them to the School House. Outside the pavilion, Mr. Spooner stood rooted to the ground, his

flabby cheeks pale, and an almost murderous light growing in his eyes.

CHAPTER 14.

Light at Last!

"IT'S all up, Eric!" Micky Kildare spoke quietly as he stood facing his cousin in the latter's study. The flush had died away out of Kildare's face, and he was pale. He had done his duty, but his heart was heavy. He could not have done otherwise, but the price that was to be paid for doing the right thing was a heavy one.

"Micky, old man"—Kildare's voice was low and shaken—"I'm sorry! Perhaps, after all, the man would gain nothing by—by going to extremes. Perhaps—"

Micky laughed shortly. "Did you see his face?"

"I did not look at him."

"I did," said Micky. "It's all up! I've only got myself to thank, and I won't trouble you any more about it, Eric. I've bothered you too much already. I shall resign my commission immediately, and take the consequences of playing the fool! It can't be helped. After all, I can always go into the ranks. There are better men than I am in the ranks."

Tap!

"Here he comes!" said Micky grimly. "I thought he wouldn't go without us seeing him, Eric! Let him come!"

"Come in!" said Kildare dully.

But it was not Mr. Spooner; it was Toby, the School House page. He held a registered letter in his hand.

"This is for you, Master Kildare. It came while you were playing, so Mr. Railton signed for it, and told me to bring it to you arter, sir."

"Thank you, Toby!"

Toby laid the letter on the table and retired. Kildare hardly looked at it. He was in no mood for reading letters just then. But the pilot-officer cast his eyes upon the bulky envelope.

"Open your letter, Eric."

"It doesn't matter now."

Micky gave a short, nervous laugh.

"Do you get so many fat registered letters?" he said.

Kildare smiled faintly, and picked up the letter. He had not the faintest idea what was in it or whence it came, and he did not care at the moment. But the thick envelope certainly looked as if it were packed with banknotes. But how could that be possible?

The captain of St. Jim's slit the envelope with his penknife. Somehow his heart beat a little faster. He had written to his father for a tip, certainly, but surely it was impossible that the old gentleman had sent him a large sum.

Micky's eyes were on that fat envelope. In his desperate straits, the unhappy young man's heart leaped at a straw of hope.

"Great Scott!"

It was almost a shout from Kildare as he drew a wedge of banknotes from the envelope.

Micky gasped.

"Tenners!"

"I—I'm dreaming, I suppose!" said Kildare dazedly. "There—there must be

(Continued on next page.)

PEN PALS

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T. C. Lee, 25, Damar Road, Singapore; pen pals anywhere; stamps.

J. C. McRae, 26, Roseberry Street, Jolimont, Western Australia, Australia; stamps.

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R. Armitage, 190, St. Johns Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17; age 15-19; sports, music; S. Africa, E. Indies, U.S.A. Reader would like to hear from "Brian," formerly of Pretoria, S. Africa, now in U.S.A.

G. Mahood, 270, Hollywood Road, Strandtown, Belfast; age 15; Rugger, athletics, violin and cycling.

M. Katz, 22, Overdale Gardens, Langside, Glasgow; films, stamps, and newspapers.

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some mistake! The pater can't have sent me this!"

He separated the folded wedge of notes.

"Five of them! Tenners!" he said. "Of course, it's a mistake! They can't be for me!"

"The envelope's addressed to you," said Micky. "Eric Kildare, School House, St. James', Sussex." Not much mistake about that. Registered, too.

"I—I can't understand it."

"Is there a letter?"

"Yes, a sheet; a few lines. Listen."

Kildare read it out in tones of wonder. The brief letter was written in a backward-sloping hand, evidently to disguise the handwriting.

"Eric Kildare, St. Jim's."

"A friend who has accidentally learned of your cousin's difficulty begs you to accept the enclosed."

That was all.

Kildare and Micky looked at one another blankly.

There was not the faintest clue to the sender. For several minutes there was silence in the study.

Micky felt his brain almost reeling. Kildare was lost for words. Truly, the friend who had sent those banknotes was a friend in need!

"Well," said Kildare at last, "it isn't a dream. It knocks me over, but the banknotes are real enough, Micky. Who can have done this?"

"Some chap with plenty of cash," said Micky, with almost a sobbing breath.

"Perhaps one of the officers of my squadron. Something may have got about. But no; he'd have sent it to me, I should say. Some friend of yours. Have you let something drop?"

"Not a syllable, not a whisper—not to a soul."

"Then it beats me."

Kildare brushed his hand over his brow. It seemed like a dream; it seemed that it could not be real. Yet it was real enough. He looked at the banknotes—five crisp, new Bank of England notes, each for ten pounds. They were genuine enough. There was no mistake about it.

"Whoever he is," said Kildare at last, "he's a splendid chap. How he got to know of this is a mystery. It must be somebody the bookmaker has talked to—somebody who knows Spooner—for certainly I haven't said a word to a soul. Anyway, whoever he is, he has saved us, Micky. We couldn't send the notes back if we wanted to—and we don't want to. Of course, it's a loan. We must find the chap out somehow, and repay the money when we can get it together. But, meantime—"

"Meantime, some unknown friend has saved my name," said Micky. "He's a sportsman, whoever he is! Sure, I'm out of the scrape at last, and sure, there won't be another scrape like that, Eric. I've had my lesson, and I'll never put my foot in it again!"

He crumpled the notes in his hand. Even now it was hard to believe that it was real.

Kildare's face was very bright. His heart was full of gratitude to the unknown friend who had saved his cousin from disgrace. He wondered whom he could be; but he was far from guessing.

"Oh, Micky! You can pay the black-guard now, and you're clear—"

"Hurroo!" The pilot-officer was gay again now, his troubles had dropped from him like a cloak. "Oh, this is ripping, Eric! Bedad, I want to see Spooner now, and the sooner the better intirely."

There was a heavy step in the passage, as if in answer to him.

THE DEPARTING GUEST!



"It's a pity you're leaving, Mr. Wiffle. The house will seem quite empty without you!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Webster, Poplar House, 36, Broad Lane, Wednesfield.

A loud and raucous voice was heard. "Don't talk to me! I'm going to see him. He's there! He owes me money, the young swindler! Get aside!"

Kildare jerked open the study door. Two or three of the Sixth were barring the way of a red-faced, excited, furious man.

"Let him pass," said Kildare quietly.

"You want to see this merchant?" asked Rushden.

"Yes; let him come in!"

Mr. Spooner was allowed to pass. He strode into Kildare's study raging. The captain of St. Jim's closed the door.

Mr. Spooner shook a fat fist at him.

"Now I want my money!" he roared. "You've played me for a mug—well, now you can pay for it. That young swindler—"

"Speak quietly, or I'll give you the hiding of your life, Mr. Spooner!" said Kildare, clenching his hands and making a fierce stride towards the infuriated bookmaker.

"Pay me my money, then," Mr. Spooner lowered his voice involuntarily. "You've taken your way, and now I'll take mine. Pay my money, or Mister Pilot-Officer Swindler Kildare will be known all over London as a defaulter and a swindler before night."

"By gad!" said Micky, with a drawl. "If you repeat those remarks, Mr. Spooner, I'll lay my cane about you till you howl! As for your money, there it is." He tossed the banknotes on the table. "Now I'll trouble you for my little bit of paper."

Mr. Spooner gasped.

He picked up the banknotes and examined them. Then a bitter look came over his face.

"I understand now," he snarled. "You'd raised the money, so you could afford to quarrel with me!"

Micky Kildare shrugged his shoulders.

"My little paper, please," he said.

With a furious face the bookmaker opened his pocket-book and handed out the paper.

Micky Kildare examined it carefully, nodded, and dropped it into the fire.

"Our business is concluded, Mr. Spooner," he remarked. "Our acquaintance concludes at the same moment. Kindly get out!"

"You—you—you—" Mr. Spooner spluttered.

He had his money, but he was not satisfied. In his present infuriated state of mind he would have chosen rather to have had his revenge.

Kildare opened the door again.

"Get out!" he said.

"Hang you!" snarled Mr. Spooner. "Hang you, the pair of you! You managed to raise the money at the last minute and played me false, after all! Hands off!"

But Kildare had had enough of him; he grasped the bookmaker by the shoulders and swung him out of the room.

Mr. Spooner went reeling along the passage.

"Now, if you're not off the premises in one minute I'll kick you from here to the gates!" exclaimed Kildare.

Mr. Spooner did not wait to be kicked; he hurried away, choking with rage, and disappeared.

Kildare stepped back into the study.

"All's well that ends well," he said, with a deep breath.

"And sure, it's you that saved me, Eric! I was right to come to you, after all," said Micky. "Sure, it's ten years younger I feel! Tare and hounds! What's that thumping row?"

They rushed to the window as there was a sudden roar in the quadrangle. They could not help grinning at the sight of Mr. Spooner being chased towards the gates, with a crowd of juniors after him.

Mr. Spooner had raised his voice in the quad, and Tom Merry & Co. had undertaken to subdue it. They were doing so effectively. Mr. Spooner's rakish hat was knocked off, and the juniors were chasing him down to the gates with loud yells.

Tom Merry, just behind the panting bookmaker, was helping him along with alternate feet, as if Mr. Spooner were a very fat football and Tom was dribbling him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Pilot-Officer Kildare roared as the discomfited Mr. Spooner vanished out of the gates and Tom Merry hurled his hat after him. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare laughed, too; he could laugh now. Mr. Spooner was gone for good. The shadow had passed from the life of the young Air Force officer.

Tom Merry noted Kildare's face when the captain of St. Jim's came back after seeing his cousin off that evening.

Kildare looked as if he were walking on air.

It was very evident that his troubles were over—that the shadow had passed.

And Tom Merry rejoiced inwardly; but not a word passed his lips, even to his best chums.

Micky's secret remained a secret, and Pilot-Officer Kildare never knew to whom he owed deliverance; and the captain of St. Jim's, though he often thought about the matter, never guessed. It was a case of a still tongue showing a wise head, and Tom Merry's silence on that subject was never broken.

But if he had needed any proof that he had done well and wisely he had it when, later, there came the news that Kildare's cousin had already earned promotion in the Air Force.

(Next Wednesday: "THE WAY OF A WELSHMAN!"—starring Fatty Wynn, the junior from Wales. Don't miss this second great story of this novel series. Order your GEM early.)

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BILLY BUNTER'S GOT ANOTHER "BEE IN HIS BONNET"! THIS TIME IT'S VENTRILOQUISM—AND HE'S FUNNIER THAN EVER!

THE GREYFRIARS VENTRILOQUIST!



As Bunter walked across the Close, his head was thrown back, his mouth wide open, and a most weird series of gasps was proceeding from his throat. He was quite oblivious to the laughing juniors around him. "Mad as a hatter!" grinned Nugent. "It's come at last!"

Billy Bunter's New Stunt!

"GROO-GROO-GERROOH!"

"What's that?"

"Groo-gerrooh!"

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "It's—it's somebody in pain in the study!"

"Gerrooh—ger-r-rooh!"

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry both looked alarmed. They were coming up the Remove passage at Greyfriars when the mysterious sounds caught their ears, proceeding from Study No. 1. The study door was closed, but the curious sounds were audible in the passage.

"Groo-gerrooh-ger-r-r-r-rooh!"

"It—it sounds like somebody suffocating!" muttered Bob Cherry. "It can't be Nugent or Inky—they're both out of doors."

"Bunter is there," said Wharton.

"Then it must be Bunter. But what can—"

Harry Wharton hurried on quickly towards the study, and threw the door open. The strange sounds continued without cessation.

"Ger-r-r-r-r-rooo-ger-r-rooh!"

The chums of the Remove looked into the study. There was evidently something wrong with Billy Bunter to cause him to emit those remarkable grunts and gasps. They could only suppose that a tart had gone down the wrong way, or that he had swallowed a plum stone, or something of the sort.

"Gerrooh!"

Bunter was seated in the easy-chair, with his fat little legs drawn up, and a book on his knees. His head was thrown back, and his mouth was wide

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open, and an uninterrupted series of gasps and grunts proceeded therefrom.

"He's choking!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"It's a plum stone, I expect. Thump him on the back, while I cut off and get him some water."

"Right you are! Buck up!"

Bob Cherry dashed off, and Harry Wharton stepped quickly towards Bunter. The fat junior did not move. His head remained at the same uncomfortable angle, and his mouth, wide open, continued to emit grunt after gasp, and gasp after grunt.

"Groo-gerroooh-ger-r-r—"

Wharton seized the fat junior, pulled

him forward, and slapped him on the back with friendly energy.

Bunter gave a jump, dropped the book off his knees, and squirmed round.

"Oh! Ow! Hold on!" he yelled.

"Better now?" panted Wharton.

"Better? What do you mean? Leave off thumping my back, you beast! Oh! Ow!"

"Are you feeling all right?"

"How can I feel all right when you're thumping me on the back? Are you dotty? Leave off!"

Wharton desisted at last.

Billy Bunter put his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at Wharton in almost speechless indignation.

"You—you—you—" he gasped.

"What do you mean? What did you start thumping me for?"

"Glad you're better," said Wharton.

"Was it a plum stone?"

"A—what?"

"A plum stone, or a tart?"

"What the— Ow-w-w-w!"

Bob Cherry rushed into the study with a jug of water in his hand. He did not stop to speak, but dashed the water in Bunter's face.

"There you are!" he gasped. "That will cure your choking!"

"Ow! Ugh! Gerrooh!" gurgled Bunter.

"Is he all right now, Wharton?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I think we must have made a mistake. And he wasn't choking at all."

"Then what was he making that row in his throat for?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Choking!" yelled Billy Bunter.

"You utter idiots, of course I wasn't choking! What did you sling that water in my chivvy for, Cherry, you beast?"

"To bring you round, of course!"

"You—you—you—"

Words failed Bunter. He rubbed the water out of his eyes, his ears, and his hair, and tore off his dripping collar and tie. He wiped his spectacles with a force that all but snapped them, and put them on again.

The chums of the Remove watched him curiously. They realised by this

Wharton desisted at last.

Billy Bunter put his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at Wharton in almost speechless indignation.

"You—you—you—" he gasped.

"What do you mean? What did you start thumping me for?"

"Glad you're better," said Wharton.

"Was it a plum stone?"

"A—what?"

"A plum stone, or a tart?"

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

A FULL-OF-LAUGHS STORY OF THE EARLY SCHOOLDAYS OF HARRY WHARTON & CO. AND THE FAT BOY OF GREYFRIARS.

time that they had been mistaken, and that Billy Bunter had not been in the throes of suffocation when they rescued him. The rescue had been superfluous. "You—you shrieking idiots!" said Bunter at last. "You howling duffers! You dangerous lunatics!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Harry Wharton. "We thought you were suffocating."

"You looked like it," said Bob Cherry warmly. "And what were you making those unearthly noises for?"

"You dummies!"

"Well, if a chap opens his mouth as wide as a coal-mine, and makes a row like a grunting porker, he must expect people to think he's ill," said Bob Cherry. "Are you off your rocker?"

"I was practising—"

"Practising what? If you're going to practise making a row like that, you'll have to change your quarters, I warn you!"

Bunter mopped his face with his handkerchief. The rescue had very much disturbed him, but he was recovering from it now.

"I say, you fellows, I was practising my new art—"

"Your new what?"

"My new art. You know I took up physical culture, and hypnotism, and thought-reading, and—"

"I know you're several varieties of a silly ass."

"Well, as a matter of fact, none of those things really suited me."

"I remember telling you so at the time."

"Yes; but I've found the right hobby at last. I've found my metier."

"Your what?"

"My metier. That's a French word. It means that I'm on the right thing at last. It was that entertainer chap coming to Friardale that put it into my head. You've heard of Monsieur Dupont, the ventriloquist?"

"He's giving a show in the village, I believe?"

"That's it. Well, that put it into my head, and it struck me all at once that I was a born ventriloquist."

"More like a born idiot."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I got a book on the subject."

"Where did you borrow the tin?"

"I forget. The book I've got is the very latest thing—written by Professor Balmicrumpett, the famous ventriloquist, who has given ventriloquial performances to all the crowned heads of Europe."

"How do you know?"

"It says so in the book. I'm studying the subject now on the famous Balmicrumpett method, and I'm thinking of getting lessons from that chap in Friardale, if I can raise the tin."

"But what has that to do with the row you were making when we came in?"

"That's the first practice."

"Oh, that's the first practice, is it?" said Bob Cherry. "It had better be the last, too, if it's all like that."

"I'll read you what Professor Balmicrumpett says on the subject," said Billy Bunter, picking up the book.

"Here you are! 'The mouth open, as Fig. 1—'"

Bunter opened his mouth wide.

"That's how you open your mouth, you fellows."

"A bit dangerous for anybody standing near you, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry. "Suppose somebody fell in?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Now listen to what Professor Balmicrumpett says: 'The first step is to learn to produce the ventriloquial drone—'"

"The ventriloquial what?"

"Drone. 'This is done by opening the mouth and taking in a deep breath and—'"

"Suppose you took in a deep breath without opening the mouth?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! 'This is done by opening the mouth and taking in a deep breath, then holding it, and making a retching sound at the back of the throat—'"

"Oh, I see now what was the matter with you!"

"Then you exhale slowly, forming the vowel 'Ah'—'"

"Ah?"

"Yes; ah. I will give you an example. Groo—groo—geroooh—"

Bob Cherry stopped his ears.

"Oh, don't! Leave off!"

"I was giving you an example of the ventriloquial drone."

"Sounded to me more like an expiring frog."

"Of course, I can't expect to get it quite perfect at first. I haven't learned to throw my voice at all yet," said Billy Bunter modestly. "In a few days, however, I hope to be able to perform any ventriloquial tricks on the best Balmicrumpett principles."

"I suppose you will have to practise a lot?"

"Oh, yes! I shall keep on practising

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***If croaking like an expiring frog has any connection with voice-throwing, Billy Bunter's in a fair way to becoming the world's champion ventriloquist!***

~~~~~

the ventriloquial drone at intervals all the time, you know, day and night."

"Have you insured your life?"

"What on earth has that to do with learning ventriloquism?"

"A jolly lot!" said Bob Cherry. "It would be only common prudence to insure your life before you start practising the ventriloquial drone in a study you share with other fellows. Something might happen to you."

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"Besides, it's all rot! I suppose you'll make about as good a ventriloquist as you made a hypnotist and a thought-reader."

"With my remarkable powers of voice-throwing, I—"

"Why, you said you hadn't chucked your voice about yet!"

"Well, I haven't. But I feel I have the remarkable powers, and—"

"Keep 'em then! Hallo, what on earth are you doing? Have you got a pain?"

"I'm just going to practise the ventriloquial drone, that's all."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Groo—groo—ger-r-rooh!"

"Hold on, I tell you! How can you expect anybody to stand that fearful row?"

"Groo—groo!"

"My hat! Give me a poker, Wharton!"

"Groo—geroooh!"

"Look here, you young ass—"

Wharton laughingly caught Bob by

the arm and pulled him towards the door.

"Give him a chance," he said. "Let's get out. We'll get down to the gym. Hold on a tick till we're gone, Bunter!"

"Groo—groo—groo!"

"The young ass!" growled Bob Cherry. "What a fearful row! Talk about expiring frogs!"

"Groo—gerrooh!"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"Gerror-r-r-rooh!"

"Great Scott! Let's cut!" gasped Bob.

And they cut. Down the passage the ventriloquial drone followed them.

"Ger-r-r-rooh!"

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## A Little Loan!

"WHAT'S the matter?"

"Off his rocker, I suppose."

"By Jove, he must be!"

"The off-fulness of the esteemed rocker is terrific!"

It was Billy Bunter who caused these remarks to be made, but he was oblivious to them, being far too busy to think of trifles.

He had come out of the School House and was walking towards the gymnasium, with his head thrown back, his mouth open, and a most weird series of gasps proceeding from his throat.

"Mad as a hatter!" laughed Frank Nugent. "It's come at last. I always said that Bunter was rather weak in the top story."

"The weakness is great," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur. "My worthy Butterful chum, what is the esteemed matter with your honourable fat head?"

"What on earth is he gasping for?" said Hazeldene. "Bunter, you ass, if you're not off your rocker, what's the wheeze?"

Micky Desmond stepped in Bunter's path and gave him a gentle dig in his fat ribs. Bunter's gasping became very energetic, all of a sudden. Micky's dig had caught him in the middle of a ventriloquial grunt, and for a moment he could not get his wind. He turned his spectacles on the Irish junior indignantly.

"What did you do that for, you utter idiot?"

"Faith, and I want to know what you're at intirely!"

"You've interrupted my practice. I was trying the effect of the Balmicrumpett drone in the open air, and now you've spoiled it."

The Removites stared.

"What on earth is the Balmicrumpett drone?" demanded Nugent.

"I've lately discovered that I've got a remarkable gift for ventriloquism and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm giving up my other hobbies and taking up ventriloquism. You can see that I'm on the high road to success."

"Is that grunting ventriloquism?"

"Ass! That's only the first practice. I'm doing the ventriloquial drone now."

"Is that a drone?"

"What do you think it is, then?"

"It sounded to me like a pig grunting!"

"Well, of course, I can't get it perfect at first. Perfection will come later, when my remarkable powers are developed. I'll soon have the drone all

right, and then I shall start on the voice throwing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at. Don't interrupt me, you fellows! I find that I can practise better in the open air."

And Billy Bunter marched on, with his mouth wide open, and grunting away in fine style, leaving the Removites shrieking with laughter.

Bunter entered the gym, where Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were exercising. Bob was swinging himself over the parallel bars, when Bunter came blinking round in search of the chums of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bob Cherry dropped to the ground, missing Bunter's feet by half an inch. The Owl of the Remove jumped back.

"Oh, I say, Wharton, you startled me!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "It's not Wharton, ass! It's I, duffer! What are you getting in the way for?"

"I want to speak to you fellows."

"Well, no harm in that. I suppose we can go on while you're speaking?"

"You won't hear me—"

"Well, we don't want to!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, Wharton, it's a rather important matter—"

"Cut it short, Bunter! Do you want any advice on the subject of ventriloquism?" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"No, Wharton. My wonderful powers in that line are developing very fast, and if I could have a few personal lessons—"

"Well, we can't give you any lessons in producing the ventriloquial grunt," said Bob Cherry. "Cut off!"

"Do wait a minute! I want to get some lessons from that chap Dupont in the village. I've been disappointed about a postal order—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was expecting one by the first post this morning, and it hasn't come."

"I should write to the Postmaster-General about it. That chap gets a good salary, and he ought to see to it that you get your postal orders. This isn't the first one you've been expecting that hasn't arrived."

"Oh, don't talk rot, Cherry! I was relying on getting this postal order, and now it hasn't come, I'm in a fix. I'm in want of ready money."

"You always are."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I stood you chaps a jolly good feed the other day when I was in funds."

"Yes; and Levison had to pay the piper."

"Well, you had the feed, so you can't complain. And Levison must have lots of money, or he couldn't have stood the ten bob."

"I believe it busted him."

"Well, I'm not speaking about Levison now. I don't want much—only a pound or so."

"My only hat! And where do you think we're going to get a pound from?" demanded Bob Cherry, in amazement.

"I thought you might get up a subscription in the Form," said Billy Bunter modestly. "You see, it will be lots of fun for all of us when I'm an expert ventriloquist."

"When!"

"With my wonderful powers it won't take long, but I feel that I require a few personal lessons. The Balmierum-pett method is good, but it takes time. That entertainer chap could put me up to it much quicker."

"Well, you'd better go round raising a subscription," said Bob Cherry. "You

can put my name down for a French penny."

"But, I say, you fellows, I dare say I could do with a few bob to go on with. If my postal order had come, I wouldn't have bothered you. Look here, I'll borrow the money at interest, same as I did before with Inky. I gave Inky twelve thousand per cent—at least, it would have amounted to that for the year, you know."

"And if you'd paid up!"

"Well, I had a disappointment about a postal order, but with such a heavy rate of interest, Inky ought to have expected to take some risks."

"You utter ass, Inky gave you the tin."

"Oh, no! I expressly stated that I couldn't accept it as a gift. I may be poor, but I have pride," said Billy Bunter, with great dignity. "Now, suppose you lend me five bob on the present occasion, Cherry—"

"I haven't even five pence, fat-head!"

"Suppose you lend me five bob on the present occasion, Wharton—"

"I've only four in the wide world," said Harry, laughing. "You really ought to be a little bit more reasonable, Banty."

"I hope you don't regard me as a cadger. If you think I'm asking you to give me money, this conversation may as well cease!"

"Right-bo! Come on, Harry!"

"Hold on, Cherry! Don't be in such a hurry! As I was saying, if Wharton can't stand five bob, I could make four do, and I will cash up the instant my postal order comes. I'll give you back five bob."

"I can't—"

"Six, then."

"Look here—"

"Well, double!" said Billy Bunter.

"There you are, I've offered you cent per cent. There's precious few fellows are able to lend out money at a hundred per cent."

"You young ass!"

"Well, I suppose it is a bit reckless of me to pay such a rate of interest for a small loan; but, you see, I'm in want of the ready money," said Bunter. "My postal order will be here to-morrow morning, so the loan will be repaid in, say, fifteen hours' time. How many hours are there in a year, Bob Cherry?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"No; I'm making a calculation."

"Blessed if I know."

"Twenty-four multiplied by three hundred and sixty-five," said Billy Bunter. "I think I can do that in my head. Something under nine thousand, isn't it?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Well, call it nine thousand, to put it into round figures."

"You can call it anything you like, fathead!"

"Nine thousand, then. Divide nine thousand by fifteen—"

"What on earth for?"

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt my calculation. Is it six hundred, Wharton?"

"Nine thousand divided by fifteen is six hundred, certainly," said Harry, laughing.

"Well, then, if I give you a hundred per cent for fifteen hours, I'm giving you six hundred times a hundred per cent, calculating by the year. What is six hundred times a hundred, Bob Cherry?"

"More than a dozen, I should say."

"Oh, don't be funny when I'm making an important calculation. How many is six hundred times a hundred, Wharton?"

"Sixty thousand."

"By Jove, is it really? Then if my calculations are correct—"

"If," said Bob Cherry.

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me, Cherry. If my calculations are correct, Wharton, I shall be paying you interest at the rate of sixty thousand per cent per annum."

"I suppose Wharton will be buying a lot of casks to store it in," said Bob Cherry sarcastically.

"It's the fact. Cent per cent for fifteen hours is sixty thousand per cent per annum, or thereabouts. I don't see how Wharton can expect more. Am I to have the four bob at that rate, Wharton?"

"I can't spare it."

"I've never thought you a mean chap before. If sixty thousand per cent doesn't satisfy you, how much do you want?"

"You utter young ass!"

"It's no good calling me names because I object to being bled by a Shylock. I think sixty thousand per cent is ample."

"Look here, you young ass," said Harry Wharton, half laughing. "I'm not going to lend you any money at interest. In the first place, you will never pay it. In the second place, if you weren't such an utter ass I should like you for suggesting such a thing as interest on a loan to me."

"I think I've offered quite enough, and—"

"I'd give you four shillings if I could—"

"But I don't want you to give them to me. I couldn't accept them as a gift. I want you to lend—"

"Oh, cheese it, and cut off!"

"But I say, Wharton, I really want to get some lessons from that chap in Friardale, you know, and it may save me from having to practise the ventriloquial drone so much—"

"If that's the case, I'd stand a bob towards it, if I had one," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Well, you can have three," said Wharton. "I'm blessed if I know why we always undertake to keep that young cormorant supplied with cash. It isn't as if he was careful with it."

"Bulstrode used to lend me money when he was in Study No. 1, before Cherry came—"

"Well, here's the three bob."

"Thank you! Of course, this is purely a loan, and I shall return you six bob for it when my postal order comes to-morrow morning—"

"Oh, cut off!"

"That will be cent per cent for fifteen hours—"

"Cheese it!"

"Or sixty thousand per cent per annum."

"Get out!" roared Wharton.

And Bunter, jingling the three shillings in his pocket, got out. Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"Curious how a chap comes to look on you as his banker if you once start lending him money," Bob Cherry remarked. "When he's had some, it never strikes him that you're left with less than you had before. He always seems to think that the more he has the more you've left. Well, in this case it's the price you pay for the privilege of having me in the study instead of Bulstrode."

"And it's worth it," said Harry, laughing.

"Thanks awfully! Now let's get on the bars, before any other ass comes and starts jawing."

**Bulstrode Makes a Discovery!**

**B**ILLY BUNTER paused for a moment as he passed the school tuckshop on his way to the gates.

He had three shillings in his pocket, and three shillings would go a long way at Mrs. Mimble's in the purchase of tarts, cream puffs, and jam sandwiches, and other delicacies dear to the heart of the fat junior.

As he halted and glanced towards Mrs. Mimble's shop, it suddenly struck him that, after all, it wasn't a very good idea to spend the money as he at first intended.

"After all," he murmured argumentatively, "I can learn all right from the book, and I don't see why the chaps can't stand the ventriloquial drone as long as I like to keep it up. They'll have to stand it. Perhaps the Friardale chap wouldn't give me any lessons for so small a sum. And it's a long way to Friardale, and I don't like walking. Then I have to keep up my strength with plenty of nourishing food—that's the only thing that keeps me going. Perhaps, on the whole, it would be better to have a feed at Mrs. Mimble's, and learn the art of ventriloquism from the book on Balmierumpett principles."

And the fat junior turned towards the tuckshop.

Just as he did so, however, he received a tap on the shoulder, and turned round to see Price of the Remove.

"Going to Mrs. Mimble's?" asked Price in a friendly way.

"I—I don't know," said Bunter guardedly. "Why?"

"Why, if you're in funds—"

"I shan't be in funds till my postal order comes," said Bunter. "I've had a slight disappointment about that. There's been some delay."

Price grinned.

"Well, as you were going to the tuckshop, I suppose you've got some tin, and so you can cash up that half-crown you owe me."

Bunter started.

"Do I owe you a half-crown, Price?"

"Forgotten it, of course," said Price unpleasantly. "Yes, you do owe me half-a-crown, though why I was ass enough to lend it to you, I'm blessed if I know."

"I hope I'm the kind of fellow to be trusted with a small loan," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Yes, you're the kind of fellow to be trusted not to pay it back," said Price. "Come on, hand it over."

"I'm sorry I can't just at present, but when my postal order comes—"

"Look here, you were going to the tuckshop, so—"

"I might have been going to look in there," said Bunter. "But I haven't any money to spend there. I've a few shillings, but they were given to me—I mean, lent to me, at a high interest, too—for a special purpose, and I should not be justified in bluing them at the tuckshop."

"Hullo, what's that?" asked Bulstrode, catching the words as he came up to speak to Price. "You've been borrowing money at interest, have you, you young rascal? Do you want to be expelled?"

"Oh, I say, you fellows, keep it dark, you know."

"That's all very well," said Bulstrode, assuming a magisterial air. "But, as head of the Remove, I'm bound to look after the morals of you youngsters."

"But you're not head of the Remove," said Bunter innocently. "Wharton is leader of the Form ever since he licked you, you know. Ow! Let go my ear!"

"Am I the head of the Remove, Bunter?"

"No. Ow! Yes! Leggo my ear! What I really meant to say was that you are head of the Form, and nobody cares for Wharton."

"Oh, that's all right, then!" said the Remove bully, releasing Bunter's plump ear. "Now then, what's this about borrowing money at interest? I heard something of the sort before."

"I'd rather keep it dark."

"I dare say you would, but I wouldn't. Is it Vaseline who's been lending money out at interest?"

"Oh, no!"

"Who is it, then?"

"I'd rather not tell you, Bulstrode."

The bully of the Remove caught his ear again. Bunter gave a dismal howl.

"I say, Bulstrode, let go! It hurts!"

"How curious!" grinned Bulstrode, compressing his grip till Bunter wriggled. "Does that hurt, too?"

"Ow! Yes—yes! Leggo! Ow!"

"Who has been lending you money at interest?"

"Wharton!" gasped Billy Bunter.

"Oh, my ear! Ow!"

Bulstrode's eyes gleamed. It seemed almost too good to be true—this chance at last of crushing his old enemy.

Wharton had been a thorn in his side ever since coming to Greyfriars. He had licked him in a fair fight, and ever since then the bully of the Remove had been forced to sing small. Many a rub had they had since, but defeat had always followed Bulstrode's attempts to get level.

"You're not lying, you young rotter?" said Bulstrode suspiciously.

"Really, Bulstrode—"

"How much did he lend you?"

"I—I—"

"How much?" roared Bulstrode threateningly.

"Three bob!" gasped Billy Bunter.

"I say—"

"And how much interest are you to pay him?"

"Cent per cent. He's to have six bob back for his three to-morrow morning."

"My Aunt Jemima!" said Bulstrode.

"He's taking up the business of Shylock in good style. Hundred per cent! By Jove! I heard something like this about those chaps in Study No. 1 before, but I put it down to rotting."

"I say, Bulstrode, don't let Wharton know I told you—"

"H'm!"

"He'd be awfully waxy, you know."

"He ought to be expelled," said the virtuous Bulstrode. "And you ought to be jolly well expelled, too!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode!"

"Lending money at interest! That chap Vaseline used to go in for getting tin from moneylenders, but even he drew a line at starting the Shylock business at Greyfriars. I've never liked Wharton, but I never thought that of him. Did you, Price?"

"Never!" said Price. "But you never know a fellow till you find him out."

"Yes, you're right there. By Jove!"

"Perhaps the young idiot's lying, though," suggested Price. "He generally is."

"Oh, really, Price!"

"Well, he wouldn't have the sense to make up a yarn like that," said Bulstrode, with a shake of the head. "But we'll see. You say Wharton lent you three bob, Bunter."

"Yes. Keep it dark."

"When did he lend it to you?"

"About ten minutes ago in the gym. Don't let him know I told you."

"Then you've got it about you?"



Bob Cherry rushed into the study with a jug of water in his hands and dashed the water in Bunter's face. "There you are!" he gasped. "That will cure your choking!" "Ow! Ugh! Gerrooh!" gurgled Bunter.

"Look here, Bulstrode, I'm not going to give you—"

"Have you got it about you?"

"Ye-es."

"Show it to me. Don't be afraid, you young ass. I'm not going to take it. Do you think I want a few measly shillings?"

Only half assured on that point, but afraid to refuse, Bunter pulled out the three shillings; and Bulstrode's eyes gleamed at the sight of them.

"I say, I'll have my half-crown out of that," said Price.

Bunter popped the three shillings back into his pocket.

"I'm sorry, Price, but I'm paying a high interest for this loan, because I want the money for a special purpose. I'll settle with you later."

"It's all right," said Bulstrode. "I know Bunter was broke an hour ago. I thought it was all right. I wouldn't touch that money if I were you, Price. You don't want to get mixed up in any moneylending transactions. It means getting expelled if the Head got to know about it."

"My hat! You're right!" said Price uneasily.

"You can cut off, Bunter."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Cut off!"

"But, I say, you won't say anything about this, will you? Wharton would be in a fearful wax if he knew I had told you."

Bulstrode chuckled.

"I dare say he would. I'm pretty certain he would."

"Then you'll keep it dark?"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"But, I say, you fellows—"

Bulstrode reached out, and Bunter scuttled off. His fat face wore a rather worried look as he went hastily out of the gates of Greyfriars.

"I hope Bulstrode won't talk about it," he murmured. "It may get Wharton into a fearful row if he does. He was rather close over the money, but I should be sincerely sorry if he were expelled."

Bulstrode and Price looked at one another expressively when the fat junior was gone. Price looked rather troubled, Bulstrode triumphant.

"Well, what do you think of that?" demanded Bulstrode.

"Blessed if I know what to think of it," said Price slowly. "Wharton doesn't seem the kind of chap for that sort of thing."

"You never know those quiet chaps. When a fellow sets up to be better than other fellows you can always be certain that there's something behind it."

"Well, that's so sometimes, too."

"Not much doubt about it in this case. The question is—what ought we to do?"

Price started a little.

"Nothing!" he said abruptly. "It's nothing to do with us."

"Isn't it? What will the other fellows say about the Remove when it gets out that there's moneylending going on in the Form? The Upper Fourth will chip us to death. Besides, consider the disgrace to the Form."

"We can't interfere."

"Wharton ought to be shown up before the thing goes any further. He ought to be stopped, if only for his own sake," said Bulstrode, feeling rather a sense of novelty in the role of virtuous youth—a strange role for him. "Don't you think so?"

"I know I'm jolly well not going to interfere," said Price emphatically, and he concluded the argument by walking away.

Bulstrode knitted his brows.

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"Wharton ought to be shown up," he muttered. "Somebody ought to make it his duty to inform Quelch of what's going on. A Form-master is the proper person to acquaint with a matter like this. I don't want to get mixed up in it myself, though. I wonder—Ah!" His eyes gleamed. "Of course, there's Levison! He's the chap! I'll speak to him."

And Bulstrode went to look for Levison.

### The Ventriloquist!

"ICES."

That word, in large letters, was sprawled across the window of the village tuckshop, and caught Billy Bunter's eye as he came in hot and tired from the dusty country road.

He paused and looked at the shop, as he had paused and looked at the school shop at Greyfriars. But there was no Price hovering about now.

"By Jove, I should like an ice!" said the perspiring junior. "They say they're not good for you when you're hot, but I've never found them do me any harm. Suppose I had a few ices out of the three bob, and—"

He was walking towards the door of the shop as he muttered to himself, and he finished the argument by entering.

He had escaped the Scylla of the school shop, only to fall a victim to the Charybdis of the village establishment, to use a classical simile.

Uncle Clegg blinked at him over his glasses, and Billy Bunter blinked back and ordered an ice.

The ice disappeared in record time, and then he ordered another and another. He was consuming the third ice when a stranger entered the shop.

He was a youngish man with curly black hair and a small black moustache. There was something in his face familiar to Bunter, though for the moment he could not remember where he had seen it before.

"I will have an ice," said the young man, in a deep bass voice that seemed rather out of place in so slim an individual.

"And I'll have another," said Bunter. "You may as well bring me two while you're about it, Uncle Clegg. It will save time. I'll have some jam tarts to follow, and—let me see—have you any fresh cream puffs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! You can give me half a dozen. I'll have some saveloys and ham to start with, though, when I've finished this ice, and some tongue and some cold beef. I'm awfully hungry. And some pickles."

The young man looked curiously at Bunter.

The fat junior did not notice it. He proceeded to attack the comestibles that Uncle Clegg set before him, and travelled through them at a great rate.

"Which that will be two-and-tenpence, sir," said Uncle Clegg.

"Oh rats! You mean two bob."

Uncle Clegg turned red.

"I say two-and-tenpence!" he exclaimed angrily.

"All right," said Bunter.

Uncle Clegg looked at the fat junior suspiciously. Billy Bunter, unconscious of having given offence, went on eating. The young man with the moustache smiled. Bunter glanced at him with his mouth full.

"By Jove, I've got it now!" he exclaimed.

The young man looked at him.

"Aren't you Monsieur Dupont?" asked Billy Bunter. "I've seen your

portrait on the posters. You're giving a ventriloquial entertainment at the town hall."

The young man smiled again.

"Quite correct!" he exclaimed. "Such is fame. The features of Monsieur Dupont are known in the far corners of the kingdom, and throughout its length and breadth. You have a ticket for my entertainment this evening, of course?"

"Sorry, I haven't—"

Monsieur Dupont drew a bunch from his pocket.

"Which will you have—a shilling seat, or a half-crown dress circle, or a five-shilling stall, or a box, young man?"

"I'd like a box, sir, if it's all the same to you," said Bunter, highly flattered. "I could get leave to come, and bring some friends."

"Good! Here you are!"

"Thank you!" said Bunter, taking the slip and stowing it in his pocket. "That's very kind of you." And he went on eating.

"Well?" asked Monsieur Dupont.

"Well?" said Billy Bunter, not quite understanding.

"The ten shillings for the ticket."

"Oh, aren't you giving them away?"

"Giving them away! Giving away ten-shilling boxes!" exclaimed Monsieur Dupont. "When the crowned heads of Europe have frequently jostled one another at my door, willing to pay anything for admission."

"Have they really?" said Billy Bunter, much impressed.

"My dear lad, of course they have! See small bills for fuller particulars. As I rather like your appearance, however, I—er—I can let you have that box for five shillings."

Bunter made a long face.

"Well, well," said Mr. Dupont genially, "we will say half-a-crown; but that, mind, is giving it to you."

"I've only got twopenny left."

"Then I'll trouble you for my ticket," said Monsieur Dupont stiffly.

And Bunter reluctantly handed it back. He paid Uncle Clegg and finished the cream puffs. Then he thoughtfully regarded his last remaining twopenny, while Monsieur Dupont consumed a second ice.

"I suppose I may as well have another ice," said Bunter.

"Yes, sir. That will be tuppence, sir."

"Oh rats! You mean a penny."

"I mean tuppence!" said Uncle Clegg angrily.

"Eh?" said Bunter. "I didn't speak. I know it's a twopenny one."

"You said—"

"I didn't say anything," said Billy Bunter, bewildered. "Here's your twopenny."

Uncle Clegg granted, and scooped the two pennies into his till.

"Ere, I say, one of these is a French penny."

"That it isn't," said Bunter. "Why, it's the twopenny change you gave me yourself out of the three bob."

"Eh?" said Uncle Clegg, staring at him.

"I say it's the twopenny change you gave me out of the three bob!"

"Ay, I know it is."

"Then what do you mean by saying that one was a French penny?"

"Eh? I never said nothin' of the sort."

"Why, I heard you plainly. You said that one of those pennies was a French one."

"I never said nothin'!"

"Oh, you're off your rocker!"

muttered Billy Bunter. "Why he spoke as plainly as anything, didn't he, Mr. Dupont?"

Mr. Dupont grinned. "E's a young fool, 'e is."

Billy Bunter blinked at Uncle Clegg through his spectacles.

"Who are you calling a fool, you old duffer?" he exclaimed.

"Eh?"

"Who are you calling a fool?"

"Nobody!"

"Look here, you're dotty—that's what's the matter with you. I—What are you grinning at?" asked Bunter indignantly, blinking at Mr. Dupont. "You won't get any more of my custom, Mr. Clegg, so I tell you!" And Bunter turned towards the door.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Mr. Dupont, laughing. "Excuse me—a little joke."

"Eh? What's a little joke?"

"My little bit of ventriloquism," explained Mr. Dupont blandly.

A light dawned on Bunter.

"My hat! Was it you?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Oh, it's all right, then. I'm sorry, Mr. Clegg."

"Eh?" said Uncle Clegg, whose slow wits were far from comprehending.

"That was jolly good, and no mistake," said Bunter admiringly. "I wish I could come and see your show, sir, only I'm stony. I've had a disappointment over a postal order I was expecting, and—"

Mr. Dupont walked out of the shop with him. He selected a shilling ticket from the bunch in his pocket.

"Take that, my lad," he said grandly. "I say, that's jolly good of you, sir!"

"Not at all," said Mr. Dupont. He spoke sincerely enough, too, for he knew that at least half the seats would be empty at the town hall that evening when he gave his entertainment. Friardale was not a lively place for entertainers. "I make you a present of that ticket. If you can bring any of your friends to-night who will pay for admission, I shall get my reward. Twig?"

Billy Bunter twiggled.

"You'll tell them what a splendid show it is," said Mr. Dupont. "I suppose you come from the big school down the lane, don't you?"

"Yes, rather. I belong to Greyfriars. I'm in the Remove."

"Oh, are you really?" said Mr. Dupont, who hadn't the faintest idea what the Remove was. "That must be very nice for you."

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter.

"And you take an interest in ventriloquism?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter emphatically. "I've lately discovered that I have wonderful powers in that direction, sir."

"Have you, really?"

"Yes, I'm studying the subject on the lines laid down by Professor Balmicrumpett, in his great book on ventriloquism. I can do the ventriloquial drone."

"Can you, indeed?"

"Yes," said Bunter. "I'll show you. Groo-groo-groo-geroooh!"

Mr. Dupont stared.

"Is that the ventriloquial drone?" he asked.

"Well, perhaps it isn't much of a drone so far," said Bunter, rather discouraged. "Nugent says it's like a pig grunting."

Mr. Dupont laughed.

"Nugent is quite right. I dare say you will change the grunt for a drone later, however, if you persevere."

"I hope so, sir. As a matter of fact,

I came to Friardale on purpose to see you, sir," said Bunter.

"My entertainment is not till the evening."

"Yes, but I wanted to see you specially. I wanted to arrange about having some lessons in ventriloquism, if you would be so kind."

Mr. Dupont beamed at once.

"Excellent idea!" he exclaimed.

"Personal tuition is more necessary in the case of ventriloquism than in anything else. I could give you daily lessons during my stay in Friardale, on very moderate terms. Say, a guinea for the week and a half-hour lesson every day."

"A—a guinea!"

"Oh, we shouldn't quarrel about terms! I could take half-a-guinea."

"Half a guinea?"

"Well, as you're an enthusiastic amateur—you are an enthusiastic amateur, are you not?"

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"Well, I could take you for five shillings," said Mr. Dupont generously. "I borrowed three bob of Wharton," said Bunter disconsolately. "Only—only I felt so hungry when I got to the village that I blued it at Uncle Clegg's. I'm stony; and unless I get a postal order to-morrow, I shan't have any tin this week. And—and my postal orders are often delayed in the post."

Mr. Dupont reflected.

"Well, I want to help you if I can," he remarked thoughtfully. "Let's see. If you could bring a dozen fellows with you to-night for the entertainment, I dare say I could manage to give you the lessons for nothing."

Billy Bunter beamed.

"Oh, I say, sir, that's awfully kind of you!"

"Not at all. I'm always glad to help on an enthusiastic amateur. And you couldn't get a better instructor. I think I may say without boasting that I'm the head of my profession. I've performed with great success to all the crowned heads of Europe. See small bills for full particulars."

"Have you really, sir?"

"I have, my boy," said Mr. Dupont impressively.

"Curious how kings and queens seem to be so fond of ventriloquial shows," Billy Bunter remarked thoughtfully. "Professor Balmicrumpett has performed to all the crowned heads of Europe, too."

Mr. Dupont darted a quick glance at his young friend, suspecting for a moment that Billy Bunter was pulling his leg. But the fat junior was quite serious, and Mr. Dupont coughed and changed the subject.

The ventriloquist, although he stated that he was at the head of his profession, was not accustomed to drawing large audiences. At the present time he was calculating whether his takings during a week at Friardale would be sufficient to pay his account at the Red Lion Inn.

An influx of boys from the big school might be the saving of him. He knew that very well, and if through Billy Bunter he could attract the Greyfriars juniors to his show, the time spent on the ventriloquial lessons would be well spent.

"Then I can depend on your bringing a dozen companions?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I think so! I'll try my hardest."

"Good! Then the lessons can begin."

"But, I say, I'm only allowed as far as this on half-holidays!"

"Oh, that's easily arranged! I go out for a stroll every afternoon, and I will meet you, if you like, near the school and give you your lessons in the open air."

"I say, that's ripping! Suppose we

fix the stile in the lane near Greyfriars?"

"Excellent! I'll give you the first lesson now, if you like. Sit down on this bench," said Mr. Dupont.

"Oh, I say, thanks awfully!"

Bunter sat down eagerly. There was no one near the bench under the tree outside the village shop, and the ventriloquist proceeded to give the lesson.

"Now show me what you can do."

"Groo-groo-geroooh!"

"You don't want to grunt like that. Take a deep breath; nod when you've got it."

Billy Bunter nodded.

"Now exhale slowly, making the vowel 'ah' as you do so."

"Ah-h-h-h!"

"That's better already! Mouth a little more shut; and don't roll your eyes as if you were seeing a ghost. No need to make such a tremendous effort about it, either. You don't want to burst a blood-vessel! Now, keep on with that, and in time you'll get a clear, steady drone, like the distant buzz of a bee. That's the ventriloquial drone—very different from the suffocating grunt you've been working off."

"I see!"

"Well, try again."

Billy Bunter tried again and again till at last Mr. Dupont pronounced that he was able to practise alone, and then they parted. Billy Bunter took the road back to Greyfriars in high spirits. He had succeeded beyond his hopes.

At intervals on the road homeward he stopped to give vent to the ventriloquial drone, much to the amazement of passers-by.

### No Catspaw!

**L**EVISON, old chap!" Levison was sitting on a low wall, mending a fishing-rod. He looked up as Bulstrode came along and nodded—not very cordially. Bulstrode's manner was brimming over with friendliness.

"Hallo!" said Levison shortly.

"I say, I've got something to tell you. I've just found it out. It's about Wharton."

Bulstrode expected Levison to look eager at once. Levison and Wharton had till lately been on the worst of terms possible. But, to his surprise, the junior only nodded, and turned to his fishing-rod again.

"I say, don't you want to hear it?" asked Bulstrode.

"Not particularly."

"It's a serious matter. It may mean Wharton getting expelled," said Bulstrode impressively.

Levison started.

"What's that?"

"It may lead to Wharton getting expelled. I thought that would interest you in the matter!" grinned Bulstrode.

Levison sniffed.

"Rot!"

"It's not rot; it's true."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've had it from the chap he lent money to."

"Who was it?"

"Bunter."

"Oh, that young ass! He'd say anything!"

"Yes; but he hasn't brains enough to invent a yarn like that. Besides, he showed me the three bob Wharton had lent him, and I know he was broke a few hours ago. He was in an awful funk, too, in case Wharton got to hear that he'd given him away."

"I expect it's all rot," said Levison, in

