

HOW'S YOUR LUCK THIS WEEK? SEE  
INSIDE.

# The GEM 2<sup>D</sup>

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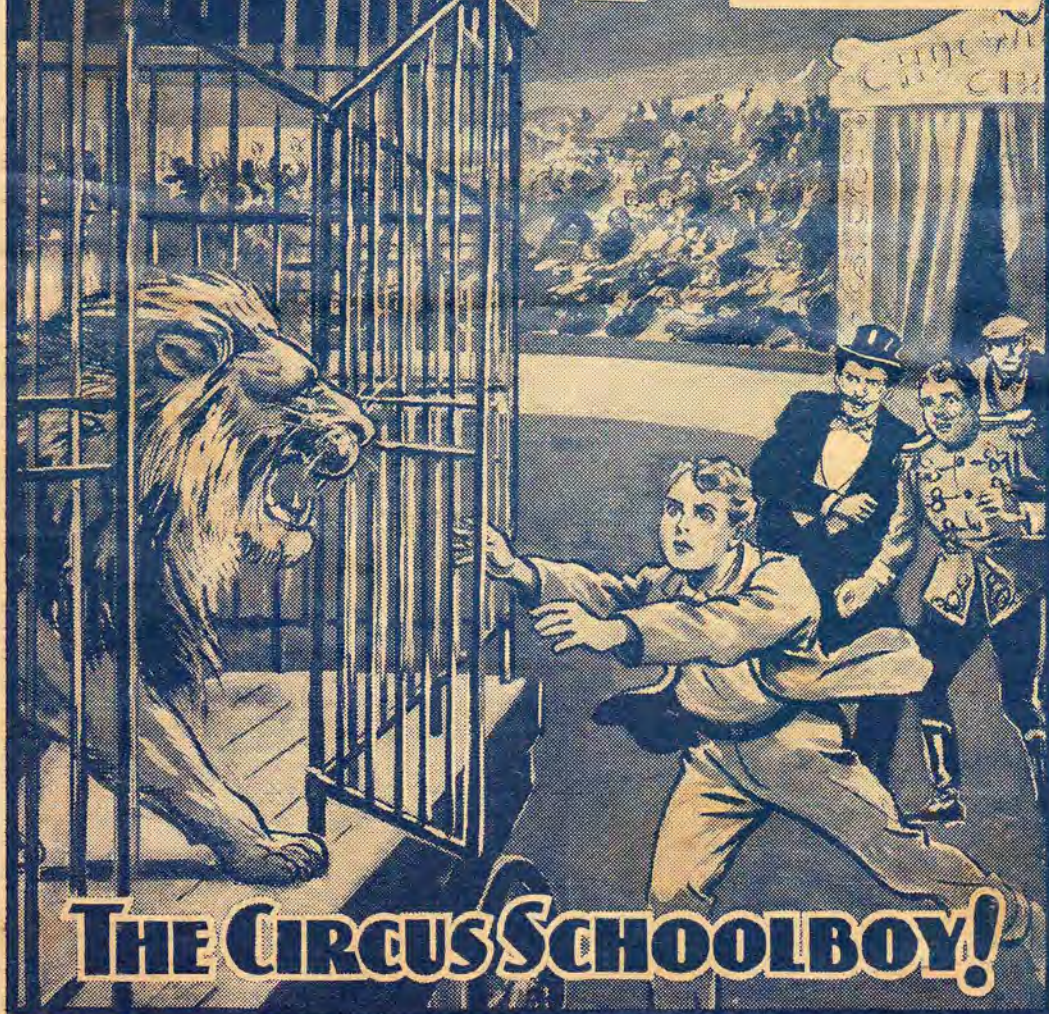
**THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY!**

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

**THE CHINESE CAPTAIN!**

By FRANK RICHARDS

Also Illustrated Jokes,  
Pen Pals, Fun Column,  
Stamp Article, and Your  
Fortune from the Stars.



## THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY!



# HOW'S YOUR LUCK THIS WEEK?

Read what the stars foretell,  
by PROFESSOR ZARRO.

**"FOREWARNED is forearmed,"** runs the old saying, and the stars supply that all-important forewarning. On this page you will find a horoscope, specially prepared for the GEM, telling every reader what kind of luck the stars prophesy for him in the week March 9th to March 15th. Look for your own particular horoscope in the section in which your birthday falls.

**January 21st to February 19th.**—A week when you will find things brightening up all around you. Not only will immediate prospects improve, but also you will find you have become keener and more enthusiastic in your affairs. Don't be a stay-at-home during the coming seven days, however, or you'll miss much that would help you. Saturday is perhaps the best day in this cheerful week.

**February 20th to March 21st.**—Other people's actions play a big part in your affairs. In all cases, their interest is intended to help you, but be wary of possible well-meant actions which may lead to bother. Towards the week-end an unexpected chance and a disappointment come your way, each being mixed up with the other.

**March 22nd to April 20th.**—Don't let other fellows' gossip affect you, and don't rush baldheaded at things this week. If you remember these two points, everything will go smoothly. Friends worth knowing prove their value, and are associated with you in success at sports. You won't lack for money this week, except, possibly, over the week-end.

**April 21st to May 21st.**—There are indications that a chance remark you make will lead you into complications this week. Otherwise, prospects are good, especially at work or school, where you make a hit by striking out on your own. The best advice for the week is, when faced by a problem, don't accept the obvious solution.

**May 22nd to June 21st.**—You may find time lies heavy on your hands this week, for there is a tendency for your friends to be engaged in things in which you will be unable to join. Make use of this spare time, however, by catching up on odd jobs you have been putting off; the results of so doing will be lucky. Friday is an especially good day for the go-aheads and go-getters.

**June 22nd to July 23rd.**—The best fun this week is in going to cinemas, watching sports, etc.; but it's also

full of good tendencies for those who feel they would like more friends. You'll be surprised at the small, but welcome, good turns which comparative strangers do you. Travelling, cycling journeys, or visits to people all turn out successfully.

**July 24th to August 23rd.**—There's a chance of a petty quarrel to-day, but, after that, this should be a cheerful week. You will be invited to an enjoyable affair of some kind by an elderly person. Seek advice in things which have been worrying you. This is a week when others can help you better than you can help yourself. Sunday is the red-letter day of the week.

**August 24th to September 23rd.**—Follow your "hunches" this week; they will lead to the best times. Family affairs are important, and you will probably find you have an unusually large number of visitors at your home. On the whole, things will happen much as you expect them to. Luck doesn't seem to play much part in your affairs this week.

**September 24th to October 23rd.**—Things start quietly this week, but sparkle towards the end, when the lucky breaks start coming your way. A loan from a friend helps you considerably; it'll probably be the loan of something you happen to need, such as a bike, or a football, etc. There is good news coming for those who have entered exams.

**October 24th to November 22nd.**—There may be a tendency on your part to find your job irksome this week, but if only you can master that feeling, you'll be rewarded. Anything connected with your favourite hobby is on the upgrade, you'll find—very probably as a result of something you learn on or after Friday next. An unexpected letter or other form of message is coming to you.

**November 23rd to December 22nd.**—This is the best horoscope of the week, for every star indication favours you. An old quarrel should be patched up; a present helps you to do something you have been hankering after for a long time; exciting, adventurous times make this a memorable week. What more could you ask?

**December 23rd to January 20th.**—Many pleasant experiences come your way in the next seven days, and you can dodge even the smallest of those petty, everyday bothers by not trying to plan too far in advance. If you do plan ahead, however, you must be prepared for possible setbacks. A day's outing planned for the week-end, for example, can easily be spoiled by rainy weather, and nothing can prevent that happening.

## BIRTHDAY INDICATIONS.

**WEDNESDAY, March 9th.**—You will be chosen for some form of extra responsibility in your work this year, but it will provide a task that you'll enjoy, and lead to a big step up. May is your best month, when luck of all kinds comes your way.

**THURSDAY, March 10th.**—Difficulties arising in the early part of the year make a bad start, but they won't hold you down. Don't let obstinacy spoil your chances. Wonderful holidays are predicted for this year.

**FRIDAY, March 11th.**—You have good judgment, which stands you in good stead throughout the coming twelve months, and puts you on the road to success. A big ambition will be realised. Unexpected presents of all kinds come your way; you will see the start of this in the birthday presents you receive.

**SATURDAY, March 12th.**—Friends play a big part in your life this year, and your best times will be in

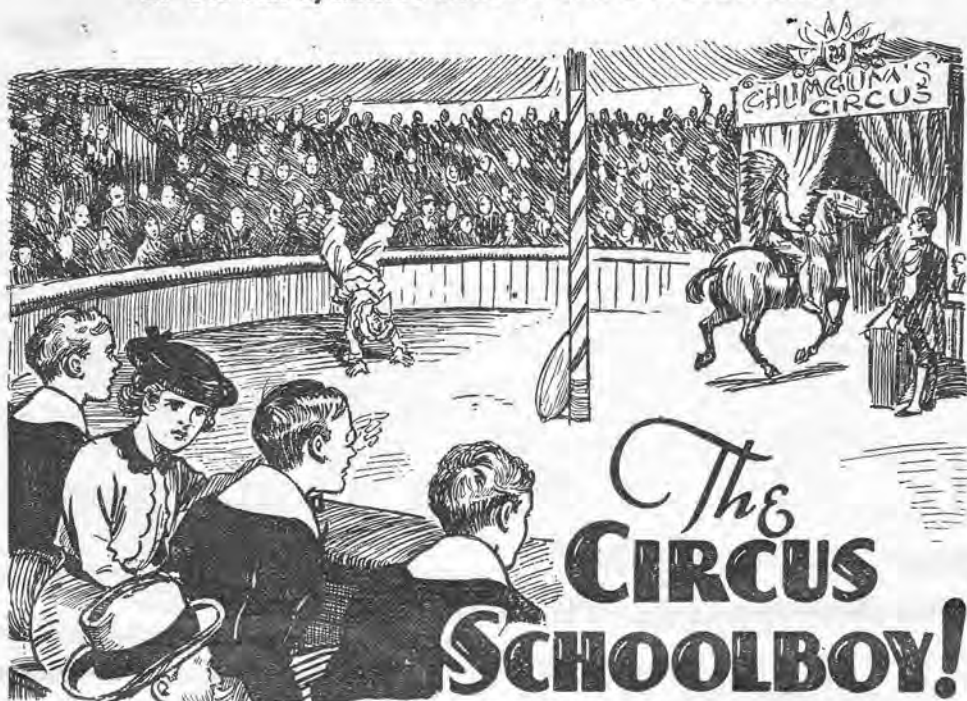
their company. You will get about much more, have more to spend. Best month, July.

**SUNDAY, March 13th.**—A big change in your life and your work is indicated—or a chance of making that change, at least, even if you don't make use of it. News of bad luck from friends and relations, but for yourself it's a year of opportunity.

**MONDAY, March 14th.**—Unexpected good luck in money will compensate you this year for a setback in some other direction. Keep yourself fit, and everything will be rosy for you throughout the year.

**TUESDAY, March 15th.**—A year of activity—always plenty doing, though perhaps not many lasting effects. You'll certainly enjoy the next twelve months, however, and if you are at work, or leave school before your next birthday, you'll find success in your job. In the same way, if you're at school, there's success coming your way.

**FROM SCHOOLBOY TO RED INDIAN IN A CIRCUS! TALBOT, THE OUTCAST  
OF ST. JIM'S, MAKES GOOD IN THE SAWDUST RING!**



"Do you see that boy made up as an Indian?" asked Miss Marie. "Chap who's just widin' out?" said Arthur Augustus. "Yes, yes! That's the one!" replied Marie. "Doesn't he seem familiar? Isn't he like Talbot?"

by  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

**CHAPTER 1.**  
**Missing!**

**C**LANG, clang, clang!  
The rising-bell was ringing out at St. Jim's in the clear, sunny morning.

Tom Merry sat up in bed in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

That was Tom Merry's first remark.

Clang, clang!

"Blessed if I don't believe that beast Taggles gets up earlier and earlier every morning!" grumbled Monty Lowther.

"Yaw-aw-aw!" remarked Manners.

Tom Merry jumped out of bed.

"Oh, turn out, you slackers!" he said cheerily. "Talbot's down already!"

Lowther and Manners glanced towards the bed that belonged to Talbot of the Shell. It was empty.

"Must have got up before light, I should think," said Lowther. "He usually gives us a call when he turns out early."

"We'll find him in the quad," said Tom Merry, proceeding to

splash in cold water. "Are you turning out, or do you want this sponge down your necks?"

"Groogh! I'm turning out!" said Lowther.

The rising-bell ceased to clang, and the Shell fellows all turned out, with one exception. Gore lay sleeping soundly, deaf to the clang of the rising-bell and to the voices of his Form fellows.

Monty Lowther, who was the humorist of the Shell, proceeded to call Gore. He bent over the sleeping junior, put his mouth very close to Gore's unconscious ear, and roared:

"Gore!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore started violently out of his deep sleep, and sat up in bed, with the result that his head came into violent contact with Lowther's nose before he could get out of range.

There was a fiendish yell from Monty Lowther.

"Yaroooh! Oh crumbs! Oh, you idiot! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther staggered back and sat on a bed, clapping his nose with both hands. His eyes streamed with water. He was hurt. Gore sat up and rubbed his head and blinked at him.

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*In the fun and thrills of  
circus life, Reginald  
Talbot seeks to forget the  
bitter memory of his  
unhappy departure from  
St. Jim's . . . .*

"Hallo!" he said, in a dazed sort of way. "Wharrer marrer? What—?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, by dose!" groaned Monty Lowther, in anguish. "Groogh! Oh, you silly fadded! Yow!"

Gore blinked at him.

"Serve you jolly well right, you silly owl! What did you yell at me for?"

"Oh dear! Yow! I was waking you up, you rodden slaggar! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther extracted a handkerchief from his pocket, and dabbed his injured nose. The handkerchief came away very red. Monty Lowther was not feeling in the least humorous now. He could not see anything to laugh at. But the rest of the Shell could, and they roared. Like a great many humorists, Monty found his sense of humour fail him when the joke was turned against himself.

He looked quite cross as he proceeded with his toilet.

Gore had not turned out; he still sat in bed, rubbing his eyes. He seemed sleepy that morning.

"You'd better buck up, Gore!" called out Tom Merry. "Going to stay in bed all the morning?"

"I'm sleepy," mumbled Gore.

Monty Lowther sniffed.

"Been out on the tiles all night," he remarked sarcastically.

Breaking bounds at night was not wholly unknown to George Gore, the black sheep of the Shell. Certainly he did not look like a fellow who had had a good night's rest. His face was pale, almost haggard in expression, and his eyes had dark circles under them, and he seemed almost overcome with sleep.

Without taking any notice of Lowther's remark, Gore dragged himself from his bed with a visible effort.

"Talbot gone down?" he asked, as he proceeded to wash himself.

"Yes; he was down before rising-bell!" said Tom Merry.

"Before rising-bell?" said Gore, evidently surprised. "What the dickens for?"

"Early to bed, early to rise, is the way to keep fit, and grow to a good size," said Manners.

"But he wasn't early to bed," said Gore.

"Eh? He came to bed last night with the rest of us, didn't he?"

"Yes, but—"

Gore stopped suddenly, and began to splash his face in cold water.

"But what?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothing."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Tom, a little angrily. As Talbot's best chum, Tom Merry did not like Gore's remark. "If you mean to hint that Talbot has been out of the dorm, Gore—"

"I didn't say so!" growled Gore.

"Well, you meant that!"

"Oh rats!"

Gore refused to say another word. Tom Merry, remembering that Gore had been seedy of late, forbore to make the remarks that rose to his lips. Any word derogatory to Talbot was enough to put Tom Merry's back up at any time.

The Terrible Three finished dressing, and left the dormitory. The Big Hall door had not been opened when they got down, so soon were they after rising-bell. When it was open, and they went into the quad, they looked, and felt, mysti-

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fied. Talbot had evidently gone down before rising-bell, but the door was not open.

"Must have got out of the window," hazarded Manners.

"Let's find him."

But the Terrible Three sought up and down the old quadrangle in vain. There was nothing to be seen of Talbot. It was pretty plain that he was not out of the House.

"Can't have gone out for an early walk, surely?" said Lowther, puzzled.

"Not likely! Why should he?"

"Where is he, then?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Try the Head's garden," grinned Lowther, as a new thought came into his mind. "Perhaps Miss Marie is an early riser, too!"

They tried the Head's garden, but the garden drew a blank. They came back to the School House in a very puzzled mood. All the Shell were down now, excepting Gore, who was still dawdling in the dormitory.

"Seen anything of Talbot about the House?"

Tom Merry asked.

"No," said Kangaroo. "Isn't he in the quad?"

"No."

"Must have gone out," said Manners. "Bunked over the wall, then; the gates aren't open yet."

That seemed to be the only explanation, but the juniors could not help feeling puzzled. However, it was plain enough that he was not within the school walls.

So they gave it up and punted a footer about till breakfast-time. They expected to see Talbot at the breakfast-table.

But when the juniors swarmed into the dining-room in the School House, Talbot did not come in with them. His place at the table next to Tom Merry remained unoccupied.

The Terrible Three were thoroughly puzzled by this time, all the more as Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who took the head of the table, made no remark upon Talbot's absence. Tom Merry resolved to inquire.

"Isn't Talbot coming to breakfast, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Linton shook his head.

"No, Merry."

"He isn't ill, sir?" exclaimed Tom. The sanatorium was a place where the juniors had not thought of seeking their chum.

"No, he isn't ill."

"Has anything happened, sir?" asked Tom.

"The Head will speak to you after breakfast, Merry. You may go to his study," said Mr. Linton.

The master of the Shell plainly did not intend to say any more. Indeed, his expression seemed to indicate that he was somewhat perplexed himself.

Tom Merry had to be content with that. He waited with what patience he could muster till breakfast was over. He was glad enough when the juniors left the dining-room.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Without a Word!

WHAT had happened to Talbot?

That question hammered in Tom Merry's mind.

That something had happened was only too

clear, though no one seemed to know what it was. Mr. Linton, apparently, was in the dark himself.

Had Talbot been an ordinary St. Jim's fellow, like Tom Merry himself, Tom would not have felt that keen anxiety.

But Talbot, the Toff of the old days, was not quite like the rest. The strange, dark past of the handsome Shell fellow had almost been forgotten in the school. But it was always there, and it came back grimly into Tom Merry's mind now. The Toff, once the prince of cracksmen, who had paid so dearly for his reform, who was now the soul of honour and the straightest fellow at St. Jim's—was it possible that some shadow out of the black past had fallen across his path again? That was what Tom Merry dreaded.

Lowther and Manners shared his apprehension. They paused in the passage before going to the Head's study.

"Something's up," said Lowther.

"I can't understand it," said Tom Merry. "There can't be anything wrong. We know how Talbot was suspected once, because of his past, but—but it's impossible that that can have happened again."

"I should say so. But—"

"Let's get to the Head."

George Gore came quickly down the passage, and stopped them. Gore's face was white as a sheet, and there was a look of startled terror in his eyes. His expression made the chums of the Shell stare at him.

"Where's Talbot?" exclaimed Gore. "Do you know? Has anything happened to him?"

"We don't know yet," said Tom Merry shortly. "We're going to the Head to find out. You can come with us if you like."

Gore shuddered.

"I won't come. I'll wait here for you."

"Look here, Gore, do you know anything about this?" demanded Tom.

"Why should I know?"

"You said something in the dorm—something about Talbot being up in the night, or late to bed, anyway. Do you know what's happened?"

"I—I don't. I thought Talbot was in bed with the rest when I went to sleep," muttered Gore. "If he went out again I didn't know anything about it."

"If he went out again!" repeated Tom Merry. "Do you mean to say that he went out once, then, after we were asleep?"

Gore drew a deep, quivering breath.

"It's no good asking me questions," he said.

"Go and ask the Head; perhaps it's all right after all. Don't waste time."

"Come on!" said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded, and they went to the Head's study.

Tom knocked, and the three juniors went in. Dr. Holmes was there, and the juniors' anxiety deepened as they saw his face. The Head was looking grave and troubled.

"What is it, Merry? Ah, you have come to ask me—"

Dr. Holmes drummed uneasily on his table with his hand.

"Talbot has left the school, Merry."

Tom Merry almost staggered.

"Left St. Jim's, sir?"

"Yes."

"But—but when, sir?"

"Last night."

"But—but he's coming back, sir?" exclaimed Manners.

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"Not coming back!" said Tom Merry dazedly. "Talbot not coming back? He's left the school for good, sir?"

"Yes."

"But—but may we know why he is gone, sir?" stammered Tom Merry.

"Circumstances have made it necessary for him to leave, Merry. I am sorry that I cannot tell you more than that. As I understand that he was a great friend of yours, I am sorry. But he has left the school, and he will not be returning, and I recommend you to banish him from your mind."

Tom Merry smiled bitterly. It was not so easy to banish a chum from his mind.

"What has he done, sir?"

"It is not a question of that."

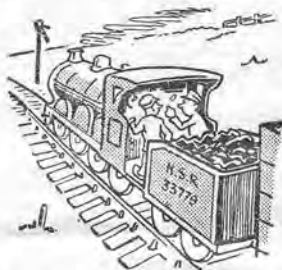
"If—if he is suspected of anything—"

"He is not suspected."

"Not suspected!" said Tom Merry dazedly. "He isn't accused—"

"No accusation has been made against him," said the Head.

The chums of the Shell looked utterly blank. If Talbot had been sent away in disgrace, on the suspicion of having fallen back into the old ways



New Engine-driver: "Put your hand out, Bill. We're going to turn left!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Joyce, 12, Merriens Close, Great Barr, Birmingham.

of the Toff, they could have understood it. But it was not that.

Why, then, had Talbot gone? Why couldn't the Head tell them?

Dr. Holmes rose.

"You may go," he said. "It is nearly time for prayers."

"Excuse me, sir, but this knocks us over," stammered Tom Merry. "I know that Talbot didn't want to leave the school. You have sent him away, sir?"

Dr. Holmes paused. He could feel for the junior; the dismay and trouble in Tom Merry's face would have touched a harder heart than his.

"I have sent him away," he said at last. "But Talbot was not sent against his will; he agreed that he had better go."

"And—and we're not to know why, sir?"

"I have told you all that is possible," said the Head. "You may be assured that Talbot has not gone, as he went before, under a false suspicion, alone and friendless. I have not lost my regard for him, and he will keep me informed of his movements. He is in no danger of falling into want. His future depends upon himself, and may be happy and prosperous if he cares to make it so. But he will not return here. That is all I can tell you."

The Head made a gesture of dismissal, and the three juniors left the study. They were like fellows in a dream. It was utterly amazing to them.

Gore was waiting for them in the passage. His face was chalky white, and he was trembling.

"Well, what—what—" he muttered, catching Tom Merry by the arm.

"Talbot's gone!"

"Gone!" muttered Gore.

"He's left St. Jim's for good."

"Is he—is he arrested?" faltered Gore.

"Arrested? No! There's nothing against him. The Head says he isn't suspected of anything. He's simply gone. I can't understand it. There's something behind it the Head won't tell us."

"Something must have happened last night," said Monty Lowther quietly. "and Gore knows something about it. No use denying that, Gore. You knew that Talbot had been out of the dorm. What was he doing?"

"I—I—I can't tell you anything!" muttered Gore.

He leaned heavily against the wall of the passage. Troubled as they were themselves, the Terrible Three could not help feeling sorry for the wretched black sheep of the Shell. They knew of the trouble he had been in of late, from which Talbot had saved him.

But Gore had nothing to say, and he was not in a state to be forced. The chums of the Shell went down the passage and left him.

By the time morning lessons commenced all St. Jim's knew that Talbot of the Shell had left the school without an explanation, and from the Sixth Form to the Second there was wonder and surmise on the subject.

## CHAPTER 3.

### The Outcast!

WHILE the St. Jim's fellows were going into their Form-rooms that morning Talbot of the Shell leaned upon a stile in a leafy lane, under the bright sunshine, ten miles or more from the old school.

The outcast of the school was resting after a long, long tramp. His bag lay on the ground; his overcoat was hung on the top bar of the stile.

Talbot of the Shell leaned there, with bitter thoughts in his mind, bitter feelings in his heart. The Toff was an outcast once more.

It was for another's sake—for the sake of a fellow who had little claim upon him, but who was "down," and whom he had promised to help, whose wretched secret he had promised to keep.

And the Toff's word was his bond; when the crisis came he had not hesitated. And now it was all over.

St. Jim's was behind him now—as much in the past as his old life, his old career as the Toff. There had not been a cloud on his horizon until, in the generosity of his heart, he had helped Gore out of his scrape, and had ruined himself in doing so.

It was too late for regrets. If he could have foreseen— But he could not. He had saved Gore from the clutches of Tickey Tapp, the sharper; he had saved him from becoming a thief, and he had paid the penalty himself. What was Tom Merry thinking of him now? What was Marie thinking—Marie, the cracksmen's daughter, whose home was now at St. Jim's?

A deep sigh escaped Talbot. It was bitter that it should all be over, and by no fault of his own.

He felt a pang as he thought of the Head—the kind old man who had been so good a friend to him, and who now believed that he had been base and ungrateful. He could not blame the

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Head. He had been found at the safe, the door open, banknotes in his hand, and he could not tell Dr. Holmes that he was there to replace what George Gore had taken.

He had risked it all to save Gore, and fortune had failed him. He could not explain, and the Head could only believe what he had seen. It was a blow for him to lose faith in Talbot, the junior knew that.

Through that weary night, which seemed like an evil dream now that he looked back upon it, he had tramped on, hardly knowing or caring whither he went. In the sunny morning he had stopped to rest, to consider his future movements. But he found it difficult to think clearly.

His thoughts wandered back to St. Jim's—to Tom Merry, to Marie, to the playing fields, and the study and the Form-room. Even at that moment the fellows would be going in to morning lessons, and wondering what had become of him. The Head had promised to say nothing; they would not know that he had left in disgrace. That was a relief. But what would they think?

He had saved Gore. Perhaps the wretched fellow would go straight after this. His old skill as the prince of cracksmen had saved Gore and ruined himself.

He had compelled Tickey Tapp to clear off—the rascally sharper who had led the black sheep of the Shell into folly, and who was the cause of all the trouble. After all, he had done some good there.

Hours had passed since he had halted at the stile. It seemed to the boy that he could go no farther. He hardly felt fatigue; he was hard as nails and thoroughly fit. But his heart and his thoughts were with the friends he had left in the old school, and he lacked resolution to tear himself away.

How long the junior would have rested there, thinking—thinking over what was irretrievable—he never knew. His black thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a cry from the field behind him:

"Elp!"

Talbot started, and looked round quickly over the stile. To his left was a grove of young trees, with thickets growing between them, and it was from the grove that the cry came. He could see nothing; the trees hid from his sight what was passing there. The cry was repeated.

"Elp! Ah, would yer? Oh! 'Elp!"

Talbot did not hesitate. His own troubles were forgotten. He put his hands on the stile and vaulted over.

There was a sound of a struggle among the trees. Talbot dashed through the thickets and came suddenly upon a startling scene.

A stumpy, thick-set man was down in the grass. He had evidently been sleeping there the night before. An empty bottle lay in the grass, and the stumpy man's face showed that he had been drinking heavily over-night. He was still partly under the influence of liquor, though he had slept off the worst of his intoxication.

A man dressed in a tweed suit, which seemed familiar to Talbot, was kneeling over him, pinning him down.

"Hand it over!" he was saying, as Talbot burst on the scene. "I know you've got it!"

"Elp!"

"Who's to help you here, you fool? Come now, you were splashing quids about in the Black Bull last night, and you can spare a few to help a gentleman who's 'ard-up. I'll let you off for a fiver. I dare say you'll get some more at the circus, if the lions don't chew you up!"



As Lowther yelled in his ear, Gore started violently out of his deep sleep. He sat up in bed, with the result that his head came into violent contact with Lowther's nose! "Yarrah!" yelled Lowther. His little joke was not quite so funny now!

"Tickey Tapp!" exclaimed Talbot.

The man in the tweed suit swung round in surprise. Talbot knew him now; it was Tickey Tapp the cardsharp, whom he had driven away from Rylcombe. Tickey Tapp was astonished to see him there.

"The Toff!" he ejaculated.

"At your old game, you scoundrel!" exclaimed Talbot. "Let that man alone!"

"'Elp!" panted the prostrate man. "He's trying to rob me! Tried to pick my pockets while I was asleep, the scum!"

Tickey Tapp ground his teeth.

"What are you doin' ere, Toff? This ain't your business! You 'ook it!"

Talbot did not trouble to reply; but he ran straight at the sharper.

Tickey Tapp had just time to leap to his feet to defend himself.

The next moment they were fighting furiously.

The stumpy man sat up in the grass, blinking dazedly and gasping. He was in no condition to render aid. But Talbot did not require aid.

Boy as he was against a man, he was more than a match for the flabby, ill-conditioned cardsharp. And he had unbounded pluck—a quality in which Mr. Tapp was somewhat lacking.

Talbot was "all over" him at once, hitting out right and left. Tickey Tapp fought him hard for a couple of minutes, but he gave ground before the St. Jim's fellow's whirlwind attack, and at last his foot caught in a root and he fell heavily.

"Ow!" groaned Tickey Tapp. "Ow!"

Talbot looked down on him with blazing eyes. This was the rascal who was the real cause of

his own disgrace and ruin, and he would have been glad to give Tickey Tapp the hiding of his life. But Tickey Tapp had had enough. He blinked up at Talbot again through half-closed eyes.

"So that's 'ow you 'andle an old pal, Toff?" he mumbled.

"Get out of this!"—and Talbot began to use his foot on Tickey Tapp, and the rascal picked himself up and ran, pouring out a stream of oaths as he went.

Talbot turned back to the man in the grass. He was still sitting there in a dazed state, blinking.

"Are you hurt?" asked Talbot.

"'Urt?" said the stumpy man. "Yes, I'm 'urt! Clean winded! The villain! Chummin' up with me like anythin' in the Black Bull night, 'e was. Tryin' to see whether I was well-lined all the time—wot? The 'ound! Is there anythin' in that bottle?"

"There isn't," said Talbot; "and you'd be better without it if there were."

The stumpy man did not seem offended by that remark. He nodded his head sagely.

"Right y'ar," he agreed. "The boss says the same. 'E says the lions will chew me up one of these nights when I've been oilin'. Serve me right if they do, the boss says."

"The lions?" said Talbot, looking at him keenly.

"Yes. I'm much obliged to you for 'elpin' me like this 'ere," said the stumpy man. "That rascal was going to rob me; he saw my quids last night in the Black Bull. I'm Captain Coke."

"Captain Coke!" repeated Talbot.

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The beery and dilapidated gentleman did not look much like a captain.

"Yes. My little bit's lion-taming."

"Oh, I see!"

"At the circus, you know," explained Captain Coke. "I 'ad some pay last night, and I played the silly idjit."

Talbot laughed.

"But where's the circus now?" groaned Captain Coke. "For it's plain enough to see that I missed my way comin' from the Black Bull last night. 'Cause why? Here I am! I must 'ave slept 'ere," added Captain Coke, with conviction.

"I think you must have," agreed Talbot, smiling.

"And that rascal 'unted me out," said the captain, "arter pickin' my pockets while I was snoozin'. But I woke up. Why, I'd 'ave knocked 'im into a cocked 'at if I'd been sober! Unfortunate moment, young gentleman, because I'm a teetotaler, really."

"Oh!"

"But, look 'ere, 'ow am I to get to the circus?"

"Where is it?" asked Talbot.

"Same place as the Black Bull—Fernbrook. I must 'ave taken the wrong turnin' arter I left the Black Bull and walked out into the country."

"You walked about a mile," said Talbot. "I passed through there last night. It's a mile from here."

Captain Coke groaned deeply.

"A mile! Why, I couldn't walk a hundred steps!" he said pathetically. "I suppose a swell young gentleman like you wouldn't give a man a hand on 'is way?"

Talbot paused. He certainly did not relish the

prospect of walking a mile with a man in the worthy captain's condition. But he felt that he could not leave the poor wretch in his present state.

"I'll help you," said Talbot. "Wait a minute till I get my bag and coat."

"Right y'er!"

Talbot hurried back to the stile. He had not thought of his bag and coat when he ran to the rescue. He thought of them too late now. The stile was bare; bag and coat were gone. Talbot compressed his lips with anger. He had little doubt where they were gone. Tickey Tapp had not departed empty-handed, after all.

He glanced about him, without much hope, for a sign of the rogue, but Tickey Tapp had long departed. Pursuit was hopeless. The rascal had vanished, and it could not be guessed even in which direction.

"The hound!" muttered Talbot, in helpless anger.

He returned to the grove with slow steps. Captain Coke was on his feet now, examining the empty bottle. He dropped it, with a guilty look, as Talbot appeared.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yes," said Talbot shortly.

"Got yer things?"

"That rascal has stolen them."

"Oh, by gum!" said Captain Coke, in dismay. "That's 'ard lines, that is. Collared 'em while you was lookin' arter me—wot? The rascal! But I've got five quid. I'll go 'arves!"

"It's all right. My money wasn't in the bag," said Talbot. "Never mind your five quids. Let's get off!"

And Talbot took the stumpy man's arm and they left the grove.

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### CHAPTER 4.

#### Alarming!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY snorted. It was an unaccustomed proceeding on the part of Arthur Augustus, the swell of St. Jim's, the glass of fashion and the model of form in the School House. But he did it.

He was evidently very much perturbed.

Tom Merry & Co. were in the quadrangle after morning lessons. They were discussing the disappearance of Talbot. Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth were with the Terrible Three. They were equally concerned about the mysterious departure of the Shell fellow, and they equally failed to make anything of it. It was as he joined the group of juniors in the quad that Arthur Augustus snorted.

"Wotten!" he said.

"Hallo! What's biting you?" said Monty Lowther.

"Nothin' is bitin' me, Lowthah, and I wegard the question as widdleous, and, in fact, wathah coarse. I have been to see the Head."

"What on earth for?" demanded Blake.

"To ask him about Talbot, of course."

"He wouldn't explain to us," growled Tom Merry.

"I am quite awah of that."

"Well, did he explain to you?" demanded Herries.

"He did not. In fact, he was vewy short and sharp," said Arthur Augustus. "He requested me to wetiah from his study at once. He said there was nothin' to be said. I was beginnin' to

argue, and he weached for his cane, so I thought that pewyaps it would be bettah to wetiah."

"Perhaps it was!" grinned Blake.

"Howevah, I wegard it as vewy wotten of the Head. I am considwably disappointed in him. But the mattah does not west here. Talbot has gone."

"Go hon!"

"There is somethin' vewy w'ong. Talbot didn't want to go. I know that. He didn't know yestah-day that he was goin'! He wasn't the kind of a chap to keep it secwet fwom his chums if he knew. He has been turned out. But why? We all know vewy well that he hasn't done anythin' wotten."

"Of course we do!" growled Tom Merry. "But the Head must think he has. But he said that Talbot wasn't accused of anything, or suspected of anything. Simply that circumstances made it better for him to go."

"Yaas; and those circumstances are what is w'ong. The Head is undah some kind of misapprehension. We are goin' to set it right."

"How?"

"By findin' out those extwemely mystewious cires."

"And how are we going to do that?"

"That will wequiah some thinkin' out, of course. But you can leave it to me. I will have a big think."

"What with?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally. Lowtah—"

The Terrible Three strolled away. They did not feel sufficient confidence in Arthur Augustus' mighty intellectual powers to leave the matter to him. But what they were to do themselves puzzled them.

"If we only knew where he was now!" said Tom Merry, for the tenth time. "If he'd only tell us himself why he went! Why can't he? I know he's done nothing wrong. Why can't he tell us why he's gone?"

"It beats me!" said Manners.

"Here's Miss Marie," said Monty Lowther, in a low voice.

The three juniors raised their caps as the girl came hurrying up to them. Miss Marie's sweet face was very pale. They understood that she had heard the news, too. And they knew how she would miss her old chum—as badly as they missed him themselves.

"You've heard, Miss Marie?" said Tom.

"Yes, yes. I have seen the Head. He will not tell me anything!" exclaimed Marie Rivers, in an agitated voice. "Why has Talbot gone?"

"Nobody knows."

"But—but it is terrible!" exclaimed Marie. "Did he say nothing to you before he went?"

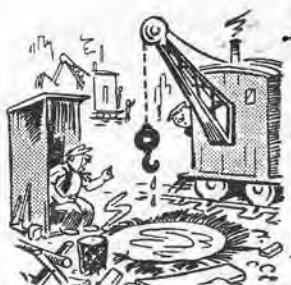
"Nothing. We were asleep. He went last night."

"He will write—he must write," said Marie. "There is not time yet. It is strange that the Head does not explain. He knew what old friends the Toff and I are."

Marie coloured a little. The Head and the Terrible Three were the only ones at St. Jim's who knew that Marie was the daughter of a reformed cracksman. Marie, the devoted nurse whom all St. Jim's liked and respected, had been the Toff's comrade in the days that were long past.

"Yes, he will write," said Tom Merry. "But if the Head does not tell us, will Talbot tell us?"

"You do not know any reason—whether he has seen anybody he knew before he came here—"



"They've 'ad yer bait this time, Joe!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Ralph, The Dawn, Little Burstead, near Billericay, Essex.

Tom Merry started a little.

"Tickey Tapp," he said.

"Who is that?"

"A rotten cardsharp. He had a fellow in our Form in his clutches, and made him sign some papers," said Tom. "He was holding them over the poor rotter's head. Talbot got the chap I'm speaking of out of that. He knew something about Tickey Tapp that he could be sent to prison for, and he made the man give up the IO U's and clear out. But Tickey Tapp can't have anything to do with this."

Marie shook her head.

"I do not see that he could. I cannot understand it. But the Toff will write; he is sure to write."

Marie hurried away towards the sanatorium, and the Terrible Three strolled moodily through the quadrangle.

"Tickey Tapp can't have anything to do with it," said Tom. "Even if the Head knew that Talbot had spoken with him, he couldn't send him away for that. Yet it's odd. It was only last evening that Talbot made the brute give up Gore's IO U's and clear off. When we came back to the school Talbot had no idea that this was going to happen. I'm sure of that. Gore's mixed up in it in some way. He's as good as admitted that he knows something about it."

"Let's ask him," said Manners. "We've asked him once, but—"

Tom Merry nodded. There did not seem much chance of extracting information from Gore, but there was nothing else to do.

The Terrible Three went up to the Shell passage. They found Skimpole, Gore's study-mate, outside the study, with a look of alarm on his face. Skimpole blinked at them through his spectacles.

"I am glad your fellows have come up," he said. "Gore quite alarms me. I really think he is going to be ill."

"What's the matter with him now?" said Tom Merry gruffly.

"He is talking so strangely," said Skimpole. "Do you fellows think that I look like a policeman?"

"Wha-a-at?" The Terrible Three stared blankly at Skimpole.

"You do not?" said Skimpole, blinking.

"Well, hardly," said Lowther. "You look more like a specimen out of the British Museum than anything else, Skimmy."

"Well, then, why should Gore take me for a policeman?"

"Eh?"

"Perhaps he was joking," said Skimpole. "But

he looks very earnest and very frightened. And he is talking very strangely. Listen!"

A voice that was hardly recognisable as Gore's came from the study in wild, loud tones.

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't care—I don't care! What can they prove? That's what I want to know? I didn't do it—I wasn't there! Safe as houses!"

"My hat! What's the matter with him?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

He flung the door open and entered the study.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Marie is Wanted!

**G**EORGE GORE was standing by the table. His face was like chalk, his eyes burning with a wild light.

He burst into a laugh as the Shell fellows came in, a delirious laugh that made their flesh creep.

"Gore! What's the matter?"

"Are you ill?"

Gore stared at them, making a visible effort to pull himself together. It was painful to see how the wretched fellow was trying to control the delirium that mastered him in spite of himself.

"Ill?" he muttered huskily. "No I'm not ill! Talbot's gone! He won't come back. He won't say anything. I shan't say anything!" His tongue was babbling now; the effort of self-control had passed. "Send for the police! I don't care! Why should I care?"

"Quiet, old chap—"

"Keep it quiet!" babbled Gore, catching at the word. "Keep it quiet! Talbot won't talk—he's not that sort! Besides, he's a crackman—ha, ha, ha!—cracking the Head's safe in the middle of the night! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry felt his very blood run cold.

The junior was delirious—the trouble that had been driving him hard for days had culminated in this at last! He had broken down under the strain. But what did his wild words about Talbot mean?

"Send him to prison!" went on Gore, in the same wild tone. "Send him to prison—the Toff's a crackman—send him to prison! Where's the police?"

"Better call the Housemaster," whispered Lowther.

There was a crowd outside the study now. The juniors looked in with awed and wondering faces. Gore did not see them. He was unconscious now of the fellows in the study. His tongue ran on wildly, with unconnected words.

Lowther ran hurriedly down the passage. It was only too evident that Gore was seriously ill—and that he needed care.

"Tickey Tapp!" muttered the delirious junior. "Tickey Tapp! Make your game, gentlemen! I've lost! All my money's gone! I'll give you an IOU! Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!" said Kangaroo of the Shell. "That shows what the poor brute's got on his mind."

"I say, if the Housemaster hears that, Gore will get into awful trouble," muttered Blake uneasily.

"Can't be helped!" said Tom. "He can't be left like this. He's got to be taken care of."

"Tickey Tapp!" Gore went on. "Marked cards! Talbot knows he swindled me. Fifteen

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pounds! I can't crack a safe like the Toff. Talbot's cracking the Head's safe! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wh-what does he mean?" gasped Blake. "It—it can't be possible, that—that—" He could not finish.

"Of course it can't!" said Tom Merry roughly. "He's delirious—he doesn't know what he's saying."

"But—but it must be in his mind—"

"He's been thinking about Talbot going, and got that into his head, I suppose," said Tom.

"Here comes Mr. Railton," said Glyn, from the passage.

The juniors made way for Mr. Railton to enter the study.

The Housemaster was looking very disturbed.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Lowther tells me that—Gore, what is the matter with you?"

"Keep him away!" screamed Gore. "I—I won't go! They shan't take me! Talbot—where's Talbot? Talbot will stand by a fellow when he's down. Talbot's worth a whole lot of you. He won't turn his nose up at a fellow when he's in trouble. Lot of cads, that's what you are! Talbot's worth the whole bunch!"

"What ever can be the cause of this?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "The boy is quite delirious. He must be taken to the sanatorium at once!"

"Keep him away!" shrieked Gore, as the Housemaster made a movement towards him. "I'm not a thief! I'm not—I'm not—"

"What can the unhappy boy have in his mind?" gasped Mr. Railton. "Surely no one has suspected him of theft?"

"No, sir."

"Yet something must have caused this; it is amazing! He must be taken away at once. Blake, will you go to the sanatorium and ask Miss Pinch to prepare for him?"

Jack Blake cut away at once.

"Now, Gore, come with me," said Mr. Railton gently.

Gore sprang away, screaming, as the Housemaster advanced towards him. Mr. Railton stopped. The unfortunate junior was evidently quite out of his senses.

"This is dreadful!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "Gore, calm yourself. We will take care of you."

"Perhaps Miss Marie could persuade him, sir," said Manners. "She's awfully clever with invalids."

"Perhaps so. Please ask her to come here, if she will be so kind."

Mr. Railton made no further attempt to approach the boy. Gore had retreated into a corner of the study, still muttering and mumbling.

There was a rustle of a gown in the passage, and the Head stepped in.

"What is it, Mr. Railton?"

"Gore is ill, sir—delirious. I cannot understand it. He is talking in the wildest way. Manners has gone to fetch the nurse, who may be able to deal with him."

"Gore," said the Head gently.

Gore stared at him with burning eyes, but did not answer. It was only too clear that he did not recognise Dr. Holmes. The Head made a sign to the startled juniors crowded round the doorway, and they disappeared, wondering greatly. Gore had been so strange in his manner the last few days that more than one fellow had remarked that he seemed to be going "off his rocker." It had evidently happened at last.

"Come with me, Gore," said the Head, advancing a step.

Gore uttered a shriek.

"Leave me alone! I won't go! I—I—I wasn't there! It was Tickey Tapp—let them take him!"

The Head started.

"What does this mean?" he said, in a low voice. "That is the name of the rascally character whom D'Arcy—"

"Tickey Tapp!" muttered Gore. "I don't know him—I don't know the man! I'm not a thief! Who dares to say that I am a thief? I tell you I won't do it—I can't! All right, old chap; I'll tell you all about it," went on the wretched boy, sinking his voice to a whisper. "You'll help me, I know—you'll stand by me, Talbot—where's Talbot?"

"Was this boy very friendly with Talbot, do you know, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head, as Gore's voice died away in incoherent mumblings.

"He was his studymate—I don't know more than that," said Mr. Railton. "But Talbot was very popular. Surely it cannot be simply Talbot's going away that has had this terrible effect on Gore!"

There was a light step in the passage, and Miss Marie entered. The Head and the Housemaster turned to her with great relief.

"The boy is delirious," said the Head. "Perhaps you can do something with him, nurse. He must be got to the sanatorium."

"I will try, sir."

Marie came quietly towards Gore. To the great relief of the masters, he simply stared at her dully.

"Come with me, Gore," said Marie, in her sweet soft voice.

"Where's Talbot?" muttered Gore confusedly.

"Talbot can get me out of this! I'm in awful trouble!"

"Let me take care of you," said Marie. "Talbot shall come later. Come!" Her cool hand took Gore's hot and feverish one, and he seemed dazed as she led him from the study.

From doorways and corners, scared faces watched Gore as he went with Marie. He was muttering incessantly as he went, and Marie soothed him.

Ten minutes later, Gore was safe in the sanatorium, under the care of Miss Pinch, and tossing restlessly from side to side in his bed, and muttering without cause wild and incoherent words. The wretched boy who had perhaps been more sinned against than sinning, had found a heavy punishment.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Fallen Among Friends!

"IT'S jest the legs!" said Captain Coke.

Talbot was very patient. It was very like Talbot to forget his own troubles and preoccupations in assisting a helpless stranger.

The worthy captain zigzagged unsteadily as he progressed. His potations at the Black Bull overnight, and the bottle he had apparently finished while reposing under the trees, had completely knocked him over. He explained almost pathetically that his head was clear as a bell, but that he was "drunk in the legs"—and certainly his legs were acting in a totally irresponsible manner.

"Jest the legs!" he murmured. "Always takes

(Continued on next page.)

# LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty Lowther.



Hallo, Everybody!

*A resident in Wayland is always losing his wireless set because he does not keep up the instalments. Hear to-day, gone to-morrow.*

Ah me, as the convict said, if only I had my time over again.

*I hear a guide to migratory birds has been published. Sort of Cuckoo's Who?*

"Are Oysters Healthy?" asks a headline. Well, we've never heard one complaining!

*"Nothing is lost by politeness," observes Mr. Linton. How about your seat in a bus?*

Crooning comes hard on the breathing, says Herries. What about the hearing?

*It is best to go to bed with the flu, advises the school medico. We'd rather go to bed without it.*

Kerr tells the story of the Scotsman who taught his boys to run upstairs three at a time in order to save wear on the stair carpet.

*After a tree-chopping competition near Rylcombe, the onlookers gathered round the winner and chanted: "For He's a Jolly Good Feller!"*

The driver of a horse van in Rylcombe tells me he has a miserable time in traffic nowadays. A life full of whoa.

*Howler: Will-power is what wealthy relatives have, wrote Wally D'Arcy in an essay.*

If you are thinking of buying an aeroplane, remember the initial cost is not so much, but you have got to think about keeping it up.

*Gore tells me he would like to be a bone specialist. Well, there's one thing—you've got the right kind of head for it, old chap!*

Definition: An income is something very difficult to live within, but impossible to live without.

*Listen: "I put my shoes outside my door last night, and they haven't been touched this mornin'," complained Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, staying at an Irish hotel last vac. "Bless you, sor," exclaimed the porter, "you could lave your gold watch in the passage all night here and nobody would touch it!"*

See you next Wed, begorrah!

me like that! 'Ead as clear as anythin', young man, but it sticks to the legs longest. 'Strordinary, ain't it?"

"Very extraordinary," said Talbot, half-laughing.

That mile to Fernbrook seemed the longest mile to Talbot that he had ever traversed. People who passed them in the lane, stared and smiled and laughed. The handsome junior in Etons and the seedy old roysterer certainly looked very ill-assorted.

But Fernbrook was reached at last, and the captain zigzagged towards the common outside the village, where the circus was pitched.

Talbot gave a start as he came in sight of a big marquee, upon which, in staring letters, was the announcement:

### "CHUMGUM'S CELEBRATED CIRCUS!"

"By Jove!" said Talbot. "Is that it?"

"That's it, my kind young friend."

"Chungum's Circus!" said Talbot. "Why, you were performing near St. Jim's some weeks ago—I know some of the people. Captain Coke—I remember your name now; it was on the bills. My hat!"

Talbot paused irresolutely.

He knew Chungum's Circus very well—he had paid more than one visit to it with Tom Merry & Co. when it was in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's. The chums were acquainted with some of the performers—Tiny Tony, the clown, and Samsonio, the strong man, and the genial Mr. Chungum himself.

At any other time Talbot would have been glad to see his acquaintances there. For he liked the breezy, free and easy circus folk.

But now it was different. They would know at once that he was a St. Jim's fellow; they would wonder what he was doing away from the school. He did not want to excite curiosity. Still, he could not desert the shipwrecked captain so close to port. He resolved to pilot Captain Coke home, and take his leave immediately.

"'Ere we are agin," said Captain Coke, zigzagging over the rough common. "'Ere's some of the boys!"

Mr. Chungum had come out of the tent, and he was staring at them.

Tiny Tony, the clown—not in his circus attire now, but in grey flannel trousers, and an ancient sports jacket—came out of the caravan. He burst into a chuckle at the sight of the plunging captain.

"'E's come 'ome," remarked Tiny Tony.

Mr. Chungum frowned.

"So here you are!" he snapped, as the captain was brought to an unsteady halt at last.

Captain Coke blinked and nodded.

"'Ere I am," he said. "This young man 'as seen me 'ome. I lost my way last night, boss."

"Serve you right!" said Mr. Chungum.

"I've nearly been robbed," said the captain. "This young man come to my 'elp, and brought me 'ome."

"I saved him from having his pocket picked," said Talbot.

"And the rascal stole his bag and coat while he was a-doin' of it," added the captain.

"That's hard lines," said Mr. Chungum, looking very curiously at Talbot. "It was very good

of you to take care of this worthless idiot. Haven't I seen you before?"

"I came to the circus with my friends at Wayland," he said.

"Thought I remembered. You belonged to the school—St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"Holiday now?" asked Mr. Chungum.

Talbot coloured.

"No; I have left. Now Captain Coke is safe, I'll be getting along."

"Don't run away like that," said Mr. Chungum. "You're among friends here, you know. You're out early. Where did you pick up this fool?"

"In the wood about a mile from here."

"And you've carted him home," said Mr. Chungum. "It was very good of you! Better have chucked him in the nearest pond; but it was very good of you, Master Talbot! I think I remember your name."

"Yes."

"Kindness itself he was!" mumbled the captain. "Stopped that rascal who was robbin' me, and lost 'is own bag and coat, 'e did!"

"Tony, yank that boozy brute into his van!" said Mr. Chungum; and the grinning clown dragged the captain away. "I am sorry you should have lost your things in looking after my lion-tamer, Master Talbot!"

"That's all right. It couldn't be helped."

"Going home now?"

"Not exactly."

Talbot could see plainly enough that Mr. Chungum was surprised and curious.

"Had your breakfast?" asked the circus master.

"No; but—"

"Nor ain't I," said Mr. Chungum. "You'll stay and have breakfast with me, Master Talbot."

The keen country air had sharpened Talbot's appetite, and he felt that it would seem ungrateful to refuse.

"I'll stay with pleasure," he said.

"Good!" said Mr. Chungum. "This is my tent. Trot right in."

A little later Talbot was seated at the breakfast-table with the stout showman, in a tent from which a wide expanse of the green common and the fields beyond could be seen.

"Tuck in!" said Mr. Chungum hospitably. "How's all the boys at home—Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and the others?"

"I left them all quite well," said Talbot.

Mr. Chungum looked very thoughtful as he chatted to Talbot during breakfast. The Toff made an excellent meal, and felt much better for it. It was not till he had finished that Mr. Chungum came to the subject that was chiefly in his mind. He lighted a cigar, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Now, you won't think me inquisitive, Master Talbot," he said. "I ain't one for asking questions about what ain't my business; but you're a boy, and I'm old enough to be your father. So you'll excuse me."

Talbot nodded, without speaking. He knew what was coming, and there was no avoiding it.

The genial circus master meant kindly.

"Not to put too fine a point on it, you've run away from school?" said Mr. Chungum bluntly.

"No. I've left rather suddenly," said Talbot, "but I have not run away. There was a little misunderstanding with the Head, but I left with his full knowledge and consent."

"Oh!" said Mr. Chungum considerably taken aback. "I'm off the track, then?"

"Yes," smiled Talbot.

"But there's something up, I can see that. Say the word, and I'll close up like an oyster, and mind my own business," said Mr. Chungum frankly. "But you've done that idiot of mine a very good turn and you've lost your things through it. I don't feel as I ought to let you go away like this. You've said that you're not going home, so I take it you're in a fix?"

"Well, yes."

"S'pose you take my advice—which is to go straight home?" suggested Mr. Chungum.

Talbot coloured painfully.

"I have no home," he said. "I—I used to be connected with some people, but have nothing to do with them now. I was at St. Jim's on a scholarship. I have no people."

"That's hard luck," said Mr. Chungum. "Might I ask—as a friend, mind you—what you are after now?"

"I shall go to London and get work."

"Phew! And how's the money market? Mind you, I'm asking you this as a friend."

"Set fair!" said Talbot, with a smile. "I have quite enough money for a long time to come."

"Well, that's lucky—very lucky," said Mr. Chungum. "But you're a young kid to be going out into the world on your lonely own. What can you do? Do you know anything about horses?"

"Horses?" said Talbot.

"Yes. Can you ride?"

"Yes, rather!" Talbot was a little puzzled by the question. "I hardly think I have much prospect of getting in that line, however."

"That depends," said Mr. Chungum, with a beaming smile. "You might come across a man

who's willing to give you a few days on trial, and take you on if you are worth your salt—what? A man like me?"

"Like you?" said Talbot.

"That's the idea," said Mr. Chungum. "You stay with the circus a few days—see how you like it, you know. You stay as a guest, and pick up the ways of the place and the kind of work that's to be done, you know. It'll give you time to think over what you're going to do. And if you like the idea, there's room for an extra rider in Chungum's Circus—fellow who can ride and is willing to make himself useful. Small pay to begin with, of course—a little pocket-money—but you'll get your keep and your outfit. What do you say?"

Talbot looked blankly at the genial showman. He had been far from expecting anything of the kind.

But he liked the idea.

The life of a circus rider was not exactly what had been in his dreams of the future. But he was not in a position now to pick and choose.

It was quite as good as anything he could hope to find by going to London and joining the crowd of unemployed there.

"You are very kind!" he said at last. "I hadn't the least idea—"

"Of course you hadn't," said Mr. Chungum. "But don't run away with the idea that there's any call for gratitude over this. If you're any good you'll be more than worth your keep in the circus. You take a week or two to think it over, and during that time you're my guest," said Mr. Chungum.



Talbot dashed through the trees and came suddenly upon a startling scene. A man was down in the grass, while another was kneeling on him, pinning him down. "Hand over your money!" threatened the latter. "I know you've got it!" "Tickey Tapp!" exclaimed Talbot.

"No, no!" said Talbot. "If I stay, I work. I'm not idle, and I don't want to eat the bread of idleness."

"Well just as you like; I'm an accommodating gent. smiled the showman."

"One word. Are you going near St. Jim's again?" asked Talbot. "I don't want to fall in with any of the fellows there."

"We're making for the coast now; we've thoroughly done this district," said Mr. Chumgum. "Shan't be in that neighbourhood again for years, most likely."

"Then it's a go, and I'm awfully obliged," said Talbot. "You'll take me on trial, and if I'm not worth my keep you'll tell me so!"

"Done!" said Mr. Chumgum.

And Talbot stayed.

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Baffling Mystery!

"**B**ETTER go on with your prep, Tom!" Tom Merry came out of a gloomy reverie.

The Terrible Three were in their study, and Tom Merry was silent and glum. The long day had passed without any news of Talbot, and Tom was not likely soon to forget his chum.

"No good moping," went on Lowther. "We shall hear from old Talbot sooner or later, Tom—sure to. The Head can't have forbidden him to write."

Tom gave a sigh.

"If a fellow only knew what was up," he said, "but to be mystified like this—it's too rotten. Where can Talbot be now?"

"Goodness knows. But the Head said that he won't be in want, Tom; it won't be like last time."

"If it were I'd go and look for him, Head or no Head," declared Tom Merry. "But I suppose we've got to work. Hang the prep."

The chums of the Shell settled down with their books. They were all feeling gloomy enough, but preparation had to be done.

There was a sudden startled exclamation from Tom Merry as he opened his Latin grammar. It was the first time that day he had opened it.

"What's that? My hat!"

A sheet of paper had slipped out on the table.

"Talbot's list!"

"Great Scott!"

Tom Merry caught up the letter.

"He must have put that in the book before he left last night!" he exclaimed.

"What does he say?"

The three juniors read the note together.

"Dear Tom,—I'm leaving St. Jim's to-night, and I can't even say good-bye to you and the other fellows. I can't tell you why I'm going; it's due to circumstances that simply can't be helped. But I don't think I need tell you that I have done nothing I should be ashamed to tell you. But don't blame the Head either; he was kindness itself to me, and I know it grieved him to see me go. It's just rotten bad luck, and it can't be helped."

"Don't worry about me. I have enough money, and I'm not in any danger. It's nothing like it was last time. I may see you again some day, perhaps; I hope so. I shall always remember you, and what a brick you've been. Good-bye, old chap!—REGINALD TALBOT."

Tom Merry read the brief letter through twice.

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his brows wrinkled. It bore out what he had been certain of—that Talbot had left the school with his honour unstained. But what were the "circumstances" that had driven Talbot away from the school he loved, away from his chums, away from his hopes of the future, and made him an outcast?

"It beats me," said Monty Lowther. "Not a word as to why he's gone. Why can't he tell us, his pals?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Something happened last night," he said, "something with Gore mixed up in it. I'm certain of that. But what it was beats me."

"And there's no getting anything out of Gore, now he's in the sanatorium," said Manners.

"He won't own up," said Tom. "He's afraid to, for some reason. Blessed if I can guess why. But Gore's been moping and queer for days."

"But Gore's trouble can't have made Talbot go," said Manners. "What can the connection be?"

"I give it up, but it's plain enough that there is a connection," Tom Merry started. "Gore may have done something, and Talbot's got the blame for it."

"But the Head said he wasn't accused of anything."

"Or suspected," said Lowther.

"Oh, I give it up!" said Tom Merry in despair. "Still, there's one thing jolly certain—old Talbot is square as a die, and he's not done anything to deserve this."

Somewhat comforted by Talbot's letter, mysterious as it was, the chums of the Shell settled down to their preparation. But their absent chum was in their minds all the time.

Meanwhile, Talbot had found a warm welcome in the circus.

That afternoon the circus was "on the road" again, and the Shell fellow of St. Jim's travelled with it towards the coast.

The Toff had the gift of making friends, and after a few hours in the company, he felt that he would be very comfortable with Mr. Chumgum, Tiny Tony, Texas Bill, the bronco-buster, and the rest.

Texas Bill—otherwise William Flaherty of Tipperary, whose accent was not at all like that of Texas—had given him a trial with his horses, and many words of commendation. Talbot was a good horseman, and though probably he would not "witch the world with noble horsemanship," still he would be a good and reliable "hand" in the ring.

When the circus started from Fernbrook Talbot was riding, and leading a couple of horses. It was a new and curious experience for the Shell fellow. He had changed out of his Etons into grey flannels and a sports coat he had bought in the village.

Captain Coke, who had taken a great fancy to his rescuer, had offered him quarters in his caravan—an offer that Talbot had hesitated at first to accept. But he finally decided to do so, and he put the captain's van into a little better order for him.

Chumgum's Celebrated Circus stopped at another village for the night, and the big tent was pitched on the common.

Talbot found that there was plenty of work to do. Even the majestic Mr. Charley Chumgum himself turned to and helped. There was no room for idlers in Chumgum's Circus.

# It's An Old Chinese Custom!



Sun Yat Sen's stamp. Note the growing ears of wheat each side of the portrait—the Republic is growing.

*China is full of quaint customs, and many of them are reflected in her stamps.*



The Republic has grown. So sa ythe full ears of wheat on this commemorative issue.

consequence, greater interest is being taken in Chinese stamps—an interest which is well repaid, for few countries can boast more attractive issues.

China was very slow to follow the lead of the rest of the world in establishing a Government postal system for the first official stamps were not issued until 1878. These were for the use of the Imperial Customs Post, which was controlled by an Englishman, Sir Robert Hart, who was the head of the Chinese Customs Department.

Most of these Customs stamps are fairly expensive, but they are extremely fascinating, for their designs are full of the quaint allegory of the Orient. Nearly all of them depict the Imperial Chinese dragon, which later Chinese stamps have made familiar to us all. It was this dragon which is said to have given a remote Chinese emperor the secrets of writing and philosophy.

## AN AMAZING CREATURE.

Since this creature has been such a familiar Chinese stamp subject, it is interesting to note what the Chinese believe it to be like. It is said to have the head of a camel, the horns of a deer, the eyes of a rabbit, the ears of a cow, a snake's neck, a carp's scales, a hawk's claws, and a tiger's paws. Altogether, a truly amazing beast!

On the first Chinese stamp you'll notice the dragon depicted with five claws per foot. A very important point, this, in Chinese eyes. Mandarins might have their own private dragons, but only the Emperor could have a five-clawed dragon.

In 1896 the Customs Post was developed into a national organisation. A brand-new series, printed in Japan, appeared in 1897. The next year another set, bearing similar designs, was printed in London. The lowest values showed the

well-known dragon, and the subject of the middle values, was a couple of carp.

Carp are known to the Chinese as "messenger fish," for legend has it that on one occasion a mighty revolution was hatched by conspirators who sent messages to each other by means of the carp.

The highest values depict a wild goose in flight, a subject which also has a "messenger" flavour. When a Chinese is going to post a letter he will often say it is for "the convenience of the wild goose."

## THE WINGED MESSENGER.

In the dim, distant past, so the story goes, a Chinese ambassador was captured by a desperate brigand. One day the captive found a wild goose, and had the forethought to attach a message to the bird's foot. When released the bird flew south, and was shot down by the Chinese Emperor, who, seeing the message, sent out an expedition which released the ambassador and punished the brigand.

In 1912 revolution broke out in China, resulting in the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the Chinese Republic. Two very handsome and interesting series of stamps were issued that year to honour these events. The first bore a portrait of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, prime mover of the revolution, the second, the portrait of the first full-powered Chinese President, Yuan Shi Kai.

The borders of the first stamps show unripe ears of wheat, signifying part development of the Republic. In the borders of the second series we are reminded that the job is completed by ears of fully grown ripe wheat.

In the twenty-six years that have followed since then the designs have generally been of a much more straightforward nature, but they have been no less attractive for all that.

Talbot worked hard enough, and helped in every way he could, and made himself generally useful. Texas Bill had informed the "boss" that Talbot was quite equal to appearing in the ring on a horse, and Talbot was told that he could take part in a Red Indian act which was superintended by Mr. Flaherty.

In the dressing-room the junior grinned at his reflection in the glass, in fringed leggings and war-paint. He was with half a dozen "hands" who were to play the part of Redskins in Texas Bill's turn. It was hard for him to realise that only the day before he had been a St. Jim's fellow.

He did not feel nervous about his first appearance. The part given him was so exceedingly "super" that there was nothing to feel nervous

about. He simply had to sit on his horse and yell.

As soon as Texas Bill's turn came on, he rode into the ring with the rest, and went through his modest part with perfect calmness. After the turn, he had nothing to do but kill time until the rest of the performance was over; but he went into Captain Coke's van to see how the lion-tamer was getting on.

Talbot had taken rather a liking to the worthy captain, who was a thoroughly good-natured and good-tempered fellow.

The junior found the captain already dressed for his part, looking exceedingly plump and stumpy in his professional attire. There was a

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clink of a bottle and a glass as Talbot came in, and the lion-tamer looked round rather guiltily.

"Oh, it's you, kid!" he said. "Thought it was old-Chungum. He's a worry."

The spirit gurgled out of the bottle.

Talbot looked at him gravely.

"Is that safe, when you're going to appear with the lions?" he asked.

"It's a bad habit," agreed Captain Coke at once. "Don't you ever get into it, my boy."

"Then why do you do it?" asked Talbot.

"Must!" said the captain dolorously. "You see, I've got no nerves left. If I didn't take a pick-me-up before I go on, I'd never be able to handle the lions. I have to get up my nerve."

"It won't pay in the long run."

"It's breaking me up," said Captain Coke. "But I am a victim—an 'un'appy victim! If I'd 'ad an experienced friend to give me advice when I was your age, I'd never 'ave touched it—never!"

And, having made that frank confession, the captain proceeded to take a gulp of the potent liquor.

"For goodness' sake, don't overdo it!" said Talbot. The junior eyed Captain Coke uneasily. If this was his usual method of preparing for a performance, it was useless to comment. And, besides, he had no right to give advice to a man old enough to be his father. But he could not help thinking that Captain Coke was over-doing it.

"I suppose the lions are pretty tame," he remarked.

"The lioness is a daisy," said the captain, "but her mate—e's a corker! I 'ave to keep 'im in 'and, I can tell you!"

The spirit gurgled again.

"For goodness' sake, don't take any more!" exclaimed Talbot, moving to interfere. "You'll have an accident in the cage."

The captain lurched against the side of the van.

Talbot put the bottle and glass into the locker and closed it.

Captain Coke blinked at him. Then he made his way unsteadily from the van.

Talbot followed him uneasily. If this was the captain's custom, there was probably nothing to feel alarmed about; but the boy could not help feeling alarmed.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Talbot to the Rescue!

MR. CHUNGUM'S voice could be heard calling:

"Where's Captain Coke? Don't he know we're waiting for him?"

"Ere you are, boss!"

"You've been at it again!" roared Mr. Chungum, as he caught a potent whiff of the lion-tamer.

"Just a drop—a mere drop—as this young man will tell you."

"You leave this circus on Saturday!"

Captain Coke drew himself up with dignity, resting his hand on Talbot's shoulder to do so.

"If my services ain't required in this circus," he said, "I'll go! I shall take the public with me. I warn you of that, Mr. Charley Chungum!"

"Is the fool too drunk to go on, do you think, Bill?" asked Mr. Chungum, not paying the

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slightest attention to the captain's dignified retort.

Texas Bill shrugged his shoulders.

"Not more squiffy than usual, boss—not much more, anyway."

Mr. Chungum eyed the captain anxiously. Captain Coke was a sore trial to the circus master. He was too good-natured to carry out his constant threats of sacking the captain. And, besides, the lions were a great draw to the circus when the captain did his turn creditably.

"Oh, you ass!" said Mr. Chungum emphatically. "You remember you were nearly mauled at Friardale, and you can't stop playing the fool like this!"

"I was drunk that time!" protested the captain.

"And what are you now, you fool?"

"Fit as a fiddle, boss—fit as a fiddle! You'll see."

"Well, you've got to go on," said Mr. Chungum. "They're waiting for you, and they must be getting fed-up with Tony's gags by this time. Go on, and walk as straight as you can, you idiot!"

Captain Coke made an effort and pulled himself together, and went into the ring.

The circus master was watching him anxiously from the opening in the tent, and so was Talbot. The big cage containing a lion and a lioness was already in the arena, and Tiny Tony had been keeping the audience in good humour by cracking a succession of ancient chestnuts, which were probably new to the unsophisticated inhabitants of Westwood.

"There'll be trouble sooner or later," Mr. Chungum growled. "I shall have to sack him for his own sake. It'll come to that. He's drunker than usual this evening. And after what happened before, when he had to be dragged out of the cage—" Mr. Chungum finished with an angry snort.

He proceeded to ascertain that the assistants with the red-hot irons were ready, in case of trouble with the lions. That was a precaution Mr. Chungum never neglected.

Talbot stood watching the lions' cage. Captain Coke had walked fairly straight till he reached it. But the junior could see that he was in no state to deal with lions, unless they were very tame indeed. The captain opened the cage door and entered, closing the door after him.

There was a murmur of applause from the audience. Talbot noted that the captain had not fastened the iron door, and that it had swung several inches open again after him. He continued to watch uneasily.

The captain held on to a bar of the cage as he cracked his whip. Mr. Chungum went into the ring, resplendent in his white shirt, dress suit, and silk hat. He approached the cage, and spoke to the lion-tamer through the bars.

"Coke, you idiot, if you can't do your work, come off! What's the good of hanging on to that bar and cracking your whip?"

Captain Coke blinked at him.

He looked as if he would fall down if he let go the upright. The lion was growling.

"Come out of that cage!" said Mr. Chungum. "I'll cut the turn, and tell 'em in front that you're ill."

"I ain't ill," said the captain.

"No; you're tipsy, you idiot!" said Mr. Chungum, in deep disgust. "Come out, I tell you! I don't like the looks of that animal. He knows you can't handle him."

"You see!"

Captain Coke flicked the lion with his whip. There was a thunderous roar from the great beast, and he crouched as if for a spring. By some instinct he had realised that the tamer was not in a condition to subdue him. Captain Coke blinked at him, the whip falling from his hand without his even noticing it. Some sense of his danger came to his confused, liquor-soaked brain, and he backed unsteadily to the door of the cage, the lion growling furiously as he watched him.

Talbot came quickly into the ring. He was anxious for the captain now. But the wretched man succeeded in backing out of the cage.

He reeled towards Mr Chumgum and caught hold of him, almost dragging him down.

"You've left the door open, you fool!" panted the circus master, trying to free himself from the captain's clasp.

The iron door of the cage was wide open. The lion had observed it at once, and stalked towards it, his tail lashing.

There was a buzz and a yell among the audience, who could see that there was something wrong now. In a few seconds more the lion would have been out of the cage, and there would have been a panic.

Talbot, without stopping to think, ran towards the door to close it. The great head, with its bristling mane, had already emerged when Talbot slammed the door. It slammed on the muzzle of the lion and drove him back. A fearful roar reverberated through the circus as Talbot secured the iron bolt.

There were wild cries and trampling of feet among the audience, and a crash of overturning benches as they struggled for the exit. Mr. Chumgum threw off the captain, who pitched helplessly into the tan, and shouted desperately:

"Ladies and gentlemen! Take your seats! Take your seats! It is only the performance—simply the performance! No cause for alarm!"

Tiny Tony, with great presence of mind, started a hornpipe, dancing round and round and over the captain as he lay in the tan. The commencing panic was stilled; the circus master's statement banished the fears of the people "in front." The good folk of Westwood, looking considerably sheepish, scrambled back to their seats. The lions' cage was at once wheeled out of the arena.

"Ladies and gentlemen," pursued Mr. Chumgum, who had certainly not been brought up at the feet of George Washington, "I regret that alarm has unintentionally been caused by the new act—the thrilling scene just introduced to your notice. Pray keep your seats! No cause whatever for alarm!"

Captain Coke staggered to his feet, and Mr. Chumgum, Tiny Tony, and Talbot immediately seized him, whipped him up, and carried him struggling out of the ring, amid shouts of laughter from the audience, who took that for part of the performance, too.

Rab Rabbi, the Indian juggler, immediately went on, and Tiny Tony somersaulted back into the ring.

Mr Chumgum wiped the perspiration from his brow when he was safe out of the view of the audience. Samsonio, the Strong Man, picked up the captain as if he had been an infant, and carried him to his van.

"By gosh!" gasped Mr. Chumgum. "If—if that lion had got out it would have been ruin for Chumgum's Circus! Why, they would have

trampled one another to death if the panic had fair started! It would have been in all the papers. It would have been ruin!"

Talbot smiled a little. The worthy showman was evidently thinking chiefly of the harm that would have been done to his circus.

"And you stopped him, kid," went on Mr. Chumgum. "Where did you get your nerve from? Why, his blessed head was nearly touching you when you slammed the door on him. You've saved some lives to-night, young 'un, and saved Chumgum's Circus!"

"Lucky I got it shut in time," said Talbot cheerily.

"Lucky!" repeated the circus master, with a shudder. "I don't dare to think of what would have happened. As for that drunken fool, he



"Drat those kids! They've been playing bubbles with my pipe again!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Robertson, 161, Beechwood Avenue, Earlsdon, Coventry.

shall never give another performance in my circus!"

Mr Chumgum meant it this time.

Talbot, feeling rather sorry for the unfortunate captain, much to blame as he had been, went away to the van to see how he was getting on.

Captain Coke lay on the floor of the van, snoring. Talbot made him as comfortable as he could and left him.

## CHAPTER 9.

### A New Leaf!

CHUMGUM'S CIRCUS travelled on by easy stages

Every evening Talbot took his little part in the programme—a part that was growing bigger now as Texas Bill's riding performance was extended. The lion-taming act had been cut out, and the boss had not yet filled the place with another turn.

Talbot soon grew to like his work, and his general willingness to lend a hand, and his courageous act on the first night of the circus, had made him very popular.

He still shared Captain Coke's van, for the captain, though sacked, and not sharing the performance, remained with the circus.

Mr. Chumgum had made up his mind. The lion-tamer was not to appear again.

Talbot could not doubt the justice and wisdom of that decision, but he was very sorry for the captain, who found his means of livelihood gone. His contract with the boss had long ago run out, and Mr. Chumgum had wisely refused to renew it.

The captain was the owner of the lions, and of the van he travelled in. Every morning the boss

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invited him to take himself off, but the captain dispiritedly travelled along with the circus, perhaps hoping that Charley Chumgum would relent.

"It was all my own fault," he told Talbot a dozen times. "It serves me right. I'm a victim, but it serves me right."

"It does," agreed Talbot, at last.

"Oh!" said the captain, somewhat taken aback by this assent. "Course it wouldn't 'appen again, you know."

Talbot shook his head.

"I'm one of them fellows as is nobody's enemy but their own," said the captain pathetically. "I never 'ad anybody to give me good advice when I was your age, young 'un. Don't you never touch a drop."

"I won't," said Talbot, smiling. "But why don't you become a teetotaler really? A man in your line of business is simply dotty to drink at all."

"Don't I know it?" groaned the captain. "But I'm an un'appy victim. I 'ad to take it to get up my nerve for the performance."

"But you're not performing now."

"Well, I—I—h'm!" said the captain, taken aback by that argument. "But the boss will come round, you know, and then I shall be a victim again."

"Now, look here," said Talbot, "you've given me a lot of advice, captain."

"I 'ave," said Captain Coke, "and I 'ope you'll benefit by it, my boy."

"I hope so," assented Talbot; "but one good turn deserves another, and now I'm going to give you some advice."

"Go a'ead," said the captain. "Somebody's always givin' me advice, and why shouldn't you 'ave your turn?"

"You know what might have happened the other night," said Talbot. "You might have had human lives to answer for."

"Don't I know it? If you 'adn't been there, and brave as a lion yourself, young 'un—"

"Never mind that! There might have been serious injuries and any amount of loss to Mr. Chumgum, who's been a good boss to you."

"I knows it!"

"Well, then, for your own sake, and for his, it's up to you to chuck up this rot," said Talbot.

"I've told him I'm willing to sign the pledge again," said the captain disconsolately. "I'd sign it twice over if he asked me, that I would!"

"Never mind the pledge. Make up your mind and stick to it, and let me help you."

"Ow can you 'elp me?"

"I'll remind you of your resolve whenever you begin playing the giddy goat," said Talbot. "So long as I'm with you I'll see that there's never any of that muck in the van."

"Will you, really?" murmured the captain, not very heartily.

"I will, really! You're not performing now, so you've got a first-class chance of getting out of the habit."

"So I 'ave."

"And if the boss saw you going steady for a few weeks, he'd come round very likely. He doesn't want to part with you."

"You—your think so?"

"I'm sure of it!"

"Blessed if I don't try!" exclaimed the captain, with a burst of energy. "If you ever see any liquor in this van, you pour it away."

"I will!"

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"Good! Now I feel easier in my mind," said the captain. "Why, I feel a new man already! This means a new life to me! I'll jest take one drink to the new life, and it's the last drop as'll pass my lips."

He opened the locker, and Talbot reached out the bottle, and pitched it out of the window. Captain Coke uttered a wild yell.

"What are you doing?"

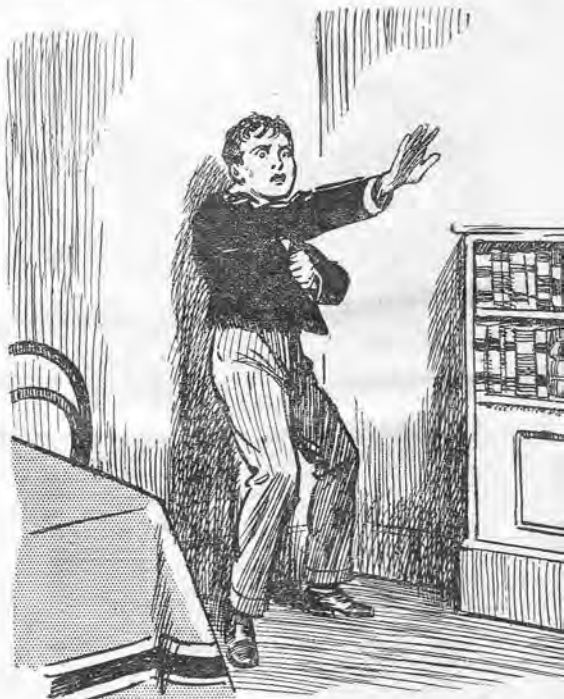
"Keeping my promise."

"Oh, by gum! I—I didn't exactly mean— Oh corks!"

"Are you thirsty?" asked Talbot.

"Dry as a lime-kiln!" groaned the captain.

"I'll get you some water."



"The boy must be taken to the sanatorium," said Mr. R. Gore, as the Housemaster made a movement to

"Oh! D-d-don't trouble! I ain't so very thirsty now I come to think of it."

Talbot left him looking dispirited. To the wretched man's constitution soaked with liquor, the poison had become a necessity. But there was no doubt that he was better without it. Indeed, after a few days, during which he kept his resolve, the captain's improved state of health surprised himself.

On the strength of a week's sobriety, he urged the boss to give him another chance.

Mr. Chumgum was adamant.

"When you've been steady sober for a month, we'll see," he replied. "If you don't, like that, travel off, and good riddance to you! You can drink yourself to death outside my circus!"

But the unfortunate captain did not care to

travel off. His brain was clearer after a few days without his favourite poison, and every day he repeated to Talbot his stern resolve to keep steady. He found a great deal of help in Talbot.

When he wandered away in the direction of a Black Bull or a Red Cow, the junior called him to order and argued with him. He really had a regard for the weak, good-natured captain, and would have been very glad to see him reinstated in Mr. Chungum's good books.

The companionship of the healthy schoolboy, too, had a good effect upon the captain. He began to feel ashamed of the smell of liquor that clung round him, and of the frowsy slovenliness that was the result of his drinking habits. The



on. "He is quite delirious." "Keep him away!" shrieked  
ds him. "I'm not a thief! I'm not—I'm not——"

change that came over the captain was remarked with wonder by Mr. Chungum.

"You're making a new man of that silly ass, kid," he said. "Keep him up to the mark, and I'll let him have his job again next week."

"Can I tell him so?" asked Talbot cheerily.

"Yes; he'll have his chance as soon as he feels that he doesn't need whisky to steady his nerves for the performance," grinned Mr. Chungum.

"Good!"

Talbot imparted that information to the captain.

"I'm sticking to it," said Captain Coke determinedly; "I mean business. You keep an eye on me, young 'un, I 'ave weak moments, that's all."

And a few days later Talbot had the satisfaction of seeing his new friend resume his turn in the circus—without fortifying himself with potent liquors.

Meanwhile, Talbot had settled down to his new life, and his care of his friend the captain helped to keep him from thinking of the past, or brooding over it. Already his life at St. Jim's seemed to have faded away behind him, like his former life as the "Toff"—though often the thought of his old friends came sadly enough into his mind. But it was useless to brood, and he tried to drive regrets from his mind, and, at all events, he succeeded in keeping cheerful.

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Secret!

**T**OM MERRY & CO., too, were growing used to it.

For the first few days the departure of their chum left a blank in their lives, but they grew accustomed to it.

Not that they were likely to forget Talbot.

Tom Merry always hoped that the trouble, whatever it was, would be cleared away, and that his chum would take his old place in the school. He never lost that hope. But, like Talbot, he felt that it was useless to brood, and he went about his usual occupation as cheerfully as he could.

Miss Marie had told him of a letter she had received. The Toff had informed her that he had found friends and work—that was all. He did not tell her where he was, or why he had left the school. It was evidently because he dreaded to be asked for an explanation he could not give.

But Marie was comforted to know that he was well, and not in want. She, too, hoped that the clouds would roll by, and that the Toff would return.

Meanwhile, George Gore was a patient in the sanatorium, under the care of Miss Pinch and Marie.

The unhappy boy's delirium had passed off, but he was in a very weak and low state, and remained under the care of the nurses till he should be restored to strength. He was in his right senses, but he lay silent and gloomy, and Marie could guess easily enough that there was a trouble on his mind. But she did not question him. He was in no state to be questioned.

His father had come down to see him—a grim-faced old gentleman, who had stayed a quarter of an hour, and who left the patient in very low spirits.

Gore's illness was a general puzzle, and the Head and the Housemaster were both waiting for him to become stronger, in order to question him about his mysterious references to Tickay Tapp and other matters.

Probably the wretched junior knew that inquiries would follow his recovery, and that had a retarding effect.

At all events, he did not improve.

A week had passed since his admission to the sanatorium, and he was worse instead of better, though no longer delirious.

Tom Merry & Co. frequently came to the sanatorium to ask after Gore. Tom Merry had not lost his conviction that Gore, if he liked, could unveil the mystery of Talbot's disappearance.

But Gore expressed no desire to see any of his Form-fellows.

Marie read to him sometimes, but he hardly listened. Dr. Short was puzzled by the case. He came to the conclusion that the junior had something on his mind.

But Gore said no word.

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Only to Marie he gave a hint of the trouble that was in his miserable thoughts.

"Any news of Talbot?" he asked suddenly, while the nurse was reading to him.

Marie laid down her book surprised by the question.

"He is well," she said.

"He's not coming back?" asked Gore.

"I don't know; I hope he will some day."

"You're awfully good to me, Miss Marie," said the Shell fellow miserably. "You like Talbot, don't you?"

"He was my best friend," said Marie quietly.

"He was a splendid fellow," said Gore. "He would help a chap when he was down. He's been through things himself, and he understood a fellow getting into a fix. You know, some of the fellows were down on him because of what he'd been—when he was called the Toff. I never was! I'm glad of it now. I never thought he'd be such a brick, though. I don't know why he should."

"You miss Talbot?" asked Marie, a little puzzled.

"He wasn't exactly a pal of mine, either," said Gore. "That makes it all the more surprising."

"What is surprising?"

Gore did not answer that question.

"What would you think of a chap who played him a dirty trick, Miss Marie?" he asked.

"You have not done anything of that sort, I am sure."

"But suppose I did?"

"Then I am sure you are sorry for it."

Gore was silent.

His words had puzzled Marie. The thought came into her mind, as into Tom Merry's, that Gore must know something of the reason of Talbot's mysterious departure. It was on the following night that she learned more.

Gore had been uneasy and feverish all day, and at night Miss Marie had decided to stay up with him. The hour was growing late, and she sat quiet, her kind eyes on the patient.

Gore was tossing restlessly, and mumbling and muttering. The delirium was coming on again, but he showed no signs of violence; he was too weak for that. His head moved feebly and restlessly on his pillow, and his eyes, full and heavy, had no consciousness in them. As the night grew on, his mutterings became louder and more incessant; from feverish, disconnected words, he began to speak more coherently.

Marie watched him patiently, unheeding the strange words that poured from his lips. It was not the first time she had heard the rambling talk of a feverish patient. But she started suddenly at the sound of a sentence from Gore's dry lips.

"I can't let you do it, Talbot! I can't! I'm a coward to let you do it! Suppose—suppose you were caught there!"

Marie started violently.

The muttering voice went on:

"What a good chap you are, Talbot—the only chap that'll help me in this awful scrape! I'm in awful trouble, old man—awful! It means the sack for me, and I daren't go home. You don't know my father! He'd turn me out. I didn't mean to be a thief; you know that, don't you? You see, Linton sent me there—that's how it was. I was to go to the Head to be caned, and was it my fault he had left the safe open? Putting temptation in a chap's way!"

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"He didn't know I was so hard up. Where was I to get fifteen pounds from? Tickey Tapp wouldn't let me off. He was going to the Head. That meant the sack. You'll help me, Talbot; lend a fellow a hand when he's down! No, it's too risky—too risky! Suppose the Head should see you there?"

Gore's voice died away in low mutterings. Marie sat motionless, her brain in a whirl. What had Gore done? What had Talbot done? Had the Toff—always generous to a fault—got himself into some inextricable scrape for the sake of his studymate?

Gore's voice came clear and loud again.

"I know you can do it! Mind, it's your own suggestion, but think of the risk. Twelve one-pound notes and twelve for ten bob! Count 'em! My head's no good; I can't count! The Head hasn't missed them yet, I know that. There'd have been a row—an awful row! Then they'd have spotted me. They've all noticed there's something wrong with me. They'd guess at once. I know you can open the safe, but think of the risk!"

"Put 'em back where I found 'em; I never meant to take them. I was quite off my dot. I swear I meant to put them back myself, only the Head wouldn't leave the safe open a second time. I dodged into his study twice to see if it was open, but it wasn't. Fifteen pounds! Tickey Tapp! Put it all back for me, and I shall be square. I'm not a thief! Hush, hush! Suppose some of the fellows wake up; they'll ask you where you're going! Hush!"

Marie listened to the words tensely. She began to understand now.

"I shan't sleep while you're gone, Talbot. Come back as quick as you can. Think of the risk! Suppose the Head should catch you at the safe? You won't tell him about me! I'll own up if you're bowled out—I'll own up! I won't let you get sacked for me, Talbot! I'll swear I won't! No, I daren't! Mum's the word! I don't know anything about it, anything at all! Not a word! How can I own up and be sent home? Where's Talbot?"

The wretched boy babbled on without a pause.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Light at Last!

D R. HOLMES was seated in his study, with a frown upon his brow.

His beloved Æschylus was before him, but the Greek letters danced before his eyes.

He was thinking.

Somehow or other the thought of Talbot would come back into his mind. Where was the boy now? Not a word had come from him to the Head since he had left, but the Head had seen the letter to Marie. That was all the news he had.

The more the Head thought over the matter the more perplexed he was. He had found Talbot at the safe, the door open, as only the skilful fingers of the Toff could have opened it, the stolen notes in his hand.

He could not doubt the evidence of his eyes.

Talbot had not even attempted an explanation. He had had nothing to say. He was a thief; after so long a struggle, he had fallen back into the old ways of the Toff.

Yet the Head knew that the Toff had fought hard to keep from falling back into his old life; he knew that the boy had suffered rather than

yield to the persuasions and menaces of his old comrades.

He had been free from all that; and then he had fallen, unpersuaded, unmenaced. He had deliberately thrown up everything.

Why?

At times the Head was tempted to ask himself whether there had been some fearful mistake. Yet how could he doubt what he had seen? There was no room for doubt; yet he still felt kindly towards the unhappy junior. Talbot had done his best to resist evil, even if he had fallen at last; he was sure of that.

The hour was late. Dr. Holmes started from his reverie as a tap came upon his study window.

He started to his feet.

Tap!

In great astonishment the Head advanced to the window and opened it. In the starlight he recognised Marie Rivers' pale face.

"My dear child," exclaimed the Head, "what—"

"I saw the light from your window, sir, and I could not get into the house; it was closed,"

said Marie hurriedly. "Will you come to the sanatorium?"

"Gore—he is worse?"

"He is delirious, and talking. But—but first, before you see him, you will make me a promise, sir?"

"I—I don't understand."

Marie breathed hard.

"It is important that you should know what Gore is saying. But he is my patient, and I am his nurse, and I could not betray his secret to harm him. You understand that? Whatever should happen to Talbot, I could not betray the patient under my care."

"To Talbot?" said the Head. "What has Gore to do with Talbot?"

"You will see; but before you come you will promise me that Gore shall not suffer. He has suffered enough: you will see that when you listen to him. He has done wrong, but he has suffered for it. And unless his mind is relieved, he will be worse perhaps the worst will happen. You will promise me that he will not be sent away from the school?"

(Continued on next page.)

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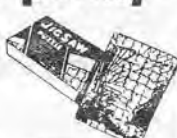
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"Why—why should you think that I would send him away?"

"Promise me—"

"But—"

"Or you cannot see him!" said Marie resolutely. "I am his nurse and he is in my charge, and I cannot let harm come to him because of what he has said. It would be treachery."

"I understand you, my dear child," said the Head kindly. "Neither should I feel justified in making use of a discovery made through the poor boy's delirium. You may rest assured that Gore shall not suffer."

Marie gave a little cry of relief.

"Then come, sir! I have left him to call you. You will understand soon what Talbot did. One word: Did you find Talbot here at your safe that night—the night he went?"

"How can you know?"

"Come to Gore and you will understand—as soon as you can."

"I will come at once."

Marie flitted away in the starlight.

The Head turned from the window in great astonishment. What was he to learn now? What did Gore know of Talbot's strange action on that mysterious night? It was impossible that Gore could tell anything to clear Talbot, for it was not a case of suspicion or accusation.

As the Head had told Tom Merry, there was no accusation against his chum; there was no suspicion. The Head had found him at the open door of the safe in the small hours of the morning. It was a thing that could not be explained away.

But the Head lost no time in hurrying to the sanatorium. He was puzzled and keenly interested. He knew that Marie must have had a powerful reason for thus calling him at nearly midnight.

Marie was standing at the patient's bedside as he entered the little ward. The subdued light showed Gore's pale, feverish face. His eyes were wide open, but he had no recognition in them; he was staring blankly at the ceiling, unseeing. He made no sign as the Head approached the bedside. It was evident that he did not recognise him—did not know that he was there.

He was speaking—in tones now low, now raised, speaking almost incessantly, the words tumbling over one another from his lips. Sometimes the wretched boy seemed to fancy that he was talking to Talbot, sometimes to the Head, sometimes to Tickey Tapp the rascal who was the cause of all his misery.

Marie did not speak.

She made the Head a sign to listen, and Dr. Holmes stood silent by the bedside while the boy babbled on.

A strange change came over his face. He started in utter amazement at what he heard, and drew a deep breath.

For the torturing thoughts in the sick boy's mind came from his tongue again and again, telling the wretched story.

In half an hour, as he stood by the bedside without word or motion, the Head learned it all—much that he had half-suspected concerning Gore's dealings with Tickey Tapp, much more than he had ever dreamed of concerning Talbot and the help he had so generously and recklessly given the unhappy victim of the sharper.

How the wretched boy had fallen into the clutches of the cardsharp; how he had, in desperation at his losses, signed IOU's which Tickey Tapp had held against him; how the sharper had counselled him to help himself from richer fellows

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in the school, threatening to take his signed papers to the Head if his claims were not met. That he was not a thief, that he would not be a thief, came over and over again from the babbling lips.

The Head, as he listened, could feel nothing but compassion. Gore had done wrong, but he had suffered for it. What he had suffered was more severe than the punishment he had dreaded in case of discovery.

How Mr. Linton had sent him to the Head to be caned; how he had found the study empty, the safe door unlocked; how, in a moment of madness, he had taken the money he needed to save him from the cardsharp's threats—it all came babbling from the delirious boy's lips.

The Head remembered the day that he had the talk with Mr. Railton which had kept him away from his study, forgetful of the safe he had just unlocked. He had found the study empty on his return, and locked up the safe, never dreaming that it had been visited, never missing the money that had been taken.

Twelve one-pound notes and twelve for ten shillings! Again and again the delirious boy asked Talbot to count them, to make sure they were right, living over again the scene when Talbot had come to his help, to get him out of that dreadful scrape. Again and again he repeated that it was too risky—that he had haunted the Head's study in the hope of finding the safe unlocked again, so that he could restore what he had taken, but had never found it so.

In the wild, wandering, broken sentences it all came out—how Talbot had offered to save him, using his old skill as a cracksmen to open the safe and replace the stolen notes; how he had regained those papers from Tickey Tapp which the sharper was holding over Gore's head, and had driven the rascal away with threats.

The Head passed his hand over his eyes. That was the explanation—that was why he had found Talbot at the open safe in the night. He had gone there to replace what Gore had taken, to save his studymate from disgrace and ruin, to save him from being a thief against his will.

And, caught in the act, the generous lad had allowed himself to be believed guilty rather than betray the weak, wretched culprit who trusted in him and whom he had promised to save.

The Head understood it all now. He realised how he had wronged Talbot. He could not blame himself, since the boy had uttered no explanation, but he felt deeply sorry for the lad whom he had sent away.

If Gore had told the truth—the wretched lad's delirious mutterings told how his conscience reproached him for having allowed Talbot to suffer, how he had striven with himself to do what was right, but always his courage had failed him.

The Head drew away from the bedside at last. Gore was still muttering without ceasing, living over again the terrible days he had passed through.

But the Head no longer listened. He had heard enough. He turned to Marie.

"I am glad that you called me here," said the Head gently. "It was right that I should know this. As for Gore, he has been punished severely enough. I could not punish him further. He did not mean to steal, the wretched lad; his efforts to replace what he had taken are sufficient proof of that. And Talbot—poor Talbot!—it was in trying to save that unhappy boy that he brought disaster upon himself, and he would not speak."

"He could not betray Gore," said Marie. "It



"It was through me that Talbot went," muttered Gore, the Head and Marie listening carefully to his words. "I—I ought to have owned up before, but I was afraid. I shall be sacked. I don't care. But I won't let Talbot go through it when it's all my fault."

was like him. He was always generous—always noble."

"He has been wronged," said the Head. "But it is not too late; the wrong shall be righted. Even when I believed him guilty, I made excuses for him. I believed that it was his early training that had influenced him, in spite of himself, and I had pity for him. Nothing has been said. Nothing will be said. Talbot shall be found, and he shall return."

Marie's face lighted up.

"When Gore is in his senses again, you will tell him that all is known, that I know the truth, and have pardoned him; that he has nothing to fear," said the Head. "I see now what has brought this to pass, why his illness has been so obstinately prolonged, apparently without cause. When his mind is set at rest, he will be better."

"I am sure of it," said Marie.

"You are fatigued," said the Head, with a glance of affectionate compassion at the girl.

"That is nothing. At three o'clock Miss Pinch takes my place."

"I will remain till then."

The Head sat by the bedside, within sound of the feverish mutterings that hardly ceased for a moment. But silence came at last.

Gore fell into a heavy slumber. Save for the rustle of the wind in the trees without, there was no sound, but suddenly there was a start from the sick lad, and his voice was heard again.

"Miss Marie!"

He was not delirious now. His voice was faint and low, but calm.

Marie bent towards him.

"Yes!"

Gore stared at her.

"I've been dreaming," he said.

"You have been asleep," said Marie.

"Is it late?"

"Yes; it is not long to morning now."

"I want to see the Head in the morning," said Gore. "Will you ask him to come here? He can't come now, I suppose? But in the morning I must see him. I can't keep it up any longer. I want to tell him about Talbot."

The Head drew a deep breath. Gore could not see him where he sat near the foot of the bed, and little dreamed that he was there.

"It was through me that Talbot went," muttered Gore. "I—I ought to have owned up before, but I was afraid. I shall be sacked. I don't care. I won't go home. I can't face my father. But I won't let Talbot go through it like this, when it's all my fault. I said all along I'd own up if it came to the pinch, but I haven't the nerve. I'll tell you now—"

"I know," said Marie softly.

"I've been talking, have I?"

"Yes."

"What a rotten cad you must think me," groaned Gore. "But I'm going to tell the Head. I can't keep it up. He'll sack me, of course, but I won't go home. I'll run away to sea."

"Don't be afraid," said Marie gently. "The Head will pardon you."

"Oh, no, he won't! You don't know what I did," muttered Gore. "You see, that villain Tickey Tapp was going to show me up, and then

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the safe was open, and I—I didn't mean to steal, really. I was almost off my chump just then, and I took the notes, and Talbot said he would put them back for me."

"I know—I know, and the Head knows, and he has pardoned you."

"But he wouldn't—he couldn't."

"He has said so," said Marie. "You have nothing to fear. When you are well, you will go back to your Form again, and nothing will be said. It will all be forgotten."

"But—but," panted Gore, "I—I can't believe it. You see—"

Dr. Holmes rose.

"I know all, Gore," he said, "and you are forgiven. Nothing more will be said of all this. You have been punished, and the matter is at an end."

Gore looked dazedly at the Head.

"You—you know, sir?"

"Everything. Calm yourself, and go to sleep now."

"I'm not to be sacked?"

"No."

"But Talbot—"

"He will return."

"I—I meant to own up," said Gore. "I was afraid. I thought you'd be awfully down on me."



"Hold on a minute, Bill, while I fetch my rifle!"

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I didn't mean to let Talbot go through with it for me. He was a splendid chap. He knew I didn't mean to steal; but if I'd had to keep the notes, I should have been a thief whether I wanted to or not, and he tried to get me out of it. There's not many fellows would do what he did."

"He is a generous lad," said the Head. "He has been wronged, but he will return."

Gore lay silent. He fell asleep a little later, and was sleeping calmly when Miss Pinch came in to relieve Marie. His mind was at rest at last.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Tact and Judgment!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY came into the School House with a beaming smile upon his face.

It was several days since Gore's confession, and during these days search and inquiry had been made for Talbot—without result.

The missing junior had vanished completely.

Tom Merry & Co. knew nothing of Gore's confession. Not a word on that subject had been said by the Head or Marie.

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But they knew that Talbot was to return.

The morning after his visit to Gore's bedside the Head had called Tom Merry into his study. He had told the captain of the Shell that the misunderstanding concerning Talbot had been cleared up, and that the junior would return to his old place in the school as soon as he could be found.

It was good news to Tom Merry and his friends. Tom did not ask for an explanation; it was evident that the Head would give him none. He was content to wait until he could see Talbot. His heart was light now. Sooner or later his chum would be traced, and would come back.

But the days followed one another, and there was no news of Talbot.

The Head had set inquiry agents to work, but they had not been able to trace the missing junior. Talbot seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Tom Merry was in the Common-room with Manners and Lowther. They were talking about Talbot when Blake & Co. bore down upon them.

"I want you, deah boys," announced Arthur Augustus. "I've got a wippin' ideah!"

"Go and bury it!"

"We are havin' a cah out to go to Chungum's Circus at Shoremouth."

"Well, cut off!" said Tom Merry.

"We want you thwee to come. There is an aftahnoon performance, and it is weally wippin', you know."

"Thanks, I won't come," said Tom. "Don't feel quite like circuses just now. You fellows go," he added to his chums.

"Wats! It's because you don't feel like it that you ought to come. What's the good of mopin'?"

"I'm not—mopin'."

"Then come to the circus."

"I'd rather not, really."

"Miss Mawie will be disappointed if you don't come," said Arthur Augustus reproachfully. "I weally think you might considah Miss Mawie!"

"Oh! Is she coming?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you fellows can look after her, I suppose?"

"Yaas; but, as you are old Talbot's best pal, she would like you to come. She has wathah a special wegard for Talbot, I think. Pewwaps you fellows have noticed it."

"Perhaps we have," grinned Blake.

"There is nothin' to gwin at, Blake. Now, Tom Mewwy, I twust you are not goin' to neglect Talbot's lady fwiend?"

"I'll come," said Tom Merry, not very cheerfully.

"That's wight. Get on your best bib and tuckah, as you are comin' out with a lady," said Arthur Augustus. And he led Study No. 6 triumphantly away.

"What do you mean by telling Tom Merry that Miss Marie is coming, when you haven't even asked her yet?" demanded Blake.

Arthur Augustus smiled the smile of superior wisdom.

"That's tact and judgment, deah boys. Miss Mawie is comin', you'll see. I believe she is in the Head's garden. Let's go and look."

Marie was in the Head's garden. She greeted the chums of the Fourth with a somewhat pale face. As the days lengthened, and no news came of the Toff, Marie's heart was growing heavier.

Arthur Augustus proceeded to explain the scheme for the afternoon, adding that the "cah" was at the gates. But Miss Marie shook her head.

"You are very kind," she said, "but I will not come, thank you."

"Wats!—excuse me, I mean wubbish! Of course, I quite compwehend that you don't feel very chirpy. But for Tom Mewwy's sake—" urged Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy is comin'. You see, he was old Talbot's best chum, and he would like you to be in the party. You weally cannot neglect Talbot's best chum, you know."

"But—"

"Tom Mewwy is lookin' awfully down in the mouth lately, you know. I am suah that you would have the effect of cheewin' him up."

Marie hesitated.

"In fact, he won't come unless you do," said Arthur Augustus; "and it would do him lots of good, you know. He's mopin'. As a nurse, you know, it's weally your duty to buck a fellow up when he's mopin'—what?"

Miss Marie smiled.

"I will come," she said.

"That's wight. We're all weady when you are."

Miss Marie went into the house, and Arthur Augustus led his flock away in great triumph. Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at their chum in great admiration. Arthur Augustus' little scheme had been an eminent success.

"I don't want to bwag, deah boys," said D'Arcy modestly, "but I weally think that in a mattah wecquiw' tact and judgment you can wely on me. You see, Tom Mewwy's comin' because he thinks Miss Mawie would like him to come, and Miss Mawie is comin' because she thinks Tom Mewwy would like her to come; and they will both be cheered up no end, all through the exahcise of a little tact and judgment."

"Gussy, old man, you ought to be in the Cabinet," said Blake, with affectionate admiration. "Tact like that oughtn't to be wasted in the Fourth Form here. I know you'll be a Cabinet Minister when you grow up. You've got all the qualifications—"

"Yaas, I weally think—"

"All of 'em," said Blake seriously. "Plenty of money—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Nice manners—"

"Weally—"

"And no brains to speak of."

"You uttah ass!"

"All you reed is to learn to prevaricate, old chap, and there's no reason why you shouldn't wind up as Prime Minister."

"I wufuse to weply to your widiculous wemarks, Blake! Pway come in and get weady for the wun, and twy to make yourself wathah tidy."

A quarter of an hour later, quite a numerous party boarded the big car, and started out on that ripping run. A rapid spin through leafy lanes in the bright sunshine, and then the sight of the blue sea, had an inspiring effect upon the whole party, thus more than justifying Arthur Augustus' prediction.

Miss Marie was smiling brightly by the time the big car ran into Shoremouth.

And it was quite a merry party that swarmed into Chumgun's Circus for the afternoon performance, and occupied the best seats that money could buy.

Arthur Augustus was doing it in style.

(Continued on next page.)



## THE EDITOR'S CHAIR.

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

**H**ALLO CHUMS! Now that the new GEM has been running for thirteen weeks, you have had a good chance to sum up its contents—to form an opinion of the various features. This being so, I should like to hear what you all have to say about the stories, the stamp articles, the fun column and "How's Your Luck This Week?"

Of course, I have had hundreds of letters already praising the new GEM, but I want to have the opinion of every reader. Just drop me a line on a postcard, stating frankly what you like and don't like, and post it to the above address. Thanks!

Oh, and by the way, send along a joke at the same time, too. You all know the type the GEM publishes. It's well-worth while having a shot at winning half-a-crown.

### "MONEY-BAGS MINOR!"

This is the unusual title of the grand St. Jim's yarn which appears in next Wednesday's number. The story deals with the arrival of Aubrey Racke, son of a millionaire who has made his money quickly. Racke minor is a nasty "bit of work"—arrogant, offensive, and full of his own importance.

The newcomer tries to cultivate the friendship of D'Arcy, merely because Arthur Augustus is the son of an earl. In this he is partly successful—until Tom Merry & Co., seeing through Master Racke's little game, work out a wheeze for showing up the millionaire's son in his true colours.

Martin Clifford is at his best in this great yarn, and readers will enjoy it immensely.

Frank Richards is in tip-top form also with part two of his lively yarn.

### "THE CHINESE CAPTAIN!"

The tricks Wun Luag gets up to in the Remove cause almost a riot, and in the end the Chinese is only too glad to resign from the vice-captaincy of the Form.

There is, of course, a full supporting programme, including illustrated jokes, your fortune from the stars, "Laugh These Off," and another interesting stamp article—altogether another bumper number. See that your GEM is reserved for you.

Before I close down, I should like to remind readers that three more grand numbers of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" are just out. No. 328 is a powerful yarn of the chums of Greyfriars, and is called, "Detective Bunter!" No. 329 contains a thrilling story of the Packsaddle bunch—the Wild West schoolboys who are well-known to GEM readers. It bears the title: "The Rebellion at Packsaddle!" And lastly, No. 330 is a gripping tale of the chums of St. Frank's and Nelson Lee, the schoolmaster-detective. This is entitled: "The Housemaster's Revenge!" Don't forget these grand books, chums, price 4d. each.

See you next week.

THE EDITOR.

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## CHAPTER 13.

## The Toff's Return!

"WATHAH good, what?"

The performance was good all through; but it was the Red Indian turn that called forth Arthur Augustus' special admiration. Arthur Augustus was a great judge of the noble art of horsemanship, and Texas Bill's troupe received his noble approval. The buck-jumping act was a great success, and the sham fight between Red Indians and cowboys was followed with loud applause.

"Wippin', deah gal—what?" said Arthur Augustus.

Miss Marie did not reply.

She was gazing intently at the Redskins who were clearing off the arena, the turn being at an end. Tiny Tony was turning somersaults and playing acrobatic tricks to fill up the interval before Captain Coke appeared with the lions. The expression upon Miss Marie's face astonished her companions.

"Do you see that boy made up as an Indian?" the girl asked breathlessly.

"Yaas; I noticed one who wode wathah well," said Arthur Augustus. "Chap who's just widin' out. Wathah athletic-lookin' chap."

"Yes, yes; that's the one. Look at him again. Doesn't he seem familiar?"

"Weally, I do not remember havin' seen him before," said Arthur Augustus. "He was not in the troupe when it performed at Wayland."

"Wasn't he like Talbot?"

"Talbot!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Yes, yes. His face was so painted it couldn't be recognised; but there was something about him—he seemed like—like Talbot," said Marie, with a catch in her breath. "Of course, it is impossible."

"I'm afraid it is, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, with a slight smile. "We are not likely to find old Talbot here playin' twicks as a Wed Indian."

"By Jove, I thought there was something familiar about him!" exclaimed Tom Merry, his

eyes gleaming. "He's just Talbot's height, too, and the same build. Of course, it can't be."

"We'll see him aftah the performance. Of course, we shall have to go wound and speak to our old fiwends," said Arthur Augustus.

"If it was Talbot he'd have come and spoken to us," said Blake. "I saw that chap looking towards us."

"He would not," said Marie. "He would be afraid we should ask why he left the school—and he cannot tell us. I am sure I saw him looking; I am sure that it is he."

"But—but how could he be in this giddy circus?" said Monty Lowther doubtfully.

"I'm sure of it, all the same."

"We'll see him afterwards, anyway," said Tom Merry. "We're bound to go and have a chat with Mr. Chungum."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors were anxious for the show to be over now. Marie's strange idea that she had recognised Talbot of the Shell under the guise of a Red Indian performer made them very curious to see him.

The lion-taming act went off with applause. Captain Coke was looking much better than when the juniors had seen him before, when the circus had been at Wayland.

The captain was keen and alert, and his turn was a great success, and the juniors cheered him heartily.

The performance ended at last. Before the end, Tiny Tony and Mr. Chungum had both spotted the party. When the ring was cleared, and the people began to go out, Texas Bill presented himself with a message from Mr. Chungum, asking his young friends to come to tea behind the scenes—an invitation which Tom Merry & Co. accepted with a great deal of pleasure.

Miss Marie was almost trembling with eagerness. The idea was fixed in her mind now that she had recognised the Toff in the circus Indian.

Charley Chungum greeted his "young friends" in his hearty, genial manner. He was evidently glad to see them. A well-spread table greeted their eyes, but they were not thinking about tea for the moment.

Tom Merry caught Marie's glance, and as soon as he could interrupt Mr. Chungum's flowing speech he asked the question he had been longing to ask.

"There was a chap in the Red Indian act, Mr. Chungum—"

Charley Chungum started a little, and looked rather peculiar. Mr. Chungum had supposed that Talbot would be glad to see his old friends. But the Toff had begged him not to mention that he was in the circus, and he kept out of sight when Tom Merry & Co. came behind the scenes.

The circus master was in a difficulty.

"You—you mean Texas Bill?" he asked.

"No; one of the troupe—a young fellow made up as an Indian," said Tom Merry. "We thought we knew him. He's new in the troupe, isn't he?"

"Well, yes."

"Would you mind telling us his name?"

"His—his name?" stammered Mr. Chungum.

"Yes," said Tom, surprised by the genial gentleman's confusion. "The fact is, we think he looks like a chap we know. Is his name Talbot?"

Mr. Chungum coughed. He was fairly caught.

(Continued on page 36.)

Grand New 35,000-word School Story of  
Harry Wharton & Co.

## CARTER TAKES THE COUNT!



Ever since he has been at Greyfriars Arthur Carter has been scheming to get Billy Bunter, his rival for riches, kicked out of the school. But it's Carter himself who gets the boot—where it hurts most! Read the spanking fine Greyfriars yarn in this week's

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**GREYFRIARS TREATS WUN LUNG'S CAPTAINCY OF THE REMOVE AS A JOKE, BUT THE WILY ORIENTAL SOON PROVES THAT HE'S ALL THERE!**



"Look out!" roared Stott, as Bulstrode shook the bookcase violently. But the warning came too late. The bookcase tottered forward and fell on Bulstrode, and there was a terrific splintering as his head went through the glass.

### Captain Wun Lung!

**H**ARRY WHARTON, in his cap and coat, with a bag in his hand, came into Study No. 1 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. Bob Cherry was there, sitting at the table, slowly and thoughtfully jabbing a pen into the cover of Nugent's new Latin grammar. The pen-nib was suffering considerably in the process, and the cover of Nugent's book was not improved. But Bob was thinking deeply, and he had no attention for trifles like that.

He did not notice Wharton come in till Harry dumped his heavy bag down on the table, and then Bob Cherry came out of his reverie with a start.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you, Harry?"

"Yes," said Wharton, with a smile. "I'm just off. I've got to catch the six-thirty at Friar-dale. You seem to be doing some deep thinking, Bob."

"I was," said Bob Cherry seriously. "I was thinking how affairs would go when you're gone, Harry. You're going to be away a week?"

"Yes."

"And Wun Lung is to be Form captain while you're away?"

Wharton nodded. He was somewhat troubled in his mind about it himself.

Harry Wharton was captain of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars. As Form captain and skipper of the football and cricket, he had important duties to perform. The Remove captaincy was no sinecure.

Harry had performed his duties well. He had been an energetic and a popular captain. Under

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# The Chinese Captain!

**By FRANK RICHARDS.**

(Author of the grand long yarns of *Reprint from Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet."*)

his head the Remove had formed a separate football team, instead of being content with two or three places in the Upper Fourth eleven.

Now Harry was called away from Greyfriars for a week. His place as head of the Form was to be taken by the vice-captain. But curiously enough, in the election held for vice-captain, Wun Lung, the Chinese, had scraped in on a small majority. There had been so many candidates that the votes had been very much split up, and twelve backers had been sufficient to bring Wun Lung to the top of the poll.

Study No. 1 had been rather in disfavour at the time, or Bob Cherry would have secured the vice-captaincy. The fellows who had voted for Wun Lung had done so partly by way of a joke, partly as one "up against" Study No. 1. When they came to think of it afterwards, they rather regretted their action. But then it was too late!

Wun Lung was vice-captain for the term, and during Wharton's absence the full authority of the Form captain would fall to him.

The Chinese was a good-tempered, popular fellow. But the mere idea of him as Form captain was absurd.

He had no idea of the gravity of the post, and he was as full of mischief as a monkey. Indeed, it was evidently in a spirit of mischief that he had put up for election at all.

But Harry Wharton did not see how it could be helped.

"You see, Bulstrode's next on the list, Bob," he remarked. "Bulstrode is a cad, and he would make a rotten captain. Wun Lung isn't much good as a skipper, but he won't do any harm that he can help."

Bob Cherry nodded.

"I suppose so—anything's better than Bulstrode. But I hear that Bulstrode's declared his intention of giving the vice-captain trouble as soon as you've gone."

"Yes, I expected that. You'll have to back up Wun Lung."

"Look here, suppose you speak to him before you go. Impress on him the importance of thinking over the matter, and of consulting this study before doing anything," suggested Bob Cherry.

"He takes notice of what you say, you know."

"I don't know that it will be much good," said Wharton. "But I'll try, certainly. Where is Wun Lung now?"

"In Russell's study, I think."

"Come along, then."

## THERE'S NOT A DULL MOMENT IN THIS GRAND YARN OF FUN AND FROLIC AT GREYFRIARS.

And Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry walked down the Remove passage towards Russell's study, which the Chinese junior shared.

Wingate of the Sixth, captain of Greyfriars, met them at the corner, and he stopped to speak to Wharton. There was a smile on Wingate's rugged face.

"I hear you're going away for a week, Wharton," he said.

"That's right," said Harry.

"And you're leaving Wun Lung in your place?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wingate walked on, laughing; and the two juniors stared after him a little uneasily.

"Wingate seems to see something comical in it," said Bob Cherry. "I found Blundell and Bland of the Fifth cackling over it this afternoon. Everybody seems to expect that it will be funny."

They entered Russell's study. A little Chinese was curled up in the easy-chair there, his almond eyes blinking at the fire.

He turned his head as the juniors entered, and fixed his dark eyes on Harry Wharton.

"I want to speak to you, Wun Lung," said Harry abruptly.

The little Chinese rose to his feet.

"You spenkee," he said; "velly good."

"I'm just going to the station—"

"Wun Lung solly."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Thank you! But I want to speak to you about your new duties. You will be captain of the Remove while I'm gone."

"Me savvy."

"I'm rather anxious about you—"

"Me allies light."

"Yes; but you may have trouble with the Form if you're not careful. Bulstrode will be up against you from the start, and so will Skinner and Stott, and some more of the other fellows. Now I want you to listen to me."

"Me listen to anything Wharton say."

"Good! I want you to consult the fellows in my study before taking important steps in any matter. In fact, you might as well dig in my study while I'm away."

The little Chinese nodded quickly.

"Me diggee in Study No. 1. Me savvy."

"And you'll consult Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh before acting in any matter of importance."

"Me consultee."

Wharton was relieved. He felt that he had done all he could, and the docility of the little Celestial was reassuring.

"Very good," he said. "I rely on that. And now, good-bye!"

Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh walked down with Harry Wharton to the station. Harry spoke a last word from the carriage window.

"You'll back up Wun Lung," he said, "and help him all you can. He'll have a hard row to hoe as captain of the Remove."

"Yes, rather," said Bob Cherry emphatically. "If he consults us, and takes our advice, and follows us like a little lamb, we'll back him up for all we're worth."

"And let me know how you get on."

"Right-ho!"

And the train steamed away, and the three

juniors stood on the platform waving after their departing chum.

### Wun Lung Doesn't Savvy!

"**W**HARTON'S gone!" It was Stott who made that announcement as he came into the Common-room. Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, looked up eagerly.

"Gone! Sure?"

"Yes; gone to catch the six-thirty." Stott glanced up at the clock. "He'll be in the train now."

"Good!" said the Remove bully.

Bulstrode's bullying had been kept very much in check by the captain of the Remove, and the smaller fags had had a quiet time since Wharton had been captain in the Lower Fourth.

All that was to change now. Bulstrode would immediately blossom forth once more into his old self.

The old swagger, which had become subdued of late, would return to his manner, and his keen expression showed how ready he was to take advantage of his chance.

Wharton was to return in a week; but in a week many things might happen. Wharton might even find that the Remove no longer wanted him as captain, if Bulstrode played his cards well.

"I'm jolly glad he's gone," said Bulstrode. "He was always an interfering cad."

"You wouldn't say that if he could hear you," said Hazeldene.

Bulstrode turned round on him at once.

Hazeldene had been his faithful follower and toady at one time, until he was taken up by Study No. 1 and considerably improved. But now that Wharton was gone, Bulstrode did not mean to take any "cheek" from his one-time follower.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"You heard what I said," said Hazeldene.

"Yes, I did, and now you hear what I say. For two pins I'd give you a licking on the spot. Wharton isn't here now. You'd better take care how you give me your lip."

"Oh, come off! Wharton will be back in a week, and if you begin your old tricks you'll jolly soon be sat upon."

Bulstrode did not reply in words.

He stepped towards Hazeldene and gave him a smack with his open hand that sounded like the crack of a whip.

Hazeldene reeled and sat down with a bump that jarred every bone in his body.

He sat there, staring stupidly at the grinning bully.

"Have some more?" asked Bulstrode politely.

"There's plenty more on tap."

"You—you beastly bully!"

"Get up, you worm!"

Hazeldene got up, and Bulstrode promptly knocked him down again. This time the junior elected to remain where he was.

"Well, do you want any more?"

"No, you rotter!"

"Then take jolly good care, or you'll get it, whether you want it or not."

And Bulstrode strode away, accompanied by the awed and admiring Stott. A couple of fags belonging to the Third Form were racing in the passage, and one of them bumped into Bulstrode.

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The Remove bully caught him a smack on the ear that sent him staggering. The fag set up a tremendous howl.

"Get out of the way, then," said Bulstrode.

"Yah! Boo! I'll tell Wharton!"

Bulstrode kicked him along the passage and he vanished. The Remove bully marched on in a sort of triumphal progress, and arrived at the door of Russell's study in the Remove passage.

He kicked the door open, and Russell, who was at work, gave a yell.

"You ass! Look there!"

He pointed wrathfully with his pen to a group of blots that were ornamenting his exercise.

Bulstrode grunted.

"Oh rats! Is that Chineese here?"

Wun Lung uncurred from the deep easy-chair.

"Me here, Bulstrode."

"I've got a bone to pick with you," said the Remove bully, with a scowl. "Wharton's gone."

"Me savvy."

"There's been some rot about your being vice-captain of the Form," said Bulstrode.

"No savvy."

"Oh, you're giving up the idea, then?"

"No savvy."

"Look here, if you know what's good for you, you'll resign the place to me, and have done with it. We've had enough of your nonsense."

"No savvy."

"Look here!" roared Bulstrode. "I—"

"Me looker."

"Will you resign in my favour?"

"No savvy."

"I say—"

"Here, chuck it!" exclaimed Russell. "How the dickens is a fellow to do his work with a wild animal in his study? If you want to under-study a loud-speaker, go out in the passage."

"Shut up! Now, Wun Lung—"

"No savvy."

"Very well, then, I'll give you a jolly good hiding—and then—hold him!"

But Wun Lung had squirmed away like lightning, and the next moment he was looking down at Bulstrode from the top of the bookcase. The bookcase was a big, old-fashioned affair, in none too good a state of repair, and it rocked rather dangerously as the little Chineese took refuge on top.

From his coign of vantage Wun Lung's quaint little face looked down, a great deal like that of a scared monkey from a tree.

"Come down!" roared Bulstrode.

"Me quitee comfy"

"If you don't come down I'll jolly soon shake you down!" exclaimed Bulstrode, seizing the bookcase.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Russell. "That bookcase is my property, and I'm not going to have it busted."

"You sit down," said Bulstrode, giving him a push on the chest that made him sit in his chair again quite suddenly. "Now, then, Wun Lung, are you coming down?"

"No savvy."

"I'll make you savvy!" roared Bulstrode.

He shook the bookcase violently.

"Look out!" roared Stott.

But the warning came too late.

The bookcase was not built to stand that sort of treatment. It tottered and fell forward, and Bulstrode gave a yell as he was overwhelmed by a shower of books. As he staggered back the bookcase crashed on him, and there was a terrific splintering of glass.

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"My hat!" gasped Stott. "You've done it now."

Bulstrode bumped on the floor, with the bookcase bumping on him. The little Chineese landed on his feet and was out of the study in a twinkling. Bulstrode lay dazed amid a heap of books and broken glass, with the bookcase across his legs.

"You'll have to pay for that!" hooted Russell.

"Ow! Oh! I'm cut all over! Ow!"

"Serve you jolly well right! You'll have to pay for that bookcase!"

"Ow! Oh!"

Bulstrode staggered up. He felt too much hurt to argue the point with Russell, and without another word he went off to attend to his injuries.

### Three Pounds a Week!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter was standing at the gates of Greyfriars as the chums of the Remove came back from seeing Harry Wharton off at the station. He was blinking anxiously down the road in the dusk, and he looked relieved when the three juniors came into the big gateway.

"I say, you fellows, I've been waiting for you."

"Go on waiting, old chap," said Bob Cherry, walking past Billy Bunter and striding towards the House. Bunter ran after him.

"But I say, Cherry, I've got something important to say. I've been looking for you everywhere. It was very annoying to find that you had gone down to the station with Wharton when I wanted you."

"It must have been," agreed Bob Cherry. "You should keep us hung on a row of hooks in the Remove passage, so that you could take us down just when you wanted us."

"Oh really, Cherry! I wish you wouldn't walk so fast. How can I keep pace with you, when my legs aren't half as long as yours?"

"Don't trouble to keep pace."

"But I want to speak to you. It's a rather important matter, involving a considerable sum of money," said Billy Bunter anxiously. "I suppose you wouldn't like me to lose three pounds a week through a little carelessness."

"Three whats through which?" demanded Bob Cherry, stopping in surprise.

"The worthy Bunterful ass is talking out of his esteemed hat," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of the head.

"Nothing of the sort," said Bunter. "If you'd give me a minute to explain—I've seen an advertisement—"

"Nothing surprising in that. I've seen lots."

"I wish you wouldn't try to be funny on a serious matter, Cherry. I'm losing three pounds a week all the time this matter is unattended to. Are you going up to the study, Cherry?"

"Yes; I've got my prep to do."

"Oh, very well!" Billy Bunter followed the chums up to Study No. 1, trying to explain all the time. "You see, this advertisement explains how a chap can earn three pounds a week in the evenings—"

"You ass!"

"I don't see what you want to call me names for, Cherry. Here we are in the study, and now I can explain comfortably. You see—What are you looking round for, Nugent?"

"My books, of course, ass, as I'm going to do my prep."

"But you can't do your prep while I'm explaining."

"Better chuck the explaining, then."

"Oh, really, Nugent! Look here, I've got the advertisement to show you—I cut it out of the paper. You can earn three pounds a week by doing home work."

"Rats!"

"It's a genuine thing——"

"How do you know?"

"It says so in the advertisement. Listen to this: 'Anyone can earn three pounds a week and upwards by home work, done in the evenings, with little trouble. This is genuine.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's clear enough that it's genuine, Nugent. Swindlers ask you to send money. This chap says plainly, 'Send no money.'"

"He won't keep that up long. That's only to induce mugs to write."

"Oh, really, Nugent! Look here, I've got a brilliant idea. Why shouldn't we do home work, and get three pounds a week each?" said Billy Bunter. "That would be twelve pounds a week for this study, without Wharton, and when he joins in, it would be fifteen pounds a week. That's a great deal of money."

"It's more money than you'll ever finger, Bunt."

"I don't see it. Listen to this: 'The work is of a simple and artistic nature, and can be done by anybody of ordinary ability, in the evenings.' Now, you fellows know I'm artistic."

"Oh, yes! But if you want some artistic work for the evenings, we haven't painted the floor round the new study-carpet yet. You can take that on."

"Oh, that's rather beneath my ability! Cherry can do that. Listen to this ripping advertisement: 'Send stamped envelope—no money—to the Patriotic Home Work Association, and particulars will be sent. Names and addresses of people now earning three pounds a week by our home work will be supplied, if desired. Now, it sounds absolutely genuine on the face of it.'"

"Rats!"

"I think you chaps might back me up a little when I'm getting up a scheme for making the whole study rich," said Bunter, in an aggrieved tone. "Some fellows would have kept this all to themselves, and kept the others out of it."

"But you're too generous for that, Bunt."

"Yes, I am, Cherry; and besides, I want you to lend me a stamp. I think we ought to seize on this opportunity of making money by easy home work."

"Now, look here, you ass!" said Bob Cherry.

"If a person of ordinary ability can make three pounds a week by easy home work, don't you think millions of people would take it up?"

"Of course, they don't know about it."

"They'd jolly soon know about it if there was anything in it, you ass!"

"I don't see it. Everybody doesn't read these advertisements. Why, I've seen hundreds of them myself and never read them. Lots of people have seen this advertisement and never thought there was anything in it. With my unusual brain-power I've seized upon it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if you chaps are only going to cackle, I'm done," said Bunter, blinking at the chums through his big spectacles, with a very injured expression. "I'm jolly well going to try it myself, and when I'm getting three pounds a week for an artistic occupation that can be done by any person of ordinary ability, you'll sing to another tune, I think."

"Yes—when!" said Bob Cherry. "We'll wait till then."

"Well, lend me a couple of stamps, then."

Bob Cherry fished a crumpled stamp out of his pocket, and, after some searching, another was discovered in Nugent's pocket-wallet.

"Thank you," said Bunter, with dignity. "Of course, I'm not taking these stamps for nothing. I shall put them down to the account."

"Yes, you mustn't overlook that," assented Bob Cherry gravely. "You can settle up for the lot when your next postal order comes."

"It will probably be here to-morrow morning. But that's all right; I expect to be in funds shortly."

And Bunter fished out a pen and a piece of paper and started writing to the Patriotic Home Work Association.

"What about your prep?" asked Bob Cherry, as he got out his books.

"Can't stop to think of that now. I'm busy."

"Quelch will think of it to-morrow morning."

"It can't be helped. I can't let a chance like this slip by because of preparing rotten lessons."

And the letter, after two or three attempts, was accomplished and duly posted in the school-box. And Billy Bunter waited confidently for the reply.

### Chucked Out!

**B**ILLY BUNTER came in from posting the letter and found the chums of the Remove just finishing their prep. A diminutive figure was curled up in the easy-chair before the fire, but the short-sighted junior did not see it.

The easy-chair had been purchased of Mr. Lazarus, in Friardale, out of an unexpected remittance Frank Nugent had received from home, his chums owing him their "whack" towards it till funds came in.

The article of furniture had only come in that day, but Bunter had already adopted it as his private property. Bunter was fond of easy-chairs, and it never seemed to occur to him that anybody else might have a similar weakness.

He grunted as he came into the study, from the exertion of having climbed up the stairs, made straight for the easy-chair, and sat down.

"Ow!"

Wun Lung squirmed like a worm under the champion heavy-weight of the Remove. Billy Bunter looked over his shoulder at him, but it did not seem to occur to him to rise.

"Dear me! I didn't see you in the chair, Wun Lung."

"Gettee off."

"I'm sincerely sorry, you know——"

"Gettee off! Me squashee!"

Bob Cherry seized Bunter by the shoulders and spun him off.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Wun Lung sat up, looking very crushed. He was gasping for breath.

"Still alive?" said Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"Me nearly squashee!" gasped Wun Lung. "Allee light now."

"Well, if you're all right now you can get off that chair and let a chap sit down," said Billy Bunter.

"No gettee off. Me stayee."

"Look here—you're not going to collar the easy-chair. I hate a chap being selfish and always sticking to the comfy seat."

"Me Form captain."

"Eh?"

"Form captain takee chair," said Wun Lung.

"You 'bey orders."

"Obey orders! Catch me! Get off!"

"Me lemain here."

"Then I'll jolly soon shift you!"

And Bunter laid hold of the Chinese and tried to shift him.

The next moment he was sitting on the rug, without having any very clear idea how he got there. Wun Lung beamed at him.

"Me Form captain," he said. "You tleatee me with respect. Savvy?"

"You—you heathen rotter——"

The door of the study was flung violently open and Bulstrode came in. The bully of the Remove presented a curious sight. His face and hands were cut, and his clothes were dusty. His expression was about as amiable as a demon in a pantomime.

"Is that Chinese beast here?"

"Me here."

"Oh, are you! Then——" Bulstrode rushed towards the little Celestial, but Bob Cherry promptly stepped into his path.

"Hold on, Bulstrode! What's the row?"

"I'm going to lick that heathen beast."

"Not at all; your mistake."

"Get out of the way, Cherry, or I'll lick you!"

"No, you won't—you'll have the three of us to lick if you start," said Nugent. "You're not going to begin your old tricks because Wharton's gone, Bulstrode. There's a fellow left in the Remove who can lick you, and that's Linley. And anyway, there's going to be no bullying. Wun Lung is captain of the Remove."

"Bosh!"

"He was elected by the Form. We're backing him up. You're not going to touch him, or we'll jolly soon touch you!"

"I'm going to lick Wun Lung. He upset a bookcase over me—look at my hands!"

"I suppose you were bullying, as usual——"

"That he was!" exclaimed Russell, bursting into the study. "He chased Wun Lung on top of my bookcase, and now it's fallen down and busted. Bulstrode will have to pay for it."

"I shan't do anything of the sort!"

"Then I'll call a Form meeting, and appeal to the Remove!" howled Russell excitedly. "I paid two pounds for that bookcase, and it was worth five."

"Oh go and eat coke!"

"I'll—I'll——"

"If Bulstrode refuses to pay, it's a matter for the Form to take up," said Nugent. "Wun Lung will have to call a meeting."

"Me callee meeting."

"Stand aside. Bob Cherry! I'm going——"

"Yes, you are—go!"

"I mean I'm going to——"

"Yes, I mean you're going, too. Lend a hand here, you chaps!"

The three chums collared Bulstrode. The Remove bully struggled desperately. He gave them a hard tussle before they got him to the door.

But the odds were too great even for the burly Bulstrode. He went flying out of the door, and crashed down in the passage.

"There he goes!" panted Bob Cherry.

Bulstrode sprang to his feet.

"Come out here, Bob Cherry, and I'll lick you!"

"Rats!"

"Coward!"

Bob Cherry turned scarlet. He did not hesitate longer, but dashed into the passage. In a second he was locked in a struggle with Bulstrode. Both were excited and determined;

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but the strength of the Remove bully was bound to tell.

Bob Cherry went with a crash to the floor, Bulstrode bumping down on top of him. The Remove bully's face was furious.

"Now——"

Before he could get further, he was grasped by Nugent and Hurree Singh. Nugent took his collar and the nabob his ankles.

He was jerked off Bob, and dragged along the passage.

He struggled furiously; but he was at too much of a disadvantage to help himself, and he was rushed along in a most uncomfortable position to the head of the stairs. There he was rolled down, and he bumped from step to step, yelling at every bump. He was half-way to the bottom before he stopped himself by clutching the banisters.

He sat on the stairs, glaring up at the juniors, but feeling too breathless and exhausted to pursue matters further just then.

The juniors returned to the study.

Wun Lung was still sitting in the easy-chair, with a smile that was child-like and bland on his quaint little face.

He nodded and grinned to the chums of the Remove.

"Allee light," he murmured. "You backes me up; me makee lipping captain."

### The Chinese Means Business!

"**W**HOL'L take Harry's place this afternoon?"

It was Bob Cherry who asked the question, when the Remove came down the next morning. It was Saturday, and the Greyfriars Remove were receiving a visit from Lowerdale Juniors in the afternoon, and Harry Wharton, who usually played centre-forward for the team, was away.

"That's for Wun Lung to decide," remarked Frank Nugent.

"Wun Lung?"

"Certainly—as captain during Wharton's absence."

"I suppose you're right, Frank," said Bob Cherry, "but——"

"It will have to be left to him. After all, he's a sensible little chap, and I dare say it will be all right. One thing's certain—he won't give the place to Bulstrode."

That Wun Lung would have the duty of filling the vacant place in the footer team was a fact that gradually dawned on all the Remove.

And it was curious to see how polite and attentive many of the fellows became to the little Chinese when they realised it. All the footballers were eager for the chance.

Even Bulstrode began to think that he had been a little too hasty in "jumping on" the Chinese captain; but it was too late now to think of making his peace, and he still hoped to carry the matter through by bluster.

His idea was to call a meeting of the football committee to decide who should fill the vacant place. But Harry's chums had promised to back up the new captain; and, as they formed the majority on the committee, Bulstrode was at a disadvantage. The committee could not be called together without its own consent, and Bulstrode had to give up the idea.

Wun Lung received the attentions of his Form fellows with his usual blandness; but in reply to

questions as to whom he had selected to fill Wharton's place, he was dumb.

Perhaps he had not yet made up his mind, though the glimmer of fun in his eyes seemed to indicate to the more keen-sighted fellows that he was thinking of some surprise for the Remove.

They waited anxiously for the news. Morning lessons were over at last, and then the chums of Study No. 1 forcibly marched Wun Lung into their quarters to make him explain.

Wun Lung had dropped into Wharton's place in Study No. 1 now, and he had brought most of his books and his personal belongings there, much to the disgust of Billy Bunter, who expected to have a little more room now that Wharton was away.

The smiling Chinese came in with Bob Cherry and Nugent holding his arms, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh following behind.

"Now," said Bob Cherry, pinning him against the wall with a hand on either shoulder, "speak!"

"Me speakee. Whatee me say?"

"Who's going to play this afternoon in Harry's place?"

The Chinese grinned.

"Me tinkee 'bout it."

"You've had enough time for thinking. Am I going to captain the team?" demanded Bob Cherry. "I can play centre-forward, and you can put down young Morgan in my place."

Wun Lung shook his head.

"Then it's I?" said Nugent.

Another shake of the head.

Hurree Singh indulged in a chuckle.

"It is my worthy self that the esteemed Wun Lung has selected," he remarked. "And with all properful respect to my worthy chums, I must say that the choicefulness is excellent."

But Wun Lung shook his head for the third time. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked puzzled.

"Is it possible that my worthy self is left out?" he asked.

"What you tinkee?"

"Then what's the game?" demanded Bob Cherry. "One of us three ought to captain the team; but if we stick where we are, who's taking centre-forward?"

"Surely not Bulstrode?" exclaimed Nugent.

The pigtailed head wagged another negative.

"Young Linley?" asked Bob. "He's good enough, I think."

"No savvy."

"Then who is it?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Answer, you young imp!"

"Me tellee-me!"

"Well, tell us, then—sharp!"

"Me explaine," said Wun Lung. "Me sayee 'me.' Me playee. Me make lipping captain for football teamee."

The chums of the Remove stared at Wun Lung in astonishment.

"You!" said Nugent faintly, at last.

"You play against Lowerdale?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The jokefulness is great," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The creamfulness of the joke is terrific!"

"Me no jokee."

"You don't mean to say that you're in earnest? That you seriously intend to play against Lowerdale?" shouted Bob Cherry.

"What you tinkee?"

"You can't!"

"Lats!"

The Celestial's pronunciation of the word "rats" was peculiar, but there was no doubting his meaning. Wun Lung was very much in earnest.

"You—you Chinese image!" spluttered Bob Cherry. "You can't play footer for toffee!"

"No playee for toffee."

"You—you dummy! You don't know a football from a toy balloon! You must be joking!"

"No jokee."

"Look here—"

"I tell you—"

"My esteemed friend—"

"Lats!"

"You can't play!"

"Lats!"

The chums of the Remove looked at one another helplessly.

Wun Lung had made up his mind, and meant business. What was to be done?



In spite of his desperate struggles, Bulstrode was rushed along to the head of the stairs. There he was rolled down, and he bumped from step to step, yelling at every bump.

"Me playee lippingly," said Wun Lung, by way of consolation. "We beatee Lowerdale—you savvy?"

"You young ass! You'll let the side down! We shall be licked!" said Bob Cherry excitedly.

"Look here, if you persist in making a silly ass of yourself, we shall call a meeting of the Form football committee, and override your decision."

"That's a wheezy, good idea."

Wun Lung shook his head with a gentle smile.

"You plomise!" he remarked.

"What did we promise?"

"To backee me up."

"Yes; if you consulted us."

"Me consultee you now."

"Eh?"

"Me consultee you. No plomise to follow your advice," said Wun Lung, with a beaming smile.

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"Me consultee you—you give advice. Me no takee it. That all light."

The Removites simply gasped.

There was no doubt that Wun Lung had them, so to speak, in a cleft stick.

They had promised to back him up if he consulted them, but they had not thought of making it a condition that he should take their advice. The wily Oriental had been too sharp for them, and intended to have his own way after the consultation. He had fulfilled his part of the compact; and now they were called upon to back him up in the fulfilment of their part.

It was a curious situation, and there was cause for the glimmer of enjoyment in the almond eyes of the Celestial. His sense of humour was very much tickled.

The juniors stared at him. They did not speak for some moments. Wun Lung glided softly towards the door; but Bob Cherry grasped him by the pigtail, and jerked him back.

"Look here, Wun Lung!"

"Me lookkee!"

"You've got to be guided by us in this matter."

"No guidee. Captain of football team always follow his own judgment. Me hear you say so yourself."

"Yes; but that was when Wharton was captain, you ass!"

"Me tly to makee good captain as Whalton."

"Now, look here, you can't play footer—"

"Me captain. If you not respectful, me leavee you out of team, and play somebody else in place, Chelly."

"What!" roared Bob Cherry. "You'll leave me out?"

"What you tinkee?"

## DETECTIVE BUNTER!

by FRANK RICHARDS

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Bob Cherry was incapable of saying more. He stared at Wun Lung, who smiled softly, and glided from the study. In the passage outside he seemed to double up for a moment in a silent ecstasy of merriment.

"My hat!" said Nugent. "We're in for it!" And there was no doubt about it—they were!

### The New Football Captain!

THE news that Wun Lung was to captain the Remove eleven in the match with Lowerdale Juniors was not long in spreading.

The Remove refused to believe it at first, and when there was no longer any possibility of doubt, they expressed diverse opinions on the subject.

Some were indignant; some were hilarious.

Bulstrode & Co. chuckled over it. They were out of the match, and they hardly concealed their desire for the side to go down before the visitors. It would be a lesson to the Form, Bulstrode said. Next time they would have sense enough to consider him and his claims.

Every fellow who had hoped to get into the vacant place was, of course, furious.

Wun Lung had taken to football, and Harry Wharton had given him a great deal of instruction in the game. He had learned that he must not use his hands on the Soccer field, and that there were rules in the game which were supposed to be more or less observed, but it could not be said that he was up to match form. Bulstrode said he might win credit in playing for the Second Form eleven, but no one expected him to make much of a show against Lowerdale.

But what was to be done?

He was duly elected captain of the Remove, and the Remove had their eyes open when they elected him.

The chums of Study No. 1, who formed the majority on the football committee, had promised to back him up.

Nothing, apparently, could be done.

The eleven had to follow the Chinese captain into the football field, and take the chance of a licking.

"Suppose we all refuse to play?" suggested Russell.

"We can't let Lowerdale come here for nothing," said Bob Cherry.

"We could scratch by wire."

"That would be rough on them, at the last moment."

"Well, we can scrag that rotten Chinese."

"We've promised to back him up," said Nugent.

"Faith, you may have, but we haven't," said Micky Desmond. "I'm more inclined to rag him baldheaded, bedad."

"Well, rag him baldheaded, then; only we're backing him up. We shall play, and if you fellows stand out, it will be a licking for Greyfriars."

"It will be that, anyway," said Trevor wrathfully.

"I don't know. Lowerdale are a tough lot; but we may be able to beat them, playing, a man short—for that's what it will amount to."

"Yes; if Wun Lung has sense enough to keep out of the way!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "But I rather think he will want to have his share of the play."

"And that means a licking for us," growled Trevor.

"It can't be helped," said Bob Cherry. "And

you've no right to grumble, for one, Russell. You voted for Wun Lung at the election for vice-captain."

"Well, it was more a joke than anything else, and, of course, I never expected anything of this sort."

"You never know what to expect when you're dealing with that blessed heathen! But it's no good jawing; we're in for it."

Some of the Removites had a wild hope that Wun Lung was only "pulling their leg"—that at the last moment he would relieve them by announcing that someone else was to play in his place. But the hope was delusive.

Soon after two o'clock Wun Lung made his appearance in an overcoat, with his football things on underneath. There was no doubt that Wun Lung meant business.

And the fellows made up their minds to go through with it. There was a faint chance that they might win, in spite of Wun Lung's assistance.

The worst of it was the hilarity with which the rest of Greyfriars treated the matter.

Temple, Dabney & Co. were almost in hysterics on the subject.

They had loudly announced their intention of seeing the match, even foregoing a practice match of their own for the purpose.

Temple said that it was too good to be missed, and Dabney observed that much might be learned how to play footer.

Fry remarked that it was worth while going down to the junior ground, for the sake of a good laugh.

These remarks and many more of the same kind were made in the hearing of the unfortunate Removites; but the latter were too depressed by the circumstances to have even the requisite energy for a Form row.

But it was not only the Upper Fourth who had taken a hilarious interest in the match. Blundell and Bland and many more of the Fifth came along to see it, and were early on the ground to get good places at the ropes.

And even the Sixth—the high-and-mighty Sixth—condescended to take an interest in the matter. Many of them came along with condescending grins, with the intention of honouring the Remove to the extent of laughing at them.

Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of the school, was the only one who seemed to take a serious view of the matter. He came up to Wun Lung, in front of the pavilion, and tapped him on the shoulder.

The little Celestial's eyes glimmered for a moment, but he turned to Wingate with a smile of childlike innocence.

"Look here," said the captain of Greyfriars, in his brusque but kindly way, "don't you think this foolery has gone far enough, kid?"

Wun Lung looked at him with an expression of wonder.

"No savvy."

"Are you really intending to captain a Form team in the field, you young ass?"

"Me playee. Me captain, doee duty."

"Better give the job to somebody else—Cherry, for example."

"No savvy."

"You'll only let the side down, and lose the match."

"No savvy."

"Look here, I don't want to interfere in affairs in the Remove," said Wingate, half-laughing. "But this is all rot. You'd better get out."

"No savvy."

And Wingate gave it up.

Whether Wun Lung savvyed or not, he had made up his mind, and he was showing an unexpected firmness, or obstinacy, as the Remove preferred to consider it.

The arrival of the Lowerdale team cut short further discussion.

The Lowerdale Juniors were a pretty strong team. Individually, they were not up to the form of the Greyfriars fellows, but the team was taken from all Forms below the Fifth. There were Upper and Lower Fourth, and even Shell fellows in it.

The Remove eleven was a Form team, taken wholly from the Lower Fourth of Greyfriars. But the Remove was on equal terms with the Upper Fourth or Shell in any other school, as far as football was concerned. But with a Chinese captain matters were likely to turn out differently.

Warrington, the Lowerdale Junior captain, looked surprised when Wun Lung met him with an agreeable smile.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "Where's Wharton?"

"He's away," said Bob Cherry. "We've got a new captain for to-day."

"Right-ho! Who's the chap?"

"Here he is."

"Eh? Not the Chinaman?"

"Yes."

"Me pleasee meetee you," murmured Wun Lung. "Me lather lipping captain. Allee light."

"Of course, it's all right," said Warrington. "Excuse my smiling. We're all pleased to meet you."

The Lowerdale juniors were all grinning. At once they seemed to regard the match as a walk-over for them.

And most of the Remove couldn't help looking at it in the same light. But, all the same, they meant to do their best, if only to show what they might have done under a better captain.

(To be continued.)

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## THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY!

(Continued from page 26.)

"I think I understand," said Marie quietly. "It is Talbot, and he asked Mr. Chungum not to tell us that he is here."

"You—you see—" stammered Mr. Chungum. "Will you tell him, if he is Talbot, that the misunderstanding is cleared up now, and the Head wishes him to return to the school?" said Miss Marie.

Mr. Chungum brightened up.

"Gosh! Is that so? I'll tell him!"

Mr. Chungum disappeared, and returned in a few moments with a lad still in Indian costume, but whose face had been cleaned of the make-up. Talbot's handsome face looked at the juniors, above the leggings and blanket of the Red Indian. Marie gave a cry.

"Toff! I knew it was you!"

"Talbot!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Talbot held out his hand.

"I'm jolly glad to see you," he said, "but—

but—" "It's all right now, old chap!"

"You're coming back."

"The Head says so."

"Give us your fist."

"Where have you been hiding yourself all this time, you bouncer?"

"What did you clear off for, you duffer?"

Talbot smiled. His heart was light. The message that had been sent to him could only mean that George Gore had confessed, and that the Head knew the truth.

"You are to come back, Toff," said Miss Marie softly. "The Head knows all now, and I also; but—but there is no need for anything to be said, because—because of somebody else's sake."

Talbot nodded.

"I'm jolly glad!" he said. "I've been all right here, but I shall be glad to come back. And the Head wants me to come? You're sure of that?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"There have been detectives searching for you for a week past," he said. "The Head is as anxious as we are to see you back, you old duffer."

"Just fancy finding him in the giddy circus!"

said Blake. "We ought to pass a vote of thanks to Gussy. It was Gussy's idea to come."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps you fellows will admit now that it was a nobbay ideah—what?" chirruped Arthur Augustus.

It was a cheerful party that sat down to tea in Mr. Chungum's tent. Charley Chungum was

sorry to lose his new recruit, as he said frankly; but he was glad that matters had been set right for him at the school; so, as he cheerfully remarked, he was more glad than sorry.

Captain Coke was sorry, too, and over tea he told the juniors what Talbot had done for him.

When the St. Jim's party boarded the car to return—Talbot going with them—nearly all the circus turned out to give them a cheer at parting, and Mr. Chungum waved his silk hat after the car.

Talbot sat very silent as the car glided away swiftly homeward.

"And you won't tell us why you cleared off?" Tom Merry asked, breaking a happy silence at last. He could hardly believe that his chum was really there, sitting by his side, going to St. Jim's with him. It seemed too good to be true.

Talbot's face clouded a little.

"I can't," he said. "There was a misunderstanding, and now it's set right. But I can't tell you without giving somebody else away. You wouldn't want me to do that."

"It's a giddy mystery," said Tom Merry. "I know it's something to do with Gore, and that you've got yourself into trouble helping him. I've guessed that much. Gore's back in the Shell now. He's all right again, only jolly quiet. We won't ask questions. We're too glad to have you back."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps, howevah, Talbot might considah it judicious to confide the whole mattah to me, as a fellow of tact and judgment."

Talbot laughed.

"Least said, soonest mended," he remarked. "It's all over now. I say, it's jolly to be going back with you fellows."

It was indeed jolly. And when the car drove up to the school in the dusk there was a shout as Talbot was spotted, and a crowd of fellows gathered round to welcome him.

Talbot went into the Head's study at once, and when he came out his handsome face was very bright.

That evening there was a first-class celebration in Tom Merry's study.

The prodigal had returned, as Lowther expressed it, and it was up to them to kill the fatted calf. The celebration was extensive and joyous. Miss Marie, of course, was there, and as many fellows as could be crowded into the study, not to mention an overflow meeting in the passage.

George Gore was there, much more subdued than of old, but looking very happy. And the hero of the hour, of course, was Talbot of the Shell, once the circus schoolboy.

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