

THE BEST SCHOOL STORIES OF THE NEW YEAR—Inside!

**"NOSE"
SCORE!**—

An amusing
incident from

**"TOM
MERRY'S
BOAST!"**

—the lively
long St. Jim's
yarn within.

The GEM

2nd





Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Blunt himself! But keep your letter SHORT, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned and no replies given by post.

B. J. O., of Coventry, writes:

Having just bought a new bicycle, I am tempted to cycle to St. Jim's School and tell you my views. Why is Tom Merry captain of the Shell? Why doesn't Fatty Wynn get thin? Why isn't Mr. Ratcliff better-tempered? How many half-holidays a week do they have at Rookwood? When does Easter fall in 1977? An answer by return will oblige.

ANSWER (by return): Who the thump are you, B. J. O.? Who were the Ku-Klux-Klan? Are you a member? Why don't you cycle to Timbuctoo? Why haven't you gone there before? Well, for goodness' sake, don't be late starting! They have two halves at Rookwood, same as at St. Jim's, and Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon following March 21st. No answer will oblige.

"Would-be Explorer," of Sittingbourne, writes:

Which is the first place I should come to if I walked east from the North Pole? I want to know specially, because I am thinking of doing a bit of hiking next summer.

ANSWER: I'm not buying that one, thanks! You can only walk south from the North Pole, as everybody knows who has been there. Men to say you never have?

"Determined," of Southampton, writes:

The large parcel you will receive very soon by registered post contains a high-explosive bomb capable of blowing up the Houses of Parliament. I found it aboard an Atlantic liner which docked here. I think it may interest Detective Kerr. As I can hear the bomb ticking, I am afraid it will go off at any moment. I leave it to you.

ANSWER: Very decent of you, I'm sure. Luckily, both Detective Kerr and myself are familiar with the old gag of planting an alarm clock in a package. But you want to make sure the clock is reliable. Your "bomb" had stopped ticking when I received it. Would you like the clock back as it is, or shall I get it repaired for you?

X. Y. Z., of Hammersmith, writes:

A fellow gets fed up with life sometimes. Lonely and depressed, I wander about on my own, hardly hearing a sound or noticing a thing. I

simply don't know what to do to take an interest. Can you advise me?

ANSWER: You're a difficult case, old chap, but luckily for you, I thrive on 'em. You're lonely in London! Think of the men who spend months at a time in lighthouses—or people living in some remote hamlet! Think of me, having to answer silly questions like yours. Snap out of it!

"Optimist," of Burton-on-Trent, writes:

I am rather keen to sell my old bicycle for about ten pounds, as I have just bought a new one. The old one is a very good bike, except that the front wheel is a little out of the true, owing to a smash I had with a steamroller, but luckily it didn't hurt the steamroller.

ANSWER: I'm awfully glad to hear it didn't hurt the steamroller, anyway. Of course, your bike sounds no end of a bargain, but why stop at ten pounds? If you can get ten pounds for a second-hand bike with a bent wheel, you ought to be able to get fifteen or twenty, surely? Any advance on twenty quid, fellows?

A. B. C., of Stroud, writes:

I have prepared a list of questions. If you don't answer them, I shall fail in my history exam. 1. Why did William the Conqueror land in 1066? 2. Who were Christopher Columbus' Discoveries? 3. Was 1588 the year of Wat's Rebellion or the Great Fire of London? 4. What is the permanent address of Santa Claus?

ANSWER: 1. Because he missed the boat in 1065, and 1067 was too long to wait. 2. You're getting mixed up with Carol Levis. 3. Neither. 1588 was the year of the Spanish Armada. 4. Now you've stumped me. The last time I saw him he was at Oxbridge's, in Oxford Street. They will forward letters (well, maybe!). P.S. I reckon you will fail in the exam, anyway.

"Football Fan," of Nuneaton, writes:

Which F.A. Cup-winning team has never played in the tournament since winning the Cup? My friend asked me, and I'm beaten.

ANSWER: You may be beaten, but my goal is still intact. Preston North End—last season's winners—is the answer. They play in the Third Round on Saturday.

TOM MERRY'S IN A HOT SPOT IN THIS EXCITING YARN OF FOOTER, FUN AND HOUSE RIVALRY AT ST. JIM'S!

TOM MERRY'S BOAST!



George Alfred Grundy was not the fellow to hang back while an attack was being fumbled, as he regarded it. He rushed at Tom Merry, barged his own skipper, and took possession of the ball!

CHAPTER 1.

Swank!

"TOMMY, you look worried!"

"What's the matter?"

Lowther and Manners asked those questions together, as Tom Merry came into the study.

Lowther was busy with his comic column for the "Weekly." Manners was cutting films. But they forgot the comic column and the films as they saw Tom Merry's usually sunny face.

Tom was not looking sunny now—far from it. He sat down with a plump.

"I've done it now!"

"You silly ass, you have!" roared Manners. "You're sitting on a roll of films!"

"Bother your films!"

Manners jumped up in great excitement. The photographer of St. Jim's could stand anything but damage to his films or his camera.

"You howling chump!" roared Manners. "Gerroff!"

"Hold on, Manners! There's something the matter with Tommy!" said Monty Lowther.

"There'll be something serious the matter with him if he doesn't get off my films!" shrieked Manners.

Tom Merry snorted.

He rose, picked up the somewhat crushed films, and pitched them at Manners. The roll caught Manners on the nose, and curled round his ears.

"There, you ass!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Oh, you dummy!"

"Shurrup!" said Lowther. "Can't you see Tommy's worried?"

Tom Merry's got his work cut out to make good his boast to beat the New House with two hopeless duds in the School House footer team!

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

"Br-r-r-r!" came from Manners.

He had been prepared to be sympathetic. But the damage to his films banished other considerations. Manners looked a good deal upset as he smoothed them out.

"Of all the silly chumps—" he growled.

"Oh, bother your silly films, and bother you!"

"Look here—"
"Fathead!"

"Why, you—you—"

"Peace, my infants, peace!" interjected Monty Lowther soothingly. "Now, Thomas, my bonny boy, get it off your chest. What's the matter? Railton been down on you?"

"No, ass!"

"Ahem! Lines from Lathom?"

"Blow Lathom!"

"Been lending Baggy Trimble any money?"

"Blow Baggy!"

"Bad news from your uncle?" asked Lowther, becoming serious.

"Not so bad as that!"

"Oh, good! So, whatever it is, it might be worse," said Lowther cheerfully. "Is your dear old guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, coming to visit you?"

Tom Merry glared.

"Not so bad as that?" asked Lowther.

"Look here, you silly jabberwock—"

"Shush! Don't slang your Uncle Montague when he's being sympathetic! Suppose you tell us what's the matter? I've run through all the misfortunes I can think of!"

"I've done it!" said Tom Merry.

"You've done that which you ought not to have done, or you've left undone that which you ought to have done—which?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, don't be a chump!"

"Suppose you give us a slight inkling as to what you've done, then?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"I've been in the New House—"

"Yes; I thought you'd gone over to see Figgins," said Lowther. "Why don't you keep on the respectable side of the quadrangle when your Uncle Monty isn't with you?"

"Ass!"

"Ahem! Well, what's happened in the New House? Did Figgins & Co. pitch you out on your neck? We shall jolly soon do the same, if you don't explain!"

Tom Merry drove his hands deep into his pockets.

"I've done it!" he said. "We were jawing footer. Those New House worms have beaten us in two matches running!"

"Well, chaps have lost footer matches and still survived," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, our team wasn't up to full strength either time," said Tom Merry. "But, of course, the New House crowed no end!"

"The crowfulness was terrific, as that inky chap at Greyfriars would remark. What does it matter?"

"Well, I suppose it doesn't matter. But—but—but—"

"But you got excited in arguing with Figgins?" grinned Manners.

"Well, yes!"

"And there was a row?" asked Lowther, mystified. "Never mind; this study thrives on rows."

"Worse than that!"

"Well, give it a name."

"I—I—I—I was rather waxy, you know," confessed Tom, "what with Figgins saying the School House was played out, and Kerr offering to come over and coach us at footer, and Fatty Wynn offering to buy us some marbles to play with—"

"Cheeky ass!" said Lowther warmly.

"And—and I said we'd play 'em every day and beat them—"

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"So we will!"

"I—I said we'd play 'em and beat 'em with Baggy Trimble in goal!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"And Grundy in the half-back line—"

"Ye gods!"

"And—and so I've done it!" said Tom Merry lugubriously. "You can bet the bounders jumped at it. They took it for granted—"

"So I expect they would, you ass!"

"I was wild, you know. They took it for swank, and pinned me down to it. Of course, I couldn't draw back then. So—so it's arranged!"

"Arranged! My hat! A House match, with Trimble in goal and Grundy at half!" said Manners faintly.

"Yes."

"Oh, you ass!"

"Oh, you chump!"

"I told you I'd done it!" said Tom Merry.

"You have—and no mistake! Fancy you swanking in your old age!" said Monty Lowther severely.

"I didn't mean to swank, really. I was rather wild, and I suppose I didn't really mean it!" confessed Tom Merry. "But they pinned me down, the beasts! Then I stuck to it. You should have heard those New House beasts chortling as I came away. Simply killing themselves!"

"Yes, I should fancy they'd chortle a bit!" said Manners. "You've booked a licking for the House, you frabjous ass! If they beat us, we shall be laughed to death. And they're bound to beat us, with Grundy and Trimble playing for us—the biggest duffers at footer in the whole school!"

"That's why I said it, of course!"

"Of course!" said Lowther. "Well, you'd better go and tell Figgins you were only swanking, and that it's off!"

"No fear! The School House can't climb down to the New House!"

"Well, I suppose not! But School House is going to get a record licking from New House, and no end of chortling in the bargain!"

"Well, I've done it!"

"Yes, you have done it," agreed Monty Lowther, "and now we're going to do something, to show our appreciation. Collar the silly ass!"

"Look here— Oh my hat!"

Tom Merry struggled in the grasp of his chums. But he struggled in vain.

Manners had even forgotten his films, in his wrath.

The captain of the Shell smote the study carpet with a mighty bump.

Bump!

"Yaroooooh!"

Bump!

"Yooooop! Leggo!"

Tom Merry sat on the carpet and gasped. And as he gasped, his chums told him what they thought of him. Never had such an eloquent flow of language been heard in Study No. 10 in the Shell passage.

CHAPTER 2.

Plain English!

"WATS!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke emphatically.

Blake, Herries, and Digby grunted, with a grunt expressive of total disbelief.

"It's true!" said Dick Julian. "I heard it from Figgins—honour bright!"

"But it can't be true!" growled Blake.

"Imposs, deah boy!"

"Even Tom Merry couldn't be such an ass as that!" said Herries argumentatively. "Of course, he's an ass. He actually found fault with my play the other day. He's an ass, right enough. But not such an ass as to play Trimble and Grundy in a House match! Draw it mild!"

"Figgins was pulling your leg!" said Dig.

"It's a fact, I tell you!" exclaimed Julian.

"There's going to be an extra House match, and Trimble and Grundy are playing."

"Wats!"

"I say, have you heard the news?"

Kangaroo of the Shell came up to the group in the Junior Common-room.

"What news?" asked Blake.

"Tom Merry's going to play Trimble and Grundy in a House match!"

"Bai Jove! It begins to look——"

"You fellows heard?" chortled Racke of the Shell, coming in. "Trimble—ha, ha, ha—in the School House eleven! And Grundy! Ha, ha, ha!"

* "Wubbish!"

"Fact!" roared Aubrey Racke. "I'm going to put some tin on the New House for that match! Any takers? Five to one in quids, if you like!"

"Pway do not pwoopose any wascally bettin' in my pwesence, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner.

"Oh rats! Now's a chance for you fellows to back up your House!" grinned Racke. "Who'll take five quid against the School House? Quids!"

"Oh, don't yell!" snapped Blake. "It can't be true, and if it is, we'll scalp Tom Merry. We shall want a new junior House captain. One from the Fourth would be best. The Shell isn't much good, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewways it would be a good ideah for me to put up," remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "What is wanted is a wippin' footballah, and a fellow of some tact and judgment——"

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, Julian!"

"I say, Tom Merry's gone off his rocker," said Crooke of the Shell, coming in. "What do you fellows think of Trimble in a House match—and Grundy?"

"Begins to look as if it's true!" said Blake, in wonder. "Why, we'll lynch Tom Merry if there's anything in it!"

"True enough!" said Crooke. "Tom Merry seems to have been swanking over in the New House, and Figgins called his bluff."

"Figgins did what, Crooke?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Took him at his word," said Crooke.

"And that's our captain!" sneered Racke. "No chance for a chap like me in the House team! Now, I'll put it to you fellows—do I play worse football than Trimble or Grundy?"

"You couldn't!" said Herries, for once in agreement with the cad of the Shell.

"Oh rot!" growled Blake. "You don't play footer, Racke! Grundy tries to play, at any rate, though he never gets there. If Tom played you in a House match, we'd duck him in the fountain."

"What about me?" demanded Crooke. "I've asked for a place in the team—I'm a footballer. I was laughed at!"

"Well, it was funny—you asking for a place in the team. You'll admit that," said Julian.

"I suppose I can play better than Grundy!" sneered Crooke.

"It can't be true!" exclaimed Blake. "Tom Merry wouldn't be idiot enough to spoil the House record in this way. After two lickings, lately. Hallo, Levison! Have you heard anything about this?"

Levison of the Fourth came in with Cardew and Clive. Cardew was grinning, but the other two looked serious.

"Oh, you've heard?" said Levison. "What the merry dickens does it mean? Trimble and Grundy can't play footer!"

"Then it's true!"

"Oh, yes, it's true! Grundy, you know! Even Wilkins and Gunn nearly fainted when they heard. They've gone to tell Grundy."

Jack Blake looked round grimly.

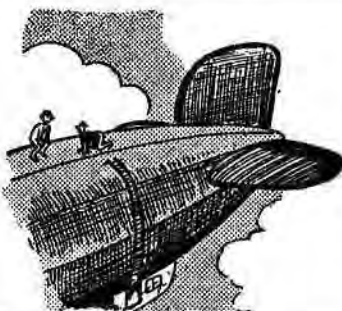
"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he said. "It seems to be true. This is where we go and talk to Tom Merry like Dutch uncles——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He must be off his rocker," said Hammond.

"Why, there's me waitin' for a chance in a House match! Trimble! Grundy! By gum!"

"Come on!" said Blake. "If it's arranged, it



"If only I had a pail of water here I'd soon find the leak!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Butler, Doncaster Road, Kenilworth, Cape Town, South Africa.

will jolly soon be disarranged. If not, Tom Merry will get a bit disarranged. Come on!"

The excited juniors started for the Shell passage to interview the junior captain of the School House.

It was not surprising that they were excited. House matches were keenly contested at St. Jim's. Only utter outsiders like Racke and Crooke had no regard for the House record.

It was a feather in any fellow's cap to be selected for a House match. There was always a long waiting list. It was only second in distinction to playing for the school junior team.

The news that Tom Merry was giving places in the House team to the two most hopeless duffers in the School House was surprising—almost unnerving.

Grundy of the Shell was a fellow whose football would have made a cat laugh, as Blake expressed it. Grundy was keen enough; he was all right on that point; nobody could call him a slacker. But he had a perfect genius for blundering, and getting in the way of other players. To play Grundy in a match against any team more dangerous than the Second Form was to ask for a licking.

And Trimble! Baggy Trimble of the Fourth was a hopeless slacker, fat and unwieldy, lazy and obtuse, conceited and clumsy—too slack even to want to play in a House match if he had the chance!

The crowd of juniors—increasing in numbers

on the way—arrived at Tom Merry's study. There was the sound of a warm and excited argument going on within.

Evidently Manners and Lowther shared the general opinion of the School House.

Jack Blake jammed his foot against the door, and hurled it open. He was not in a mood to stand on ceremony. The juniors swarmed into the study, and the warm argument proceeding among the Terrible Three stopped.

Tom Merry looked round with much less than his usual good-humour.

"What the dickens do you fellows want?" he demanded.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We want an explanation!" roared Blake, thumping on the table with a thump that made the inkpot dance. "Are you playing Trimble and Grundy in a House match?"

"Yes."

"Then it's true?"

"Quite!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And what's the reason, you howling, burbling jabberwock?" demanded Blake.

"Rats!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Rats!"

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"Yes; that's about all."

Blake glared at the captain of the Shell. Tom Merry was flushed, but he spoke quite coolly.

Tom was in a bad position. He could not advance any argument in defence of playing the two duffers in a House match. But he was bound to do it, or else climb down to the New House, which was unthinkable. Naturally, his reply did not placate the indignant School House juniors.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I suggest a whip-wound to buy a stwait-jacket for Tom Mewwy."

"Rats!" chimed in Monty Lowther. "Tommy's footer captain, isn't he? Don't you criticise your captain, you young ass!"

"Like your cheek, I think!" said Manners hotly.

Tom Merry simply blinked at his chums. These remarks were very unlike those they had been making to him a few minutes before.

But it was a case of backing up the study, and Manners and Lowther played up loyally.

Tom had, unfortunately, put himself in the wrong; but it was not a thing for his chums to desert him.

"You kids clear off," continued Lowther. "I'm surprised at you! You can't talk to a footer captain like this!"

"Pure check!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, you ass—"

"I call upon Tom Merry to resign!" shouted Herries.

"Hear, hear!"

"Resign, you ass!"

"Give the job to somebody who can do it!" howled Crooke.

"Resign! Resign!" shouted Racke, with great relish.

It was pure joy to the two shady black sheep of the House to find a big majority against Tom Merry. For once, they were as one with the decent fellows. They meant to make the most of it.

Tom Merry bit his lip.

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"You want me to resign?" he asked quietly. "Yaas, wathah! In the circs, I wegard that as the pwopah capah."

"Yes, of course," said Blake. "I never said a word about your losing matches. Accidents will happen. But when you go out deliberately to book lickings for the House, it's time you travelled."

"Hear, hear!"

"Resign!"

"Well, I won't resign!" said Tom. "I challenged Figgins & Co. to a House match, with Grundy and Trimble in our team. I don't say it was a judicious thing to do."

"My hat! I should say not!"

"But I've done it. Dash it all, you fellows are always gassing that School House is Cock House of St. Jim's! Well, if we're Cock House, we can beat the New House playing two men short. That's what it amounts to. We're going to try!"

"It's worse than that. Grundy can't play, and he won't let anybody else play!" hooted Digby.

"So you mean to say you're playing the goat like this from sheer swank?" exclaimed Blake.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Oh rats! 'Nuff said! Any chap who isn't satisfied can raise the matter in committee, and if I'm asked to resign in a proper way, I'll resign fast enough. That's all."

"You'll get the boot!" sneered Racke.

Tom Merry gave Racke a look of contempt.

"You needn't chip in!" he exclaimed. "You don't care twopence for House matches, excepting to lay your rotten bets on the result!"

"Yaas, wathah! You dwy up, Wacke!"

"Well, I think you're a howling idiot, Tom Merry," said Blake.

"Same to you!"

"And a burbling chump!" roared Blake.

"Anything else?"

"Why, you—you—"

"Pway do not let your angwy passions wise, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy has made a mistake. He has been swankin', and the New House have pinned him down. That's how it is. We are bound to see him through. Instead of waggin' Tom Mewwy, let's pile in at footah pwactice, and get into toppin' form for beatin' the New House."

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Blake snorted.

"I suppose we should be bound to play the match, even if that silly ass did resign, or else be chortled to death by the New House," he said. "We've got to see it through. The howling duffer has undertaken to play them with two silly idiots in the team. Let him do it. If he wins the match for the House, all serene. If he loses it, he will be asked to resign, and make room for a skipper who doesn't play the giddy ox with House matches."

Tom Merry frowned.

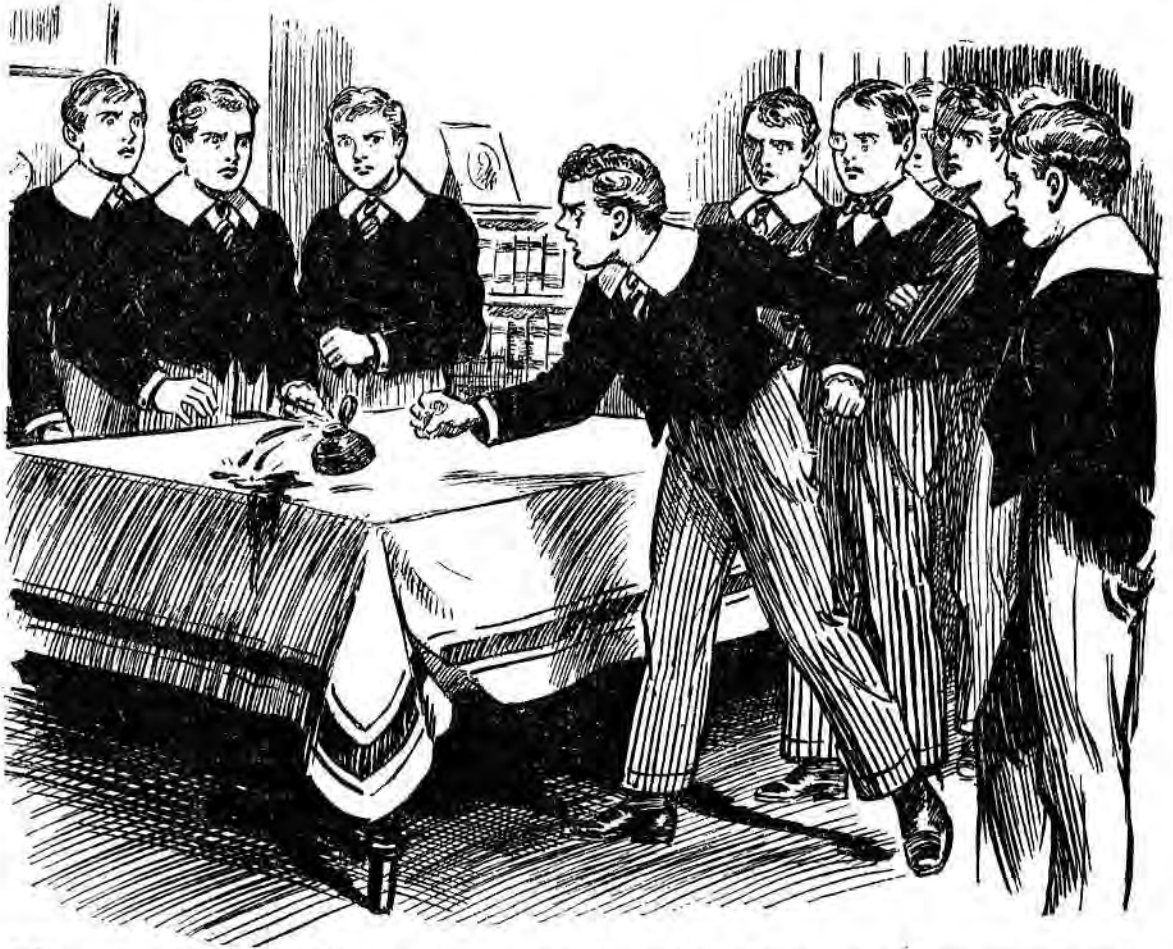
"If the match is lost, I shall resign without waiting to be asked," he said. "Now give me a rest."

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"Duffer!"

And, with those parting compliments, Blake & Co. retired, and slammed the door after them.



"We want an explanation!" roared Blake, thumping on the table with such force that the inkpot danced. "Are you playing Trimble and Grundy in the House match?" "Yes," replied Tom Merry. "Well, you howling, burbling jabberwock!" exclaimed Blake.

Left alone, the Terrible Three looked at one another.

"Well, you're in for it now, Tommy," remarked Manners.

"Can't be helped. After all, we're Cock House, and we ought to be able to beat the New House with two passengers aboard. I shall make up a jolly good team, excepting those two."

"You didn't mean that about resigning?"

"I did," said Tom quietly. "The fact is, I've played the giddy ox, and I don't mind owning up to it. If I pull the match out of the fire, well and good; if I don't, the School House can look for a new junior skipper. Now I'd better go over the eleven."

And Tom Merry, with a pencil and paper and a deeply wrinkled brow, crouched over his list of players, and became oblivious of everything else.

CHAPTER 3.

Good News for Grundy!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY of the Shell was in his study when Wilkins and Gunn came in, grinning.

Grundy wore a frown. He fixed his eyes on his studymates with a bitter expression.

Grundy was not often bitter; but there were times when a fellow got fed-up, and this was one of the times.

"I call it rotten!" said Grundy.

"So all the fellows are saying," remarked Gunn.

"Oh, are they?" said Grundy, in surprise.

"Well, I'm glad they're coming round to a sensible view. It's a bit too thick for a fellow of my abilities to be constantly kept out of the footer. You chaps know how I play footer—"

"We do," murmured Wilkins. "We does."

"Unless I get a chance in the footer, I shall put my foot down!" said Grundy.

"I can see you haven't heard the news," said Wilkins.

"Eh—what news?" said Grundy morosely.

"It's about the footer—"

"Tom Merry decided to play me in the next House match?" said Grundy, with sarcasm.

"Yes."

"Wha-a-at?"

Grundy jumped up.

"That's it!" said Wilkins.

"My only hat! You mean to say that Merry has decided to do the right thing at last!" exclaimed Grundy.

"I don't know about the right thing, but he's decided to do that. I expect the chaps will lynch him."

Grundy's frown vanished as if by magic. He was to play in the House match! Now, at last, he was going to have a chance of showing St. Jim's and the world generally what was what at footer.

"Well, I must say that this is a surprise," he said. "Tom Merry isn't, on the whole, a bad skipper!"

"I never thought so till now," said Gunn.

"He's kept me waiting for this, but he's decided to do the sensible thing at last," said Grundy, unheeding that remark. "A chap can go easy with a chap who does a chap justice at last. He was bound to do it, really, after losing two House matches. He felt, I suppose, that he couldn't spare me. Well, I must say I'm glad he can see it at last, though it's taken him a long time."

Wilkins and Gunn looked curiously at their chum. Evidently Grundy hadn't the faintest suspicion as to the true inwardness of the case.

"I shall overlook the past, and let bygones be bygones," said Grundy magnanimously. "I'm not a fellow to bear malice. After all, Merry's doing this in time to save the House record. What are you cackling at, Gunn?"

"Was I cackling?" murmured Gunn.

"By gad, we'll beat the New House this time!" said Grundy, rubbing his hands. "We'll wipe out those two defeats! I may say I shall wipe them out! It all depends on how the team backs me up!"

"Backs you up?" stuttered Wilkins.

"Yes. I suppose it's no good asking Tom Merry to leave the captaincy in my hands; he's a bit too conceited for that. But I shall give him some advice about the rest of the team. You ought to be played, Wilkins!"

"Thanks!"

SPOTTING THE SECRET!



A hidden message! Somewhere near Greyfriars School, £1200 in notes lay hidden deep! The only clue to the hiding-place of the loot is a succession of Greek letters scratched inside a cigarette case now in the hands of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars.

How these famous schoolboy chums elucidate the meaning of the Greek letters is told in Frank Richards' 35,000 word school yarn appearing now in

The MAGNET

Of all Newsagents. Every Saturday. 2^d

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"What about me?" demanded Gunn.

Grundy shook his head.

"N.G.!" he said decidedly. "I'm sorry to say it, Gunny, but I couldn't recommend Merry to put you in. You're all right at books, but you aren't much good at footer! You don't mind my saying so, do you?"

"Not at all!" gasped Gunn. "I might mind if you knew anything about footer! As you don't, I don't mind! Not at all!"

"Don't be a silly ass, Billy Gunn! The fact that I'm in the House eleven shows what my footer's like, I suppose."

Grundy was already feeling like a full-blown House player.

"It's a sort of joke," said Gunn. "Tom Merry was swanking that he could play the New House with you in the team—like undertaking to lick a chap with one hand tied behind your back, you know!"

Grundy gave Gunn one look, and then pushed back his cuffs.

"Come on!" he said.

"Eh?"

"I'm sorry to have to punch you, Gunn; but if you ask for it—"

"Look here, you ass— Oh, my hat!"

William Gunn dodged out of the study as Grundy rushed at him. He was not prepared to face George Alfred's four-point-seven punch.

"Come back!" roared Grundy.

But William Gunn's footsteps died away in the distance.

Grundy turned to Wilkins.

"Bit thick, a chap's own pal being jealous of his football form!" he said. "I should hardly have expected it of old Gunn. What are you grinning at?"

"Nothing!" gasped Wilkins. "I—I say, Tom Merry's going to play Trimble in the same match!"

"What utter rot! Trimble can't play footer!"

Wilkins opened his lips, but closed them again. He was about to remark that Grundy was in the same boat with Trimble. But George Alfred was between him and the door, so that remark remained unuttered.

"I shall certainly object to that!" said Grundy. "I can't have House matches chucked away by an utter ass being played in the team!"

"You're going to decline?"

"Eh? I'm speaking of Trimble!"

"Oh, my mistake!"

"If you're going to be funny, George Wilkins—" began Grundy darkly.

"Not at all!" muttered Wilkins. "It's a serious matter for the School House."

"Yes; I agree with you there. Trimble certainly can't be played. I shall point that out very firmly to Tom Merry. Hallo! What do you fellows want?"

Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in. "We've come to make a suggestion to you!" grunted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm open to suggestions," said Grundy loftily. "But I'm rather busy about footer. I dare say you know I'm in the House team now?"

"That's it. I suppose you want the School House to win?"

"Of course!"

"You'd like to help?"

"I'm going to."

"Well, then, could you make it convenient to walk down to the river—"

"To the river?" ejaculated Grundy, in astonishment.

"Yes; and jump in——"

"Jump in?"

"That's it!"

"You frabjous ass! How would that help the School House to win a House match?"

"Why, you'd be drowned, you see, and then Tom Merry couldn't play you—see?"

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

The two Fourth Formers went on their way, leaving Grundy staring. Wilkins burst into a chortle.

"Stop that silly cackling, Wilkins!" roared Grundy. "There's nothing to laugh at in the cheek of those Fourth Form fags! Shut up!"

"You're not going to do it?" asked Wilkins humorously.

"I know what I'm going to do!" exclaimed the exasperated Grundy. "I'm going to give a cackling duffer a thick ear!"

Wilkins dodged out of the study.

"Cheeky ass!" growled Grundy; and he tramped away to Tom Merry's study.

He found the Terrible Three there, and bestowed a genial nod upon Tom Merry as the latter looked up from his footer list with a worried brow.

"I hear you're playing me in the next House match, Merry?"

"That's right."

"I congratulate you!"

"Well, I'm glad somebody's pleased!" said Tom, with a sigh.

"You're the only fellow in the House who doesn't want to scalp me, Grundy!"

Grundy snorted.

"Don't take any notice of silly, carping idiots!" he advised. "Do the right thing, and stick to it. But I hear you're playing Trimble. That won't do!"

"Won't it?"

"No. I hardly think I could consent to Trimble playing in my eleven."

"Your eleven?"

"Well, the eleven I'm a member of, anyway," amended Grundy. "You can see it won't do! Trimble can't play!"

"Well, you can't, either."

"Don't be a funny ass, Tom Merry! I warn you that I don't care about playing in the same team with a fat cuckoo like Trimble of the Fourth."

Tom Merry looked hopeful.

"You decline to play?" he asked eagerly.

If Grundy declined to play, the captain of the Shell was naturally absolved from his undertaking to play him. He couldn't make a fellow play against his will.

But there was no such easy escape for the hapless footer captain.

"I don't say that," said Grundy. "No, I don't say that—certainly not! If a fat idiot like Trimble is in the team you'll need all the good players you can get, and leaving me out would mean defeat. I doubt if I shall be able to pull the game out of the fire, though, with Trimble in the team."

"Do you mind if I put that in the 'Weekly,' Grundy?" asked Monty Lowther, taking up a pencil. "I want a paragraph more to fill up my comic column."

"I didn't come here to listen to your silly gags, Lowther!" roared Grundy. "You dry up! Now, then, Tom Merry, about Trimble. Where are you going to play Trimble?"

"In goal."

"Oh, my hat! And you call yourself a footer captain?" said Grundy. "Where are you going to play me?"

"Where you'll do least damage."

"Look here, Tom Merry, I'll tell you what," said Grundy. "You can't captain a team for toffee; you'll admit that yourself. Playing Trimble, by gum! I'll tell you what. Leave it to me. You want to win, of course. Well, leave it to me, and I'll give you a place in the eleven, if possible. I—— Yaroooh! Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry was fed-up. He rushed at Grundy, and Manners and Lowther rushed at him, too, and the flow of George Alfred's eloquence was suddenly cut short.

He roared as he was lifted through the doorway and bumped in the passage.

"Now, cut off!" said Tom Merry.

Grundy sat on the floor and gasped. Then he rose up in his wrath and charged into the study.



"Cheer up, Jim, the crowd's with you!"
"Ye ah! I wish I was with them!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. English, 74, Rue Prince Ibrahim, Ibrahmieh, Alexandria, Egypt.

Three pairs of hands seized him, and he was tossed out again.

He landed in the passage with a terrific bump.

Gore looked out of the next study to ask if the ceiling had fallen in.

Tom Merry slammed the door of Study No. 10, and Grundy, on second thoughts, did not open it again.

CHAPTER 4.

The Importance of Baggy!

"TRIMBLE!"

Baggy Trimble grinned.

Trimble of the Fourth had heard all about it. He knew that Tom Merry had landed himself in a difficulty owing to that unfortunate football argument in Figgins' study.

Tom Merry was pledged to play Trimble, and the crafty Baggy intended to take full advantage of the fact.

Baggy did not rise as Tom Merry came into his study. He just glanced round carelessly, looking as patronising as possible.

"I'm afraid I can't be interrupted just now, Merry," he remarked.

"What?"

"Look in another time, will you?"

"You fat idiot!" roared the captain of the Shell.

"There's the door, Merry."

Tom Merry came in, and fixed upon the fat Fourth Former a glare that a basilisk might have envied.

"You silly fat chump!" he said, in measured tones.

"I don't want any of your cheek, Merry. I've

said that I'm rather busy just now. Run away and play!"

"You're going to play in a House match on Wednesday."

"Next Wednesday?" said Baggy reflectively. "I'll see about it, Merry. I'd like to oblige you, but I may have another engagement."

Tom Merry almost choked. There were good footballers in the House who would have given a term's pocket-money to play for the team. Baggy Trimble played footer worse than any fag in the Third. And this was how he received the high honour!

"Don't you understand?" gasped Tom. "You're wanted to play for your House."

"Oh, yes, I understand! I've been kept out of the footer a long time," said Trimble. "I don't have much time for practice, having so many engagements, but I'd have been willing to play for the House before. Some fellows were afraid of being put in the shade by a really ripping forward. I quite understand. But I'm not hung up on a nail, to be taken down just when wanted. I may be able to play on Wednesday; I may not. I'll let you know later."

"You're going to play in goal," said Tom.

Trimble shook his head.

"If I play, centre-forward's my place," he said. "I'm best there."

"You're best nowhere," said Tom. "You're rotten anywhere!"

"If you think that you'd better leave me out," sneered Baggy. "I'm not asking for a place in the team. These junior matches are hardly up to my form, anyway."

"Oh, my hat! You're going to keep goal on Wednesday, Trimble, and you're going to do your best. You're going to put in every possible minute between now and Wednesday at practice, and get into some kind of form."

"I'm jolly well not!" said Trimble emphatically. "I don't care for footer practice—rather a bore."

"And you're coming down now to begin," said Tom.

"Sorry! Another engagement."

"Of course, if you decline to play you'll be within your rights," said Tom Merry, with a faint hope. But that hope, as in the case of Grundy, was to be dashed to the ground. Trimble did not intend to be got rid of. He understood the expression on Tom Merry's face, and he grinned sarcastically.

"I don't decline," he said promptly. "I feel that I ought to play for the House, if only to show the fellows that I ought not to have been passed over so long."

"I'll give you the choice," said Tom. "I've undertaken to play the New House, with you in goal. If you refuse to keep goal it falls through, and I can explain to Figgins. Yes or no? Sharp!"

"Yes," said Trimble at once. When it was put like that, Trimble decided not to have another engagement on Wednesday. He had suddenly become a person of importance, and he was not going to lose his importance.

"That's settled, then," said Tom. "You keep goal. So long as we keep up a good defence you mayn't do much harm there. But you're going to be as good as possible. Come down to practice."

"Can't!"

"Why not?"

"I don't care for it just now. I may stroll down presently."

Tom Merry choked back his wrath. The fat bouncer of the Fourth ought to have been quite

overcome by the unexpected distinction; but it was only too clear that Baggy meant to make himself as objectionable as possible.

Most of the fellows regarded the fat Fourth Former with more or less good-humoured scorn, and this was an opportunity for the slacker of the Fourth to get his own back.

He rolled back in his chair and crossed his fat little legs, and smiled at Tom Merry with great self-satisfaction. He was master of the situation to a certain extent. Unless he was licked into some sort of shape, he would be quite useless in goal; and Baggy intended to be approached with humble persuasion.

"Will you come?" demanded the captain of the Shell, at last.

"Not now!"

Tom looked at him. He came very near seizing the fatuous Baggy and mopping up the study carpet with him. He controlled himself, however, and left the study, slamming the door after him.

Baggy Trimble gave a fat chuckle. It was the first time he had been able to set down the junior captain, and he enjoyed it.

His study mate, Mellish, came in, grinning. He had heard it all from outside.

"Good for you, Baggy!" he said. "Give 'em plain talk! Don't you let them bully you!"

"I don't intend to!" chuckled Trimble. "If they want me, they can be civil. I shall suit myself. Of course, I'm a better man than any they've got in the team. I don't need all the practice those chaps need!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, I'm not going out this afternoon. Too jolly cold!"

And Trimble settled down comfortably in the armchair, with his feet on the fender.

Tom Merry joined Manners and Lowther, who were waiting for him on the stairs.

"Where's the porpoise?" asked Lowther.

"He won't come down to practice!"

"Phew!"

"It's a rotten position!" said Tom, with a grunt. "Of course, any real member of the team would be kicked out if they refused to turn up for practice. I can't kick Trimble out, owing to circumstances."

"But you can persuade him to come down to practice," said Lowther.

"How?"

"You take one of his ears, and I'll take the other!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, it will do the fat fool more good than slacking about indoors on a fine frosty day!" he said. "He's accepted the place, and he ought to practise. Come and lend a hand!"

"You bet!"

Tom Merry turned back, and his chums followed him. The Terrible Three were not disposed to stand on much ceremony with Trimble.

Baggy looked round and grinned as they came in. He waved a fat hand at them.

"Don't bother now," he said. "I haven't any time to attend to you!"

"Our time is rather valuable, too," remarked Monty Lowther. "We won't waste any of it in talking. Kim on!"

He grasped one of Trimble's fat ears, and there was a terrific howl from Trimble.

"Yaroooh! Yah! Yoop! Leggo!"

"Take the other, Tom!"

Tom Merry took the other.

LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty Lowther.



Hallo, Everybody!

"What do judges do with their spare time?" asks a reader. They seem to give a good deal of it away to one prisoner and another!

A deep silent backwater is a good place for the wireless, states a writer. But don't let the owner see you dump it there!

"Bald Moneylenders," runs a headline. Shy locks?

"A small amount of punishment early in life saves a great deal later on," observes Mr. Ratcliff. A switch in time saves nine.

A bus can easily be overhauled in half an hour, writes a mechanic. But most of us give up the chase after the first few yards.

Now you tell one. Have I heard about the schoolboy who always did his preparation, was never rude to the masters, and invariably passed his exams with honours? No, I haven't. He hasn't been born yet!

"Now, your ears are coming along with us!" said Monty Lowther pleasantly. "If you stay indoors, Baggy, there will be a painful parting! Come on, Tom!"

Still grasping Baggy's fat ears, the chums of the Shell started for the door.

Needless to say, Baggy Trimble went with them. His ears had to go, and Trimble accompanied his ears.

With a succession of furious howls, Trimble rolled out of the study between Lowther and Tom Merry.

Manners came behind, kindly helping Trimble along with his boot.

"Will you leggo?" shrieked Trimble. "I'm coming— Yaroooooh! Stop kicking me. Manners! You rotter! Yah! Leggo! I'll yell for a prefect! Yoop!"

"Kim on!"

Trimble was marched downstairs. His howls rang along the passage and the staircases, and drew attention on all sides.

"Bai Jove! What evah are you doin' with Twimble?" exclaimed D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the peculiar procession.

"Taking him down to practice!"

"Yaroooooh! I won't go! Ow, ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kildare!" roared Baggy, as the captain of St. Jim's came along the passage. "I say! Prefect!"

Stop Press: The crash you just heard was the new maid washing up for the matron. The new maid believes in dish-armament.

Of course, it goes without saying that you are bound to have a lot of ups and downs in life if you get the end seat at the cinema!

Monty Lowther writes for the GEM by arrangement with Magnoflms Corporation, the Merritone News Reel, and the Scratch-needle Gramophone Company. S'fact!

"Do you keep a diary?" asked the visitor to the prison.

"No, mum," replied the convict; "the prison authorities do that for me!"

LATE CRIME NEWS.—The Thief of Baghdad, caught at last, was executed one fine morning, two thousand years ago. Well, I warned you it was late news, didn't I?

Third Form flash: "Excuse me, sir," said Curly Gibson to Mr. Selby, "but what did I learn to-day?"

"What a peculiar question!" exclaimed Mr. Selby.

"Well, sir," explained Gibson confidentially, "that's what my pater will ask when he comes to visit me this afternoon."

"I was twelve last birthday, and I'll be fourteen next," said Wally D'Arcy to a visitor.

"But how is that?" asked the visitor. "Because to-day is my thirteenth birthday," explained Wally, with a grin.

Many happy returns, chaps!

"What's this thundering row?" exclaimed Kildare.

"Only taking Baggy to footer practice, Kildare!"

"I don't want to go!" yelled Baggy. "I'm being bullied. Make 'em let go, Kildare!"

"I'll make you wriggle if you don't stop that row!" said Kildare. "Why don't you want to go down to practice?"

"It's—it's cold!"

"You'll get warm. And if you let out one more yell I'll warm you before you go!" said the Sixth Former. "Now, shut up, and cut off!"

There was no help for Trimble. Kildare had no sympathy with slackers.

Baggy rolled disconsolately out, and the Terrible Three marched him down to the football ground. There he was placed between the goal-posts. And quite a crowd of fellows gathered round, to see how Trimble would keep goal.

CHAPTER 5.

Keeping Goal!

BAGGY TRIMBLE gasped for breath, with a crimson face, as he stood in the goal.

He hadn't any choice about standing there. But Baggy remembered the old proverb—a horse could be taken to the water, but could not be made to drink.

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Baggy was in goal, but how he would shine as goalkeeper was quite another question.

"Now," said Tom Merry, "stand up! You're not a sack of coke!"

"Grooogh!"

"Stop that puffing and blowing, you grampus!"

"Grooogh! I'm winded! Yow!"

"I'm going to boot the ball in, and you're going to stop it!" said Tom. "Now, pull yourself together, Baggy, and do your best! Remember, you're going to play for your House!"

"Yow! Bother the House! Grooogh!"

"Look out in goal!"

"Yah! Yow!"

A somewhat muddy footer was thrown down; practice had been going on already.

Tom kicked the leather in. It was the simplest and easiest shot for the new goalkeeper to save. Trimble did not make a movement. The ball passed within a foot of him and entered the net.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That will be wippin'—in a House match!"

There was a chortle from the crowd of New House fellows. Figgins & Co. had been on the ground when Tom Merry arrived with the new recruit, and they were looking on with great enjoyment.

Figgins regarded Tom Merry's rash undertaking in the light of a huge joke. The School House junior skipper, in that argument in Figgy's study, had spoken hastily and wrathfully. Figgins & Co. regarded it as School House swank, and they held Tom Merry to his word.

How he would get out of the fix he had landed himself in was an interesting problem to Figgins & Co.

"My hat!" said Fatty Wynn, the great goalkeeper of the New House. "My hat! That's how the School House keeps goal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck that ball out, Trimble!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Grooogh!"

Tom strode into the goal and picked up the ball, and smote Baggy Trimble on the head with it, amid a yell of laughter from the onlookers.

There was another kind of yell from Baggy.

Tom dropped the ball in the penalty area.

"Now, look out, Baggy—"

"Grooogh! I'm all muddy!"

"Look out, will you?"

"No, I won't! Yah!"

Tom kicked the ball in. He was determined that Trimble should stop it, and he kicked it directly at Baggy's fat face.

Baggy was determined not to stop it, and he supposed that the leather would pass him, as before.

It didn't! It plumped right on Baggy's nose, and there was a fiendish yell from Baggy as he went heels over head.

"Gurrrrrrrrrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's School House goalkeeping!" yelled Rodfern. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble sat up, spluttering.

"Yah! Groogh! Rotter! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up, you fat chump!" shouted Tom Merry, in exasperation. "Chuck that ball out! If I come in to you, I'll scalp you!"

"Bai Jove! I weally think we shall have a wathah wemarkable display in the House match next Wednesday, deah boys!"

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"We shall!" gasped Blake.

"Get up, Trimble!"

"I—I—I can't get up!" spluttered Trimble.

"I'm winded! I—I— Groogh!"

"Help him, Kangy!"

Kangaroo of the Shell went into goal to help Trimble. He lifted the junior by one ear.

Trimble was very quickly on his feet.

"Stick there for a bit, Kangy, will you? Kick him every time he doesn't stop the ball!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in great exasperation.

This was worse than Tom Merry had expected even of Trimble. He knew that Baggy was a clumsy slacker, but to have obstinacy added to clumsiness was a little too much.

The Australian junior threw out the ball, and posted himself in goal to help Baggy with his work.

Baggy eyed him savagely.

Kangaroo took a good size in football boots.

"Play up!" said Harry Noble grimly. "I'm going to help you, Baggy! Every time you don't stop the footer, you'll think you're a footer yourself, from what you'll get!"

"Look here, you beast—"

"Look out in goal!"

Tom Merry kicked the leather in once more.

Baggy made a clumsy grab at it—and missed it. The next moment Kangaroo's boot came in contact with his fat person, and Trimble's yell could be heard all over the playing fields.

"Same every time, dear boy!" smiled Noble.

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Figgins, wiping his eyes. "This is what they call footer! And they call their mouldy old House Cock House!"

"Rats!" growled Blake. "Baggy's not much worse than Clampe and Chowle in your House, anyway!"

"We don't play Clampe and Chowle in House matches!" grinned Figgins.

"Hallo! Here they go again!" chuckled Kerr.

Baggy Trimble made a desperate effort to stop the ball this time. He had had enough of Kangaroo's boot.

He stopped it and tipped it outside, and there was an ironical cheer.

"Well saved!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good for you!" said Tom Merry. "Keep that up!"

"I—I c-can't!" stuttered Baggy. "I'm tired—I'm worn out! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Look out, Trimble! It's coming!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Baggy.

The ball whizzed in, and Baggy slashed at it desperately, and his fat fist missed it by about a yard.

Kangaroo rushed at him to fulfil his part of the contract, and Trimble, with a howl, dodged out of the goal and fled.

"Come back, you fat villain!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leg it, Trimble!"

Five or six juniors rushed after the fat Fourth Former. But fear lent Baggy wings, and he fairly flew.

Hunters and hunted disappeared in the direction of the School House, amid howls of merriment.

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh,

gweat Scott! I weally have a vewy sevewe pain in my wibs!"

"Oh, Tommy!" murmured Manners.

"Now you're through with that circus perhaps you'll let a fellow get some practice," said Grundy of the Shell sarcastically.

"Oh, don't you practise now, Grundy!" exclaimed Figgins beseechingly.

"Eh? Why not?"

"You'll make us break something if we laugh any more now!"

"You cheeky New House ass——"

"Come away, you chaps!" said Figgins. "School House footer gives me a pain in the ribs!"

Figgins & Co. departed, chortling.

Grundy gave a snort of contempt, and proceeded to exhibit his wonderful powers as a footballer.

Tom Merry felt inclined to weep as he watched

"Oh rats!"

And Tom Merry went in to tea in no happy mood.

CHAPTER 6.

The Trial Match!

"**H**OW'S your cheery old team getting on?" George Figgins asked that question on Saturday afternoon.

Figgins smiled genially as he asked.

The difficulties Tom Merry was encountering were really a subject for sympathy; but the New House fellows howled over them as if they were the joke of the season.

"First-rate!" said Tom. "We're going to beat you on Wednesday!"

"With Grundy and Trimble?"

"Yes!" growled Tom.



Struggling in the grasp of many hands, George Alfred Grundy was borne off the field and hurled among the packed crowd. There was a howl from the spectators as Grundy landed. His magnificent play was finished in that match!

him. When the School House fellows went in Tom was looking the reverse of cheerful.

"What a prospect!" he gasped, as Talbot of the Shell joined him.

Talbot smiled.

"It's rather hard lines, Tom. But the rest of us are going to play like internationals, so we may pull it off on Wednesday. We mustn't let the New House fellows get anywhere near goal, that's all."

"It's a bit thick, Figgins holding Tommy down to his brag," remarked Blake. "He might let him off."

"Brag!" repeated Tom. "I wasn't bragging, you ass!"

"What were you doing, then?"

"You're not inclined to climb down yet and take it back?" smiled Figgins. "Of course, we'll let you off if you admit it was only swank!"

"The School House never climbs down!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "We leave that to the old casual ward you call a House!"

Figgins grinned.

"Well, it will be as good as a climb down when we walk over you on Wednesday!" he remarked cheerfully.

"Rats!"

The Terrible Three walked on, leaving Figgins chuckling.

There was no fixture that afternoon, and Tom Merry had arranged a practice match between

two junior School House sides. He was anxious to see what would happen with Grundy and Trimble in the team.

The other eleven was a pretty good one, made up of the House reserves. It was captained by Sidney Clive, the South African, who played centre-half, Dick Julian, Hammond, Kerruish, Reilly, Digby, Bernard Glyn, Cardew, Gore, Manners, and Lowther made up Clive's team.

Manners and Lowther were not in the House team on this occasion.

The scratch eleven fully expected to win. They were nothing near the form of Tom Merry & Co., taken as a whole, but Tom Merry's team was handicapped by Grundy and Trimble. That made all the difference.

Figgins & Co. came to watch. So did a good many other chaps. Indeed, even some seniors of the Fifth stopped to look on. Grundy's fame was great as a footballer of an original variety, and fun was expected.

Baggy Trimble looked as if he would burst out of his footer garb, but he was not looking happy.

Baggy liked the distinction of playing for his House; it was to be a subject of endless swank in the future. But he did not like the exertion involved.

Tom Merry had kept him hard at practice during the last two days, and it had exasperated him.

Racke had been talking to Baggy, too. And it was understood that Baggy was to be present at a spread in Racke's study after the match if he did not succeed in saving a single shot.

In those circumstances, it was not probable that Baggy Trimble would shine as a goal-keeper.

But Grundy was looking very businesslike.

Grundy knew how his inclusion in the team was regarded by the other fellows. But his performance in the trial match was going to silence all detractors—at least, that was Grundy's intention.

The goal he was going to score would mark him out as a fellow who could not be spared from any team. True, it was not considered, as a rule, a half-back's special business to shine as a goal-getter. But Grundy had his own manners and customs on the football field.

It was not much use talking to Grundy, but Tom Merry tried it.

"I want you to keep your place, Grundy," he said. "Don't get in the way of the other chaps. Don't hang on to the ball. Feed the forwards. You understand? And don't try any of your brilliant charging business."

Grundy stared at him.

"Do you want to win this trial match, or do you want to be beaten by a scratch team?" he inquired.

"To win, of course, fathead!"

"Then you'd better let me alone!"

"There can't be two skippers in a football team, Grundy!"

"To be quite frank, Merry, I think you ought to leave the job to me," said Grundy candidly. "If you stick to the place you'll be doing it against my judgment!"

"Your—your judgment?"

"My judgment!" said Grundy firmly. "I give you my opinion for what it's worth."

Grundy's manner intimated that he considered it was worth a great deal.

"I suppose," remarked Blake thoughtfully, "that it wouldn't do to lynch Grundy on the crossbar, would it?"

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"Bai Jove! It might win the match for us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I suppose it's no good talking to you, Grundy!" gasped Tom Merry. "If you don't keep in your place we'll scrag you, that's all!"

"A good footballer's place is where he's wanted!" said Grundy firmly. "If I see you fumbling the ball, Merry—"

"Me—fumbling?"

"You—fumbling!" said Grundy calmly. "If I see you fumbling the ball I'm bound, from a proper regard for the side, to help you out. In such a case, I shall certainly chip in and do my best. You can rely on me to interfere at any point where I see weak play!"

"Oh, Jemima!" murmured Wilkins.

"To tell the candid truth, I'm not satisfied with this team!" went on Grundy. "Look at the way D'Arcy passes—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Levison, too! I don't think much of Levison's ball control—"

"Perhaps I'd better resign!" said Levison sarcastically.

"That would really be the best, Levison. Noble, too, is pretty clumsy at half. I shall have to do most of the work, as well as my own!"

Kangaroo gave Grundy the look of a basilisk.

"Let me catch you getting in my way!" he said.

"There'll be a dead lunatic lying about soon afterwards!"

"As for Herries, you know what a muff he is!"

"Am I?" roared Herries.

"Yes. I am sorry to say so, Herries, but the truth is the truth, you know! My judgment is that you ought not to be playing for the House!"

Herries did not reply. He couldn't. He seemed on the verge of apoplexy.

"Talbot isn't bad," went on Grundy, in his role of cheerful critic.

"Thanks!" said Talbot, laughing.

"Not at all!" said Grundy kindly. "Honour where honour is due, you know. You're not bad, and with a little coaching from me you'd be really good!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's enough!" gasped Tom Merry. "Shut up, Grundy, for goodness' sake! I only hope you won't drive us into massacring you during the match! You ready, Clive?"

"Quite!" grinned Clive.

Clive won the toss, and gave the House eleven the wind to kick off against.

Grundy tapped Tom Merry on the arm from behind.

"Leave the kick-off to me, Merry, please!"

"What?"

"Leave it to me! You see—"

"Get back, you fool!"

"Oh!"

Figgins winked at his chums as the ball rolled, and the trial match started. Figgins remarked that that match was likely to prove a trial in more than one sense to the School House junior skipper, and the Co. grinned and agreed.

And certainly George Alfred Grundy had reason to plume himself upon the attention he was getting, for the shouts were all for Grundy. Almost every eye was fixed on the burly George Alfred. The fellows were wondering what he would do, and Grundy smiled with satisfaction as they roared what he took for encouragement.

"That shows what the fellows think!" Grundy found time to remark to Wilkins.

Wilkins agreed



**Detective Kerr
Investigates**

No. 25.

**THE
SECRET
MESSAGE.**

"MAIN PARTY WILL MEET KING RICHARD AND ROBIN HOOD AT CASTLE GATES. WATCH JESTER ALAN-A-DALE AND WILL SCARLETT. IF FRIAR TUCK SUSPICIOUS, ENTERTAIN HIM AT TABLE. WHILST COURT OCCUPIED ON TILTING GROUND, RANSACK CASTLE. LEAVE OUR MOTTO: 'ALWAYS WE CONQUER!'—(SIGNED) PRINCE JOHN."

This message, scrawled in pencil on a sheet of ordinary notepaper, and found during morning break in the Cloisters, wedged under a stone, so mystified Tom Merry & Co. that a special meeting of the Junior Sports Committee was called. The message was obviously in code, and appeared to refer to some sort of raid on the "castle." "Detective" Kerr was asked if he could elucidate it.

KERR: Where exactly did you pick up the message, Merry?

MERRY: It was Digby who found it. He was studying one of the stone columns in the cloisters for the art class, and he thinks it must have been wedged under the stone only a few minutes before he came along.

KERR: If we assume that it was written by Gordon Gay or one of the Grammarians, the message seems clearer. We can assume that Prince John is Gordon Gay. He says his main party will meet King Richard and Robin Hood at the castle gates. I read that as Tom Merry and Figgins at the gates of St. Jim's. You are expecting the Grammarians tomorrow afternoon, aren't you, Merry?

MERRY: Quite correct, Kerr.

KERR: Alan-a-Dale, the jester—Monty Lowther—and Will Scarlett—Manners—are to be watched. Probably to see if they sense that anything unusual is afoot.

MERRY: But what about Friar Tuck?

KERR: That must be Fatty Wynn. Now I remember it, Fatty did say something about coming on a couple of fellows who seemed to meet each other and vanish again immediately at his approach yesterday evening in the cloisters, soon after half-past six. He didn't

see who they were, as they moved off so quickly—but Clampe followed Fatty into the New House.

MERRY: What do you make of the reference to the "tilting ground," Kerr?

KERR: That's easy. We're playing the Grammarians on Little Side to-morrow. While we're busy, apparently the recipient of this message is expected to ransack the "castle." Rag the studies, I imagine. And he is not to forget to leave the motto: "Always We Conquer!" Daubed across the looking-glass in this very study, most likely.

MERRY: At that rate we can anticipate a double visit from Gordon Gay and his merry men to-morrow! One party under Gay to play us at football, and the other—a lone hand—to rag the studies. What a scheme!

FIGGINS: It's not like Gay to think of playing a trick like this on us, Kerr. We don't usually combine rags with footer.

KERR: It's neither footer nor cricket, Figgy. It's a deep-laid plot.

FIGGINS: Funny, too, Gay should have used the Robin Hood characters in his code.

KERR: That part isn't really so puzzling. We've all been over to the Wayland Empire to see the new Robin Hood film, haven't we?

FIGGINS: Yes, that's so.

WYNN: I haven't been over, Kerr—as I was in the sanny all last week with a cold, and I only came out yesterday.

KERR: Oh, Talbot! Didn't I hear you delivering a message from Gordon Gay to Tom Merry just now?

TALBOT: That's right. I'd almost forgotten it. I rode down to the village yesterday evening—I had a pass to get a stamp, and I met Gay in the post office. He asked me to tell Merry everything will be O.K. for to-morrow. In view of the code message since, I thought Merry might be interested.

KERR: What time did you see Gay, Talbot?

TALBOT: About seven, it must have been. By the way, Kerr, I suppose you don't want a job helping Racke with an impot? Racke and Crooke were trying to bribe Trimble to help them, and he was sticking out for a bob a hundred—

KERR: Ha, ha! What did Racke and Crooke get lined for, Talbot?

TALBOT: They were Racke's lines. Fifty for being in the quad after lock-up yesterday—Kildare caught him as he came in—and another four hundred and fifty for cheek!

KERR: Oh, my hat! Time Racke learned to control his tongue, isn't it?

(Who was responsible for the secret message? Kerr's solution will be found on page 33.)

Clive's eleven, it would be a good omen for the House match on Wednesday.

The House players had it all their own way at the start.

In the first ten minutes they were swarming in Clive's half and attacking goal hotly.

Gore in goal was unusually good, however, and he defended well. But the attack persisted, and

CHAPTER 7.

The Order of the Boot!

TOM MERRY had thought the matter out. Handicapped by Grundy at half and Trimble in goal, the School House game was to attack, and keep on attacking.

The front line, at all events, was excellent. If the team with two passengers succeeded in beating

would doubtless have materialised but for some assistance it received from George Alfred Grundy.

Grundy was not the fellow to hang back while an attack was being fumbled, as he regarded it. If the forwards couldn't beat Gore, he would—or he thought he could. A terrific rush from his centre-half sent Tom Merry spinning away from the ball as he was about to kick for goal. That attack in the rear was, naturally, quite unlooked for, and it took the junior skipper by surprise.

Tom Merry was hurled off, barging into Levison, and Grundy took possession of the ball, and kicked.

Naturally, it was a miskick, and instead of the ball landing in the net, it dropped at Sidney Clive's feet, and the Africander sailed away merrily with it.

Grundy, quite ignorant where the ball had gone, stared into goal, as if expecting to see it reposing in the net.

The next instant he was collared by his indignant captain, spun round, and sent whirling.

It was not a usual proceeding on the part of the footer captain. But it was not surprising, in the circumstances, that Tom Merry was a little excited.

Grundy crashed to the ground, and gasped there, while the House players rushed after the ball.

But Clive & Co. were making the most of the opportunity so kindly afforded them by the great George Alfred.

Clive, Lowther, and Cardew—who was showing unexpected form as a forward—kept the ball among them in a rush up the field.

Cardew, usually looked upon as a slacker, was full of energy now.

They brought the ball right through, and Clive kicked the leather in, and it whizzed past Baggy Trimble and landed in the net.

There was a roar of laughter from the crowd.

"Goal! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins wiped his eyes.

"That's football!" he wept. "That's what they call footer in the School House. They call themselves Cock House of St. Jim's. And they call that footer!"

"Good old Grundy!" roared Kerr. "Go it, Grundy!"

"Did you ever!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, my hat! And that's the team they're going to play against—us!"

Tom Merry's face was a study.

He had hoped for the best, in spite of his two passengers, but it was the worst—the very worst—that was happening.

Trimble, with a sickly grin, shoved out the ball.

Kangaroo dropped back into goal to speak to Trimble.

"You didn't try to stop that ball, Trimble," said the Australian junior quietly.

"I—I didn't see—"

"You didn't try!"

"Look here, who's keeping goal?" demanded Trimble loftily. "You keep your place, Noble! I don't want any lessons from you!"

"You're going to get one, all the same," said Kangaroo. "You didn't try, Trimble. You can't help being a fool, but you can help being a rogue. Next time the ball comes in, you're going to do all that a fool can do—see? I'll help you—like this, Trimble!"

"Yaroooh!" roared the fat goalkeeper as

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Kangaroo collared him, and bumped his head against a goalpost.

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the crowd.

"That's School House footer!" said Figgins, weeping. "That's the way they keep goal! Oh dear! My ribs!"

Bump bump, bump!

"Yaroooh! Help! Murder! Yah! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble clutched his damaged head and yelled, as Kangaroo released him.

"That's for a start!" said the Australian junior grimly. "You'll stop the next ball, Trimble, or I shall use my boot on you next time!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Line up!"

Kangaroo went back to his place, leaving Baggy Trimble rubbing his head. His little game had been nipped in the bud. Not fifty spreads in Aubrey Racke's study would have induced him to go through a second experience of that kind. Trimble meant to do his best as goalkeeper now—for what that was worth.

Grundy strode up to Tom Merry, his face aflame with wrath. Grundy was not the kind of fellow to be handled like Trimble.

"You slung me over!" he roared.

"Get into your place, you fool!" Tom Merry was too angry to be polite. "If you don't keep your place after this, I'll kick you off the field!"

"What?"

"Line up, dummy!"

"Why, you—you—"

"Now then," said Smith major of the Fifth, the referee. "Line up!"

Wilkins dragged Grundy away. The great Grundy was boiling with wrath, and on the point of committing assault and battery upon his skipper.

"Did you ever see anything like it, Wilkins?" gasped Grundy. "He slung me over!"

"You silly chump!" was Wilkins' reply. "You spoiled a certain goal by barging like a rhinoceros, you howling dummy!"

"What! I was saving the situation!"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Look here, Wilkins—"

The whistle went, and Grundy's eloquence was cut off. But the great man of the Shell was by no means subdued. According to Grundy, he had been slung over, and thereby lost a certain success for his side. If there was anything more like that, Grundy meant to put his foot down.

The peculiar display of the House eleven encouraged the scratch team.

Clive and his men played up well from the re-start. They got through, but the House backs defended well, and the forwards got the ball again, and went up the field, passing in great style.

There was a tussle before goal, and into that tussle came Grundy, charging like an infuriated elephant.

Levison was sent whirling. Arthur Augustus was spun round, Blake was floored, and Tom Merry was charged away. Grundy had got the ball again for a second. It required only one second for Manners to take it from his foot and send it up the field. There was a rush after it, and an attack on the home goal; but this time Trimble was on the alert. He knew what to expect if he wasn't. He fisted out the ball, and the backs cleared.

The referee's whistle rang out sharply.

It was time, for three of the School House forwards had fastened on Grundy like wolves, and seemed to be massacring him, to judge by Grundy's wild yells.

The spectators rocked with laughter.

"Get off the field, Grundy!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"What?" gasped Grundy, struggling frantically with his assailants. "I won't! You're mucking up the game! You won't even let me save it! I— Yaroooh!"

"Kick him off!"

Struggling in the grasp of many hands, and bumping on the ground at every step, George Alfred Grundy was borne off the field, and hurled over the ropes.

There was a howl from the packed crowd there as he landed among them.

The trial match proceeded without any further assistance from Grundy. In the circumstances two half-backs were better than three. Tom Merry was bound to let Grundy lose him Wednesday's match; but there was no reason for letting him lose this one, and Grundy's magnificent play was finished for that occasion.

Not that Grundy intended to take his exclusion quietly. He gained his feet, and was about to charge back into the field, when half a dozen School House fellows in the crowd seized him and rushed him away.

Grundy was frogmarched to the House and pitched in headlong; and by the time he had sorted himself out the great Grundy was not feeling inclined for any more scrapping.

Without Grundy's aid Tom Merry pulled his team together and proceeded to beat the scratch eleven.

Baggy Trimble, in goal, played up unexpectedly well. His head was still aching from the lesson Kangaroo had given him in goalkeeping.

He let the ball through only once more, which was really creditable for Trimble.

The trial match finished with the House team winners by three goals to two.

CHAPTER 8.

Gussy to the Rescue!

"I 'VE got an ideah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that announcement in Study No. 6 in the School House at tea after the trial match.

If the swell of St. Jim's expected the announcement to be received with respectful and impressed attention, he was disappointed.

Blake, Herries, and Digby, and the Terrible Three, who were the guests in Study No. 6, did not even seem to hear the announcement at all.

"It's rotten!" Tom Merry said dismally. "I know I've played the giddy ox, and you needn't tell me so again, Blake. You've told me twenty times. Or is it thirty? Nearly fifty, perhaps. I'm going to resign the captaincy if we're beaten on Wednesday, so you needn't rub it in."

"Well, we won't hold you to that," said Blake generously. "I dare say you can't help being a silly idiot, if you come to that."

"I wepeat, you fellows—"

"I shall hold to it, though," said Tom Merry. "We shall lose the match, that's a cert. We might scramble along with Trimble in goal by threatening to thrash him every time the ball goes in. But Grundy—"

Tom Merry groaned by way of conclusion.

The bare idea of Grundy as a member of the House team made him feel like groaning.

"I was wemarkin', you fellows—"

"There's only one hope," said Blake. "Grundy might meet with an accident. Short of that, we're booked for a licking on Wednesday."

"If you uttah asses will listen to me—" roared Arthur Augustus, quite forgetting the repose that should stamp the caste of Vere de Vere, in his indignation.

"You've got an idea?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go and tell it to Grundy, then!"

"Weally, Lowthah, what would be the use of explainin' my ideah to Gwunday?"

"It would serve him right."

"You uttah ass—"

"Good!" said Blake. "Grundy deserves it, and we don't. Run and give Grundy a look in, Gussy."

"Pay him a long visit," said Herries heartily.

Arthur Augustus' eyeglass glittered with indignant wrath at his studymates. It often happened that Arthur Augustus was like the prophet of old, unhonoured in his own country.

"I insist upon you uttah asses payin' atten-



"The magnet's to pick up the bits of my car as they fall off!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to K. Payne, Wellwood, Beaminster, Dorset.

tion," he said. "I wegard your wemarks with scorn. I have an ideah for makin' up for Tom Mewwy's feahful blundah!"

"Ass!" said Tom politely.

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Tom Mewwy, especially by an uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "You have landed the House team—the junior House team—into an extwemely awkward posish. It is up to this study to get the House out of that awkward posish."

"Something in that!" agreed Blake, with a nod.

"Bow-wow!" remarked Manners.

"I wegard that as a widiculous ejaaculation, Mannahs. But to wesume. If Gwunday plays for the House on Wednesday we shall be beaten. But he is bound to play owin' to Tom Mewwy's fatheaded challenge to Figgins—"

"Cut it short!" remarked Tom

"Wats! I have an ideah for neutwalisin' the dweadful effects of playin' Gwunday in the House team."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "Go it! Do you mean you are going to sing a tenah solo to him, so that he will have to go to a funeral instead of a football match?"

"Wats! If we play the New House a man short, we may get through all wight. But we are bound to play Gwunday, owin' to Tom Mewwy's—"

"Get to the point, for goodness' sake!"

"I'm gettin' to the point as fast as I can, Tom Mewwy, considewin' that I am bein' intewwupted

by asinine remarks. My idea is to play Gwunday tied up!"

"What?"

"We are bound to have Gwunday in the team. But we are not bound to allow him to wush about wuinin' the game. My idea is to tie his hands behind his back."

"What?"

"And fasten a wope wound his silly legs——"

"Great pip!"

"And then he won't be at all dangewous, you see!" explained Arthur Augustus, evidently much taken with his brilliant idea. "We play him, accordin' to the agweement. It was not specified in the agweement that he should be untied——"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Of course, when he's woped up he won't be able to play; but he wouldn't be able to play, in any case, as he can't play footah. He will be a membah of the team, howevah, and that is all the New House has a wight to expect. We will let him loose enough to walk about, but not loose enough to wun about. He will have to keep off the ball. A footah captain has a wight to tie the hands of a playah if he likes, if the playah agwees."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar in Study No. 6.

Arthur Augustus' way out of the great difficulty took the juniors by storm.

The swell of St. Jim's beamed upon the tea party.

"You see, deah boys, it's a wippin' idea! In case of doubt, you know, you can always wely on a fellow of tact and judgment, as I have wemarked seweral times in this study."

"It's the idea of the century!" exclaimed Blake. "It's a corker! Nothing against it, that I can see. We shall be playing a man short if Grundy's not allowed to do any damage, and we can beat the New House a man short!"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows.

"Wouldn't it be a bit like wriggling out of it?" he asked doubtfully. "The agreement was to play Grundy——"

"Well, you'll be playing him if he's in the team——"

"Yes, but——"

"Now, look here, Tommy," said Blake, "you've done enough damage! It's bad enough to play a man short in a House match. Gussy's idea is a corker! It will keep that dangerous maniac from doing any damage. I vote for Gussy's idea!"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby.

Manners and Lowther looked doubtful. They intended to abide by Tom Merry's decision.

The captain of the Shell wore a worried look.

The tying up of Grundy would introduce an element of the comic which would be out of place in a House match. But Tom would not have minded that much. The bottling up of the great Grundy might mean a victory, instead of a defeat. But Gussy's scheme, brilliant as it was, seemed a little like getting round the agreement to play the duffer of the Shell. Playing a man was not merely letting him walk on the field without sharing in the game.

Tom shook his head at last.

"I twust, Tom Mewwy, that you do not wefuse to adopt my wippin' idea!" said Arthur Augustus in his most stately manner.

"Can't be helped!" said Tom. "I undertook to play Grundy, and the New House chaps would

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say I was crawling round it. Otherwise, I'd jump at the scheme."

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"Thanks!"

"And I think you're a howling idiot!" said Blake.

"Go it!"

Arthur Augustus frowned majestically. He was very pleased with his great scheme, and it had not occurred to him, at first, that it would be like getting round the terms of the challenge.

But on reflection the great Gussy realised the point, and he interrupted the somewhat personal remarks Blake & Co. were making.

"Pewwaps you are wight, Tom Mewwy," he said mildly. "I wegard it as a wippin' scheme, but pewwaps it would not be quite the thing, considewin' that you undahtook to play Gwunday—like a silly ass! I withdwaw my suggestion!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry.

"Howevah, I have anothah suggestion to make. Let us awwange to keep an eye on Gwunday, and woll him ovah evewy time he gets neah the ball. That will not be bwekin' the wules. We are entitled to keep the howlin' idiot off the ball, and pwevent him fwom wuinin' the game. You did not undahtake exactly to let Gwunday lose the match, I pwesume?"



Kangaroo charged Grundy and George Alfred gave a roar and sat there! The game surged

Tom Merry brightened up. "That's better," he admitted. "Of course, we're entitled to keep Grundy from throwing the game away with his fool tricks, if we can. We'll pass the word round to charge Grundy whenever he gets going."

"Good egg!" said Blake, mollified. Blake had been rather roughly handled by the great Grundy in the trial match, and the suggestion fitted in exactly with his ideas.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So long as Grundy plays centre-half, let him!" continued Tom. "When he begins playing the ox, we'll jump on him! I undertook to play Grundy as centre-half, not as giddy ox!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right enough," said Herries. "We'll charge him! Let him shove into me, that's all! I'll give him shoving!"

And so it was settled.

After tea Tom Merry confided the plan to the rest of the School House junior eleven, and the players concurred with wonderful unanimity.

Everybody, in fact, seemed keen to keep Grundy in his place.

From which it did not appear that George Alfred was likely to have a very enjoyable experience when he played for his House.



and rolled over. The Australian junior landed on him on and Grundy was out of it.

CHAPTER 9.

Good Old Figgins!

TOM MERRY was feeling a little anxious when Wednesday came round.

It turned out a fine, cold, clear day, first-rate for football, and in other circumstances Tom would have looked forward to the afternoon's match with great keenness and pleasure.

But there was little pleasure in the prospect of the match as matters stood.

Trimble was certainly improving in goal. Drastic measures had been used with Trimble. He had a great dislike for having his head knocked against a goalpost. For that reason he bucked up amazingly. Clumsiness and fatuity could not be helped, but slacking was visited with condign punishment, and Trimble was already learning not to slack.

And Racke's offer to stand him a stunning feed if he let the ball through every time was sadly declined by Trimble. The most stunning of feeds could not have consoled him for the handling he would have received if he had been detected slacking in the House match.

The penalties promised to Baggy if he did not do his best were simply terrifying. And it was certain that Baggy would do his best, such as it was.

As for Grundy, threats were useless. Threats would only have made him more obstinate.

The fellows had given up talking to him. Actions were wanted with Grundy, not words. And if he stepped over the line in the match, he was going to have action, hot and strong.

So Tom Merry hoped for the best, but he was not happy. He felt bound to resign the junior captaincy if the match was lost.

That price he had to pay for having been betrayed, in a moment of excitement, into unjustifiable swank.

He did not want to resign, and most of the fellows, on reflection, did not want him to, either. But it was settled. If his reckless challenge to Figgins & Co. lost his House a match, he felt that he had no choice in the matter.

So Tom had plenty to think of that morning, and Mr. Linton found him a little absent-minded in the Shell Form Room, in consequence.

There were lines for Tom Merry that morning, but it could not be helped, and Tom did not mind very much. Lines were little in comparison with the dismal prospects of the afternoon.

The School House footballers were early on the ground, Baggy Trimble being routed out, grumbling, from a corner by the fire.

Fellows began to gather on the ground from far and near. Grundy's performances in the trial match had been cut short by his being kicked off the field, but they had been very entertaining, as far as they went.

Grundy was the great attraction in the present match. Owing to Tom Merry's reckless undertaking, Grundy couldn't be kicked off the field this time; he was bound to play the game through. Many of the fellows—especially the New House fellows—looked forward to an enjoyable afternoon watching Grundy.

Fortunately, the rest of the team were in tip-top form.

The School House fellows punted the ball about while they were waiting for the New House team. Kick-off was fixed for half-past two.

Grundy stood looking on at the punting, talking

to Wilkins confiding to his chum the great things he was going to do in that match.

Grundy was still dreaming of goals!

Wilkins said nothing. He was in agreement with the rest to put the stopper on Grundy when he went in for goal-getting, but he did not feel inclined to inform George Alfred of the fact.

"Time the New House were here," remarked Wilkins at last, interrupting the flow of Grundy's eloquence. "Why, they're not changed yet—that fat boulder's in Etous!"

Wilkins stared at Fatty Wynn of the New House, who had strolled down to the ground, with his plump person attired as usual.

Tom Merry spotted him, and came over to him.

"Why haven't you changed, Fatty?" he exclaimed. "Are you going to keep us waiting?"

Fatty Wynn smiled.

"They'll be along in a minute," he said. "Figgins is routing out one of the team from a smoking-party in Clampe's study."

"Oh!" said Tom. "Well, isn't it time you changed?"

"I'm not keeping goal this afternoon."

Tom brightened. If the New House were leaving out their champion goalkeeper the School House chances were considerably increased.

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"Crocked?" he asked, with as much sympathy as he could possibly feel in the circumstances.

"Not a bit."

"What are you standing out for, then?"

"Taking a rest, you know," said Fatty Wynn affably. "Figgys's got another goalie for this match."

"Hallo, Lawrence! You not playing, either?" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Edgar Lawrence of the Fourth joined Fatty Wynn by the ropes.

Lawrence smiled and shook his head.

"No. Figgys's got another half this afternoon instead of me!"

"Oh, good! I—I mean——"

"Hallo! Here they come!" said Fatty Wynn.

The New House footballers appeared.

Tom Merry looked them over curiously. To his astonishment he saw Clampe of the Shell and Chowie of the Fourth in their ranks.

The two slackers were looking morose.

Tom stared at them blankly.

Why Figgins should be playing those two hopeless duffers in a House match was a deep and baffling mystery. He was under no compulsion to play two passengers as Tom Merry was.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "Surely Figgys is not ass enough to play those two howlin' fumblahs?"

"All the better for us if he does!" said Blake in wonder. "But what on earth is the little game?"

Talbot laughed.

He thought he could guess what the little game was.

"Figgins is a sportsman," he remarked. "I fancy he was only pulling Tommy's leg in accepting his challenge, and he's playing two duffers to level things up and make it a fair game."

"Bai Jove! If that is the case, I wegard it as weally wippin' of old Figgins!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Good man!" said Levison.

Tom Merry greeted Figgins with a stare of blank surprise as he led his merry men on the field.

Figgins nodded affably.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Ye-es. But—but——"

"But what, my infant?"

"What's the game?" demanded Tom.

"Football!" said Figgins innocently. And his followers chortled. "You don't expect us to play cricket, I suppose, at this time of the year?"

"Rats! I mean, why have you left out your goalie and your best half to play two crass asses like Clampe and Chowie?"

Figgins chuckled.

"My dear ass, you're playing two silly idiots in the School House team, aren't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, I'm playing two silly idiots, too! One good turn deserves another, you know. I was only pulling your leg." Figgins explained cheerily. "If you held to your swank, I intended to play my idiots to match yours all along!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. "I—I see!"

"Time you did!" grinned Kerr.

Tom Merry drew a deep, deep breath. He understood now, and he could forgive Figgins for pulling his leg over that reckless challenge. Certainly, rotten players as Trimble and Grundy were, they were not much worse than Clampe and Chowie.

"I—I say, Figgys, you're a sportsman!" said Tom. "But—but you're entitled to hold me to

my bargain if you like. We don't climb down, you know, and you can play whom you like."

"Bow-wow!" said Figgins. "We shall beat you, anyway! Whether we do or not, I don't want to snatch a win."

"Bai Jove! I vegard that as a vewy pwopah attitude, Figgins, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Figgins bowed almost to the ground in acknowledgment.

"If I had any doubts," he said solemnly, "they are settled now. After that, I feel quite easy in my mind."

"Weally, Figgins——"
"Look here, Figgins," growled Clampe sulkily, "I'm not keen on playing in this match, and if that's the way you put it——"

"That's the way I put it," said Figgins calmly.

"Then I don't care to play!"

"My dear ass, you couldn't play if you did care to. But you're going to do your best."

"I suppose I can walk off the field if I like?" sneered Clampe.

"Certainly, if you want a football boot to help you on again!" assented Figgins. "Quite your own choice."

"I've got another engagement for this afternoon," said Chowle sullenly. "I don't care for football, anyway."

"You wouldn't!" said Figgins.

"Well, I don't want to play in this match," retorted Chowle. "That's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Quite. Anything more to say?"

"I'm not playing, that's all!"

"Will you take hold of Chowle's par, Reddy?" asked Figgins. "Put him over and bang his napper on the ground."

"Hold on!" roared Chowle, in dismay. "I—I say, I'll play if you like, Figgins, of course."

"Oh, all right!" Figgins turned to Tom Merry again. "Ready when you are, dear boy. What do you think of my two recruits?"

"About as good as mine!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Look here, Figgins, if you really mean this——"

"What I have said, I have said!" remarked Figgins solemnly.

"Well"—Tom hesitated—"you're a good sport, Figgy, and I take back what I said in your study last week, about being able to beat the New House with Grundy and Trimble in my team. There!"

"The amende honourable!" grinned Kerr.

"All serene!" said Figgins, laughing. "We knew it was only School House swank, of course. Now, then, we're ready!"

The two skippers tossed the coin, and the footballers lined up.

Smith major was referee again.

Grundy tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Just a word, Merry!"

"Shut up!"

"You see that Figgins is playing Chowle in goal, for some reason!"

"Well?"

"Well, that means that we can score as many goals as we like, with the forwards really well led!" said Grundy eagerly. "Don't you think you'd better take my place, and let me in as centre-forward? As matters stand, it's clearly your duty—for the sake of the side, I mean."

"Get back!" roared Tom Merry.

"Now, look here, Merry——"

Kangaroo and Wilkins dragged Grundy away.

"Wilkins, did you ever see such an obstinate ass as that fellow Merry?" Grundy exclaimed, in

great exasperation. "When I've pointed out to him to——"

"You—you chucklehead!" said Wilkins. "You chump! You frabjous jabberwock! You burbling, piffing dummy!"

"Why, you cheeky ass——" began Grundy wrathfully.

Phoop!

The whistle went, and that very remarkable House match began.

CHAPTER 10.

Honours Divided!

"PLAY up, School House!"

"Go it, New House!"

"Go it, Grundy. Ha, ha, ha!"

All eyes were on the game when it started.

Chowle and Trimble, in the opposite goals, stamped about to keep warm. Neither were likely to have much else to do, if the respective teams could help it.

There were loud shouts of encouragement to Grundy, but they all came from New House fellows round the field. Now that a House match was at stake, the School House crowd were not eager to see George Alfred begin his marvellous performances.

But the School House fellows gave Clampe encouraging shouts. They would have been glad to see Leslie Clampe emulating Grundy.

Clampe, however, was not thinking of that. His object was to walk through the match with as little exertion as possible. Clampe did not believe in exerting himself at any game more strenuous than banker or nap.

But Grundy was bursting with energy, as usual.

As usual, he was prepared to play the whole game off his own bat, so to speak.

The shouts from the spectators spurred him on.

He did not discern that all this encouragement came from New House fellows. Their motive for it did not require much guessing; but Grundy did not guess.

He simply felt that he was called upon to play up and win that match for the House, and he meant to do it.

The New House forwards were in their rivals' half, attacking hotly, and Grundy defended valiantly. His defence took the form of charging the left-back over and falling on the right-back the next minute. Exactly what object Grundy expected to serve by these proceedings was a deep mystery, known only to Grundy himself.

Figgins, laughing almost too much to kick, brought the ball right up to goal, and sent it in with a shot Baggy Trimble could not have stopped in ten years.

There was a joyful howl from the New House.

"Goal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Baggy Trimble, with an apprehensive glance at Kangaroo. "Noble, you beast, I—I—I did my best!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't kill the goalkeeper—he's doin' his best!" chortled Cardew, in the crowd, and there was a roar.

"Mind you do, you fat villain!" growled Kangaroo. "Chuck that ball out and shut up, you grampus!"

"Look after that dangerous maniac, Kangy!" said Tom Merry, as the players went back to the centre.

"You bet!" said the Australian grimly. "I'm watching him now!"

School House kicked off, and the New House attacked again; but this time the attack was repelled.

Tom Merry and Talbot and D'Arcy then got through with the ball.

Now was Grundy's chance. He made a terrific rush after Tom Merry, to hook away the ball and send it flashing into the net. But before Grundy could charge his captain from behind Kangaroo played up, according to arrangements. He charged Grundy.

Grundy gave a roar and rolled over, and the Australian landed on him—and sat there.

The game surged on, and Grundy was out of it.

His valuable assistance could not be given. He wiggled and roared under the weight of the Cornstalk, but the important thing was to keep Grundy out of mischief, and Kangaroo did it.

He settled a little more heavily on Grundy's back and stayed there.

There was a roar as Tom Merry kicked for goal.

Chowle could not save that shot; in fact, he did not particularly want to. He kept his hands in the pockets of his footer shorts as the leather flew in.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah! Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern dropped back into goal, kicked the ball out, and then kicked Chowle.

There was an indignant roar from Chowle.

"Yah! Wharrer you at?"

"That's what I'm at!" said Redfern, landing another with his heavy boot. "Stop the next ball, my son! You can't keep goal with your hands in your pockets—you're not quite up to that, Chowle. Take 'em out, my son, or you'll get another like that!"

"Yaroooh!"

Chowle kept his hands out of his pockets after that.

The footballers lined up again.

Grundy, released by Kangaroo, had made a frontal attack upon the Australian junior, but he had been collared on all sides and bumped hard. Grundy was in a towering rage when he took his place again. It looked as if he were going to be roughly handled if he did not let the other fellows throw the match away—as he regarded it.

There was no doubt about the rough handling, at all events.

But Grundy was a stickler. As soon as play was resumed Grundy got going again. He succeeded in charging Talbot off the ball, and then he was charged himself.

He found himself on his back, and the moment he staggered up he found himself on his face. And then Wilkins—his own familiar friend—sat on him while the game swept away, and did not get up till there was no longer any danger of Grundy chipping in.

There was another goal for the School House.

Chowle seemed little better with his hands out of his pockets than with his hands in his pockets. But the score levelled up again when Koumi Rao got a chance, Trimble allowing the ball to slip through his hands.

"Two all!" grinned Fatty Wynn, watching the goalkeepers alternately with great interest. "It will be fifty-fifty at this rate!"

Fatty Wynn's prediction seemed on the way to being realised. Trimble was doing his best, in dire terror of the results if he didn't. But his best was not much use against the New House

forwards. He saved hardly a shot. It was only a question of getting through for the New House, and Grundy's marvellous play at centre-half made the getting through a much simpler proposition than was customary.

On the other hand, Chowle was an equally easy victim, and Clampe in the New House half-back line was as good as an open gate.

Clampe spent most of his time on the ground and gasping for breath.

Grundy spent most of his in being charged over and sat on. And the two goalkeepers were constantly occupied in watching the ball pass them into the net.

When the whistle announced the close of the first half the score stood at five for the School House and six for the New House, a score that was sufficiently remarkable in itself.

And there was still a half to play.

In the second half Grundy made one more attempt at brilliance, and he was charged and hustled and bumped and rolled over at such a rate that he simply hadn't any breath or energy left to play with, and he was quite quiet after that.

Clampe, by that time, had limped off the field and collapsed.

The game was fast and furious. As football it was not quite up to House match level, but it was full of push and go, at all events.

And the goals came along merrily.

With five minutes to go, New House stood at ten to the School House nine.

The crowd were husky with laughter.

In the last few minutes Tom Merry & Co. made a hot attack, and the ball went in—suiting Chowle on the nose and stretching him on his back in the New House goal.

Then the whistle went.

"Ten to ten!" said Fatty Wynn, almost weeping. "Oh, my hat! What a game!"

"What a game!" muttered Cardew, wiping his eyes. "A game like that on the cinema would bring down the house!"

The footballers came off, gasping a little.

The match had ended in a draw, with a remarkable score. Perhaps never before had 10—10 been registered in a game.

"Well, we drew with them!" Baggy Trimble remarked. "Lucky for you fellows you had me in goal, after all!"

"A draw!" said Grundy bitterly. "A measly draw! If I'd been allowed to play my own game the New House wouldn't have got ten to ten!"

"Bai Jove! More likely ten thousand to ten, deah boy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

To which George Alfred Grundy replied only with a scornful snort.

The great match had been played. The School House had not lost, and Tom Merry did not resign. But that unhappy result would certainly have been achieved but for the good sportsmanship of Figgins, and it was agreed that the honours were with Figgy.

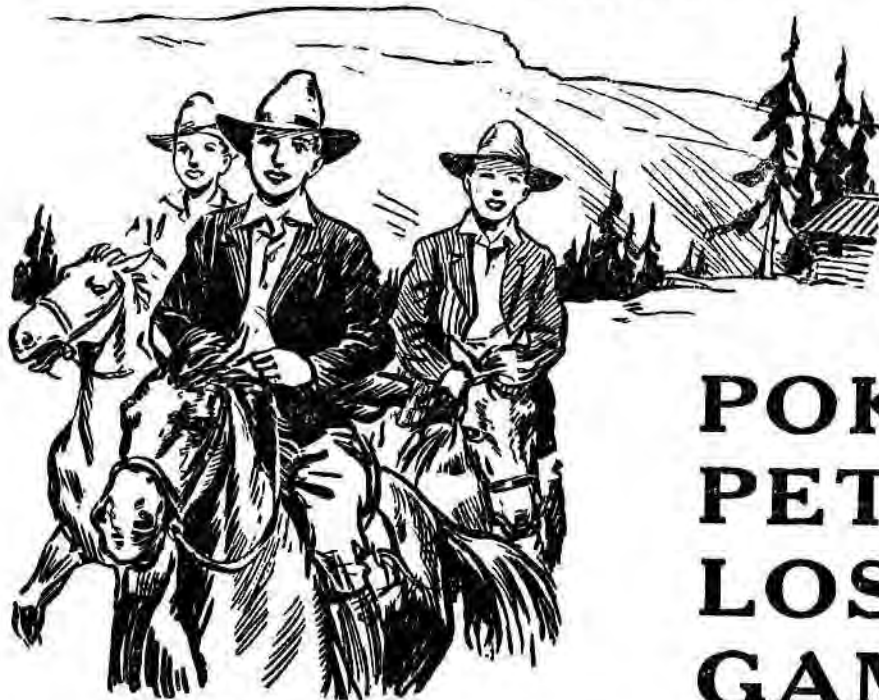
George Alfred Grundy was somewhat morose after the match. But he came round, and genially assured Tom Merry that he could rely upon him for the next House match.

To which Tom Merry's reply was the classic phrase:

"I don't think!"

THE END.

Next Wednesday: "THE ST. JIM'S SURPRISE PACKET!"



Frank Takes a Hand!

"THE brute!" Frank Richards' eyes blazed as he uttered the words. Frank and his Cousin Bob were on the way to Cedar Creek School in the frosty winter morning. As they approached the opening of the trail through the timber a loud, shrill squealing greeted their ears—the shrill, hysterical squealing of a horse in pain.

The chums quickened their pace and rode into the timber, and then the scene burst upon them that called that indignant exclamation from Frank's lips.

A horse was roped to a tree beside the trail, its head down to the trunk, and a man was raining blows upon it with a cowhide.

The schoolboys knew the man by sight. It was Poker Pete, the cardsharper of Thompson, an enterprising "sport" who lived by playing poker and ouchre with the cattlemen and ranchers.

The horse was a handsome animal, and evidently an expensive beast. Roped securely to the tree, the animal could only whirl about and kick, unable to get at its tormentor.

Taking care to keep out of reach of the lashing hoofs, Poker Pete lashed and lashed with the cowhide with all the strength of his arm.

The chums of Cedar Creek drew rein at once. "You coward!" bellowed Bob Lawless furiously. "Leave that horse alone!"

Poker Pete glared round. The man's swarthy face was set with rage, his eyes gleaming. He paused a moment in the cruel punishment.

"Mind your own business!" he snapped savagely.

Frank Richards jumped to the ground. "It is any decent fellow's business to interfere, you cowardly brute!" he exclaimed. "How dare you treat a horse like that!"

"It's my horse, you young fool!" "That doesn't give you a right to treat the animal in such a brutal way!" exclaimed Frank hotly. "You ought to be lynched!"

Poker Pete finds he's on a loser when Frank Richards and Bob Lawless save the cardsharper's horse from his cruelty!

POKER PETE'S LOSING GAME!

By Martin Clifford.

"Oh, don't chew the rag with me!" snarled Poker Pete. "Get on your way to school, you baby-faced whelp!"

He turned to the horse again, and the cowhide rose and fell with cruel force. The horse kicked and plunged and squealed.

Frank Richards ran forward, his teeth set. He grasped the ruffian, and dragged him back with such force that Poker Pete sat down in the snow with a bump.

Bob Lawless joined his chum at once, riding-whip in hand.

Poker Pete glared up at them breathlessly. "You—you—" he stuttered.

"Get up, you rotter, and try it on us instead of the horse!" exclaimed Bob. "We'll hand you as good as you give!"

The cardsharper staggered to his feet. He gripped the cowhide hard, and seemed on the point of rushing on the two schoolboys.

Frank and Bob faced him coolly, gripping their riding-whips.

It dawned on the sharper that he was not likely to get the best of such a contest, and he paused, gritting his teeth.

"You young rascals!" he shouted. "Can't you mind your own business? I'm breaking in that horse!"

"Liar!" said Bob cheerfully. "You're ill-treating it because you're a cowardly beast!"

"I tell you he threw me this morning!" said Poker Pete hoarsely. "I'm teaching him a lesson!"

"You should learn to ride, then!" said Bob contemptuously. "He wouldn't pitch me off, I guess. Take some riding lessons instead of playing poker so much in the Red Dog Saloon!"

"Will you clear off and leave me alone, you young hounds?" shouted Poker Pete.

"I guess not!"

Poker Pete seemed again on the point of springing at the chums, but again he restrained himself. He stepped back and leaned against a tree, with a bitter look, and took out his cigar-case.

"I guess I'll wait," he remarked.

The sharper knew that Rancher Lawless' son and nephew were on their way to school, and that they had no time to lose. He could afford to wait, and they could not.

Bob Lawless looked doubtfully at his chum.

"We shall be late, Franky!" he muttered.

Frank Richards' jaw set grimly. He did not intend to abandon the horse to the cruelty of its owner. He turned his back on the sharper and moved towards the panting horse.

"Look out, Frank!" exclaimed Bob anxiously.

"All serene, old scout!"

Frank was careful not to get within reach of the hoofs. The horse was in a frantic state from its savage punishment, and would certainly have smashed up friend or foe if within reach.

Its eyes gleamed wickedly round at Frank, and it made an effort to reach him with a kick. But the schoolboy kept clear.

He moved round the tree to which the animal's head was roped, and took out his clasp-knife.

Poker Pete started forward as he understood the schoolboy's intention.

"Let that rope alone!" he shouted.

"Stand clear!" answered Frank.

The rope passed right round the trunk, and from the safe side of the tree Frank Richards saved across it with the keen blade.

Bob Lawless ran back to the ponies in the trail, and mounted one, holding the other ready for Frank. As soon as the maddened horse was loose it was prudent to keep out of its reach.

Poker Pete ran towards Frank.

But the keen blade was through the rope in a couple of slashes, and the horse threw up its freed head.

The sharper made a desperate spring back, and leaped into the branches of the nearest tree as the animal reared and plunged. Frank Richards swung himself up on a branch.

With a shrill neigh, the black horse dashed out into the trail, his tail tossing wildly, his mane streaming in the wind.

Down the trail towards the distant Cedar Creek he went at a mad gallop, his reins on his neck, his hoofs thudding furiously.

Frank dropped to the ground again and went into the trail. He mounted his pony, and rode on with his chum after the fleeing horse.

Loud and savage curses came to their ears from Poker Pete as they rode on. But they were out of hearing in a few minutes.

The sharper was left to make his way home on foot, and his prospect of recapturing the horse, free now to take to the plains, was a very problematical one.

An Interruption at School!

BOB LAWLESS grinned as the chums rode on at a smart gallop on the timber trail.

Frank's face was still dark and angry, but it cleared, and he smiled as he met his chum's glance.

The thud of the runaway's hoofs had died away ahead.

"By gum!" Bob Lawless chuckled. "Has it

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struck you, Franky, that it's rather high-handed to let a galoot's horse loose like that?"

"Wasn't it the only thing to be done?" asked Frank.

"Ha, ha! Yes, from the gee-gee's point of view. I don't know what a lawyer would say about it, though."

"Well, I don't, either, and I don't care much!"

"Same here!" said Bob cheerfully. "Poker Pete will be in a terrible wax, though. That horse is worth a lot of money—three or four hundred dollars, at least. Poker Pete must have had a lot of luck lately with the pasteboards to buy a hoss like that."

"The rotten cad!" said Frank hotly. "Why, the poor brute was marked all over with that cowhide. I'm sorry now we didn't lay our whips about that sharper."

Bob laughed.

"Hallo! Here's the Cherub."

The chums reined in their ponies and dismounted as they saw Vere Beauclerc waiting at the fork of the trail. The remittance man's son joined them, and they walked on together.

The cousins were accustomed to walking the rest of the way to school, as Beauclerc had no horse.

"There's a runaway gee on the trail," Beauclerc remarked. "He passed me a few minutes ago, going like thunder."

"We know!" grinned Bob. "Franky conferred the boon of liberty upon him."

"Frank did?" questioned Beauclerc, in amazement.

Frank Richards explained.

"Jolly good!" exclaimed Beauclerc heartily. "The brute doesn't deserve to have a horse. That was a splendid animal, too. I wish I had the tin to buy him from that gambling brute."

"He didn't look an easy critter to ride," remarked Bob.

"No, that's so. I think I could ride him, though. I'd try, anyway."

Vere Beauclerc looked thoughtful as he walked along, and there was a shade on his brow. The son of the remittance man of Cedar Camp had little money at any time, and certainly never such a sum as would have purchased the black stallion.

When Mr. Beauclerc's remittance arrived from the Old Country it always went the same way—in the payment of part of a mass of pressing debts, and the rest in a "binge" at Thompson.

The grim hand of poverty was always to be seen in the shack by the creek where Beauclerc lived with his father.

"Here we are, and here's Chunky," said Bob Lawless, as they arrived at Cedar Creek. "Found any more gold-mines, Chunky?"

Chunky Todgers greeted the chums with a fat grin as they came in at the gates. But he did not reply, as his fat cheek was distended by an enormous chunk of maple sugar, which he had not yet masticated.

"Just in time," said Frank Richards, as the bell began to ring, and the chums went on to the schoolhouse.

Frank Richards was rather thoughtful in class that morning. He was not wholly occupied in thinking about his lessons, either, as Miss Meadows found once or twice. Frank was wondering what would be the outcome of his morning's adventure.

Though he was quite satisfied with the action he had taken, he knew that the legal aspect of it was at least doubtful.

For Poker Pete himself Frank had no fear; nothing but the most profound contempt. But he had the inborn British respect for the law, and he wished that there had been some other way of saving the black horse from Poker Pete's cruelty.

Morning lessons at Cedar Creek were half-way through when there was a clatter at the door, and it was thrown open.

Miss Meadows turned round sharply, and Mr. Slimmey looked over from the junior class.

Poker Pete of Thompson strode unceremoniously into the school-room.

Frank and his chums exchanged a quick look.

"Now for the circus!" murmured Bob.

"I don't care," said Frank.

"Same here, old scout!"

Miss Meadows fixed a freezing look upon the cardsharper. She knew him by sight, and Poker Pete had once had the audacity to "propose" to the mistress of Cedar Creek—a proposal that had been answered very shortly and sharply.

Poker Pete stared round him insolently, but as he met Miss Meadows' glance he had the grace to remove his hat.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Miss Meadows sharply. "You have no right to intrude here during lessons."

"I guess I've got something to say to you, schoolmarm," answered the cardsharper coolly.

"Kindly be brief, then."

"Two of your precious pupils have stolen my horse, and I want him," said Poker Pete.

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, nonsense, is it?" exclaimed the cardsharper angrily. "I guess if that animal isn't handed over to me, I'll lay the case before the sheriff at Thompson. Horse thieves aren't popular in the Thompson Valley, Miss Meadows."

"What boys do you accuse?" asked the schoolmistress.

Poker Pete jerked his thumb at Frank Richards and Bob Lawless.

"Them's the thieves," he answered.

Frank Richards got to his feet.

"That's a lie, and you know it!" he called out.

"Richards!" exclaimed Miss Meadows reprovingly.

"Sorry, ma'am," said Frank, his face crimson. "That bully is lying, all the same."

"Bully, hey?" shouted Poker Pete threateningly.

"Yes, cowardly bully, if you like that better!" retorted Frank Richards.

"Hear, hear!" grinned Bob.

Poker Pete made a stride towards the class, his brows knitted, and his hands clenched.

"Stop!" exclaimed Miss Meadows.

Frank picked up his ruler, and looked at the cardsharper with flashing eyes.

Poker Pete stopped, probably more influenced by the ruler than by Miss Meadows' command. He muttered an oath between his teeth.

"Kindly keep your temper, and tell me exactly what complaint you have to make of Richards," said Miss Meadows coldly. "I will hear you."

Exit Poker Pete!

FRANK RICHARDS stood facing the cardsharper over his desk, quite undaunted.

Many of the fellows were on their feet now, and the looks they gave Poker Pete were not at all friendly. The Cedar Creek fellows

naturally resented the attempt of the Thompson sharper to "bulldoze" in their school-room.

The sharper gave Frank Richards a black scowl and turned to the schoolmistress again.

"That young thief's got my horse," he said sullenly. "I guess I'm going to have the critter back, or there'll be trouble."

"Is that true, Richards?"

"No, ma'am."

"Tell me what occurred, then."

Frank Richards explained the incident of the morning.

"You set the horse free?" said Miss Meadows, with a troubled look, when he had finished.

"Yes, ma'am. It was the only thing to do."

"You should have seen how that brute was beating it, Miss Meadows!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "He had drawn blood."

"I guess it was my horse," said Poker Pete.

"So you were ill-treating an animal and Richards interfered!" said Miss Meadows contemptuously. "I cannot blame Richards for that. As for stealing the horse, you know yourself that it is not true."

"The hoss was taken away from me," said Poker Pete doggedly. "If it isn't handed back, I'm laying a complaint before the sheriff."

"Do you know where the horse is now, Richards?"

"Somewhere in the timber, I suppose, ma'am."

"You see for yourself that Richards cannot hand it to you, as he does not even know where it is," said Miss Meadows.

"I guess it's all bunkum about setting the hoss loose," said Poker Pete. "They've got the critter hidden somewhere in the timber, I reckon, to sell it down the valley when they get a chance."

"That's false, and you know it!" said Frank.

"I do not believe that for a moment," said Miss Meadows, "and I do not believe that you think so, either. Your horse is not here, and you have no further business here. You had better go."

"Oh, come off!" said Poker Pete roughly. "I guess I'll levant when it suits me and not before!"

Mr. Slimmey came over towards the cardsharper, his eyes gleaming behind his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Miss Meadows has asked you to go!" he said.

Poker Pete looked at the slim young man and burst into a contemptuous laugh.

"Perhaps you could make me go?" he sneered.

"I shall try, if you do not obey Miss Meadows," answered Mr. Slimmey very quietly.

"Ha, ha! Why, I'd break you across my knee, you whipper-snapper!" roared Poker Pete. "By gum, I guess I'll do it, anyway!"

He strode towards the young master, his fists clenched, the expression on his swarthy face savage and brutal.

Mr. Slimmey was not an athlete by any means. He looked as powerless as an infant beside the thick-set, strong-limbed ruffian from Thompson. But what Mr. Slimmey lacked in physical strength he made up in courage. He slipped his gold-rimmed glasses into his pocket, and faced the ruffian with steady eyes.

Miss Meadows stepped between.

"Stand back!" she exclaimed angrily.

"Ha, ha!" roared Poker Pete. "Are you going to hide behind the schoolmarm, Mr. Teacher?"

Mr. Slimmey flushed.

"Miss Meadows—" he began.

"Kindly go back to your class, Mr. Slimmey,"

said the schoolmistress. "As for you, sir, leave this school-room at once!"

"I guess not!" said Poker Pete insolently.

Bob Lawless jumped up.

"Then, by gum, we'll make you!" he exclaimed.

"Come on, you fellows!"

"What-ho!" exclaimed Tom Lawrence.

A dozen fellows came out from the desks.

Poker Pete backed away.

"Sling him out!" shouted Frank Richards.

"Stop!" exclaimed Miss Meadows. "Go at once, my man! Do you hear?"

Poker Pete was already backing towards the doorway. He had no desire to be handled by the sturdy Canadian lads.

With a black and bitter look he strode out of the school-room, slamming the door behind him.

"Go to your places at once, boys!" said Miss Meadows severely.

The schoolboys returned to their desks, and lessons were resumed, without any further interruption from Poker Pete.

Called on the Carpet!

FRANK RICHARDS and Bob Lawless were both in an unusually thoughtful frame of mind as they rode home that evening, after parting with Vere Beauclere on the trail.

Poker Pete's visit to the school had given them food for thought. If the cardsharper carried his complaint to the sheriff they could not guess what the result would be.

Yet Frank could not regret what he had done. His blood boiled at the thought of the cruelty he had witnessed, and if the affair had happened over again he would not have left the unfortunate animal to the tender mercies of its owner.

Billy Cook, the foreman, met the schoolboys on the trail to the ranch, and made a sign to them. They drew rein.

"What have you young galoots been up to—eh?" demanded Billy Cook, with a solemn shake of the head.

"Anything happened, Billy?" asked Frank.

"Yep!"

"Oh! Has Poker Pete been here?" exclaimed Frank.

"You've hit it. I guess he's still here," said the ranchman, eyeing the schoolboys curiously. "I'm giving you the tip!"

"Thanks!" said Bob. "Is the popper mad with us?"

"I guess so—a little," admitted Billy Cook. "Poker Pete's spun a yarn about you stealing his boss."

"Well, popper wouldn't believe that, anyway."

"Nope! He reckons it's one of your tricks, and he's waiting for you to come home," said Cook, with a grin. "Pete's waiting, too. He's threatening to lay the case before the sheriff of Thompson!"

"Let him!" growled Frank. "If he had a good case, he'd have laid it before the sheriff already!"

Billy Cook nodded, and the schoolboys rode on to the ranch.

It was in a rather troubled frame of mind that the chums of Cedar Creek entered the ranch-house, after putting up their ponies.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed Mr. Lawless gruffly, as they came in.

Mrs. Lawless looked very distressed, but she did not speak.

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Poker Pete was in the room, with an unlighted cigar gripped between his teeth. His eyes gleamed at the sight of the two schoolboys.

"Yes, here we are, dad," said Bob.

"Have you brought the horse here?" demanded the rancher.

"Eh? What horse?"

"Poker Pete's horse, of course. He says you took it away from him in the timber this morning!" said the rancher gruffly.

"I'm sure they did nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawless.

Bob gave his mother an affectionate grin.

"Right!" he answered.

The rancher looked puzzled.

"Did you have anything at all to do with the man's horse?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that much is true, uncle," said Frank Richards.

"Well, tell me what you did."

"They'll tell you lies, of course!" sneered Poker Pete. "But I reckon I want that animal, or there'll be trouble!"

The rancher turned on him angrily.

"My son won't tell me lies, or my nephew, either," he said. "I'll thank you to keep your tongue between your teeth, Poker Pete. Now, then, Bob, I'm waiting to hear you!"

"Frank had better spin the yarn!" grinned Bob. "He's a better hand than I am. Go ahead, Franky; I'm going to get busy with this corn-cake!"

Frank smiled, but his face became grave as he related the incident of the morning.

His voice vibrated with indignation as he told how the tied-up animal had been lashed with the cowhide.

The rancher listened with a rather grim expression on his bronzed face. But his face relaxed after a time.

"We couldn't do anything but what we did," concluded Frank. "It would have been mean and cowardly to leave the poor animal to that brute!"

"I knew the boys were right," remarked Mrs. Lawless.

The rancher smiled.

"Hold on!" he said. "Horses need larruping sometimes, Frank, my lad, and we don't stand on ceremony on this side of the Rockies. A man's horse is a man's horse."

"I guess so!" chimed in Poker Pete emphatically.

"Yes, I know, uncle," said Frank. "But there's a limit. The brute had drawn blood; the horse was marked all over. He was nearly mad with pain. You should have seen how he bolted when I set him loose!"

Mr. Lawless nodded.

"Still, I guess it's a bit high-handed to set a man's horse loose in this country," he said.

Frank coloured.

"I'm sorry if you think I did wrong, uncle," he said.

"I don't know about that. It depends a good deal on the way the man was treating the horse," said the rancher. "You're quite sure Poker Pete was actually cruel to the beast?"

"I wish you could have seen it," said Frank.

"There was blood running down its flanks!"

"Robert, you cannot blame the boys!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawless warmly. "I should be ashamed of them if they had not interfered!"

"Leave it to me, Mary," said the rancher. His brow was wrinkled with thought. He turned at

last to Poker Pete, who was waiting with a sneering face. "I guess, Poker Pete, that the boys have made out their case. You were treating that horse badly, and they were bound to chip in."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob delightedly; and Frank Richards looked very relieved.

Poker Pete gritted his teeth.

"I guess you're not the judge in the matter," he said. "I claim that horse, and it's mine. I reckon you ought to cowhide those two rascals."

"I guess you'll be disappointed on that score," said the rancher, unmoved.

"That's as you choose!" sneered Poker Pete.

"But you'll hear from the sheriff about my hoss,

Mr. Lawless stepped between him and the door, and the cardsharpener halted, with a furious look.

"Let me pass!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"I haven't finished with you yet!"

"I'm finished with you, and I'm going!"

"I'm not finished, and you're not going!" answered Mr. Lawless calmly.

There was a pause, and the chums looked on breathlessly.

But the cardsharpener did not care to try conclusions with the stalwart Canadian rancher. And Billy Cook's burly form loomed up in the porch outside. Poker Pete stepped back, with a muttered curse.



The horse kicked and plunged and squealed as Poker Pete whipped it with cruel force. Frank Richards ran forward, his teeth set. He grasped the cardsharpener and dragged him back with such force that the ruffian sat down in the snow with a bump!

I promise you! Hoss-thieves are not encouraged in the Thompson Valley!"

"Better language, please, Poker Pete!" said the rancher quietly. "I guess I've made up my mind. I've always known you for a card trickster, and I know now that you are a bully and a brute! If I'd been on the scene this morning I'd have laid my cowhide about you!"

Poker Pete flushed up with rage.

"The matter can be settled," continued the rancher in the same stolid way, quite unheeding the looks of the Thompson cardsharpener. "The boys speak of a black horse. I guess that's the horse I've seen you with in Cedar Camp. How much did you give for it?"

"What's that to do with the matter?"

"I'm willing to buy it from you."

"I'm not willing to sell," said Poker Pete coolly. "I'm going to get that horse back!"

He made a movement towards the door as he spoke.

"What do you want?" he muttered.

"I want to buy that horse!" answered Mr. Lawless.

"I won't sell!"

"You will!"

And again there was a breathless pause.

Brought to Terms!

POKER PETE stood with his hands clenched, his eyes blazing at the calm, stolid rancher.

His rage did not affect Mr. Lawless in the least; indeed, he did not seem to observe it. He was as calm and unmoved as if he were conducting an ordinary business transaction.

Frank and Bob were smiling now.

Mrs. Lawless went quietly from the room.

"The horse is lost at present, it seems," said the rancher, after a pause. "You claim that it has been stolen."

"It has been stolen!" hissed Poker Pete.
 "Lost, at all events. You claim compensation, I understand?"
 "Yes, hang you!"
 "Very good. Sell me the horse at a reasonable figure, and I'll take the risk of not finding him," said Mr. Lawless.

It was a fair enough offer, but Poker Pete was not in the least inclined to accept it.

"Yes or no?" asked the rancher impatiently.

"No!" snapped Poker Pete.

"You won't sell the horse?"

"No, I won't sell him!"

"Not though he's lost, and, according to your own yarn, you can't recover him?"

"I guess I shall get him back some time," said the cardsharpener.

"How much did you give for that horse, Poker Pete?"

"Find out!"

"I intend to," said Mr. Lawless calmly. "You there, Billy?"

"Hyer I am, boss!" answered Billy Cook from outside.

"Bring me a riding-whip, will you?"

"Won't I just!" grinned Billy Cook.

Poker Pete turned pale. His hand slid inside his jacket to the hip-pocket, which concealed a weapon.

Mr. Lawless' quiet glance upon him never wavered.

"If you draw a gun here, Poker Pete, I'll have you up before the sheriff, and have you sent to prison for five years by a Thompson jury!" he said coldly. "You're not in Boot Leg Camp or the Black Hills now, my man!"

Poker Pete drew a hissing breath.

"Will you let me pass?" he muttered in a choking voice.

"Not yet, I guess. Answer my question!"

"I—I didn't buy the horse," muttered Poker Pete. "I won him ever a poker game."

"I might have guessed that," assented the rancher, with a nod. "What figure would you put on him to sell?"

"I'm not going to sell!"

"I should say three hundred dollars," remarked the rancher.

"You can say what you like!" sneered Poker Pete. "I'm not selling!"

"I don't want to skin you on the deal," continued Mr. Lawless, unheeding. "It's a good horse, I should say. I've seen him, and I know something about horseflesh. What do you say to three hundred and fifty?"

"I'm not selling!"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" repeated Poker Pete, between his teeth. "Because I'm going to cut him into ribbons after I get hold of him, even if I lose half the value of the beast in doing it!"

He cast a malignant glance at Frank Richards as he spoke, all his cruel nature gleaming in his eyes. He knew what the boy felt like when he heard that savage threat uttered, and there was no doubt that the ruffian meant it.

Mr. Lawless looked the cardsharpener over with a calm eye. His bronzed face was just a trifle harder and grimmer.

"So that's the game, is it?" he remarked.

"Yes, that's the game—and be hanged to you!"

"I don't think you'll play that game," said the rancher quietly. "I'm offering you three hundred and fifty for that horse, Poker Pete."

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"Make it three thousand, and I'll say the same!"

"I don't intend to make it three thousand. Three hundred and fifty is the figure. Bob, bring pen and ink and paper here for the gentleman."

"Yes, dad."

Bob brought the writing materials at once.

Poker Pete looked at them and at him, and then at the rancher, puzzled and savage.

"I'm not going to sell you the horse!" he exclaimed. "Do you think you can make me?"

Mr. Lawless nodded.

"Yes, I think I can make you," he answered calmly.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Frank Richards. He had never admired his uncle so much as he did at this moment.

Bob's face was beaming.

"Make me?" repeated Poker Pete, in angry amazement.

"I guess so."

Billy Cook entered the room with a riding-whip in his hand and a grin on his rugged face.

There was no love lost between the honest cattleman and the sharper from Thompson.

"Hyer you are, boss!"

Mr. Lawless took the riding-whip and advanced towards the cardsharpener. Poker Pete's hand slid into his hip-pocket again.

"Lay a finger on me and I'll let daylight through you!" he said hoarsely.

"And be hanged afterwards at Kamloops," smiled Mr. Lawless. "I guess that's all moonshine, Poker Pete. I'm risking it, anyhow."

Poker Pete's face was pale with rage. But he did not draw his gun. The Thompson Valley was not the Black Hills, and Poker Pete knew the difference.

Mr. Lawless, with his left hand, pointed to the writing materials on the table.

"Make out the paper," he said. "Put in the horse's description and sign the receipt for three hundred and fifty dollars sale price. It's a bit over the mark, but you're welcome to the difference."

"It won't hold in law," muttered Poker Pete, gnawing his lip.

"I think it will. You'll be welcome to dispute it in the law courts afterwards, if you like."

Poker Pete clenched his hands.

"You know I'd have no chance—a sportsman against a rich rancher—in the law courts," he muttered.

"That's your look-out!" said Mr. Lawless. "You're a cardsharpener by your own choice, I suppose. There's work for you to do in Canada, if you choose; and in your own country, too, I dare say. But I've wasted enough time on you, Poker Pete. You're going to sell me that horse, and I take my chance of recovering him. The butt-end of the bargain is on your side. I may be simply throwing my money away if the horse isn't caught. You ought to be glad of the chance."

"I won't sell!" shouted Poker Pete furiously.

"You'll be thrashed till you do, then."

"Oh, ripping!" gasped Bob.

Poker Pete sprang back and then made a desperate rush for the door. Billy Cook grinned and collared him. He grasped the sharper's arm, and held back his hand from the hip-pocket, for the desperate man might have drawn the revolver at that moment.

"Take his pillbox away, Bob," said Billy Cook, holding the rascal in his muscular grip.

Bob Lawless jerked the revolver from Poker Pete's pocket, and laid it on the table.

"Throw him over here, Billy!" said Mr. Lawless.

Crash!

The sharper sprawled on the floor at the rancher's feet. The riding-whip sang through the air and came down across Poker Pete's shoulders with a cut that made him howl with pain.

He scrambled away and staggered to his feet.

"Are you selling yet?" asked the rancher calmly.

The sharper panted.

"Hang you! I'll sell!"

"Good! You might as well have saved the time you've wasted. Put it in black and white."

Panting with rage, the baffled rascal sat down at the table and jabbed the pen into the ink.

"Make the receipt for three hundred and sixty—that covers the popgun," said Mr. Lawless. "You're better without this popgun, my man. It will get you into trouble some day."

Poker Pete was too enraged to reply, but he did as he was bidden.

He finished the paper, and Mr. Lawless picked it up and read it carefully through. Then he nodded.

"I guess that's square. It's a good sale," he said. "Bob, take this key, and fetch me three hundred dollars from the strong-box in my room."

"Yes, dad."

Poker Pete rose to his feet, black with rage and humiliation.

Mr. Lawless, quite unmoved, called Billy Cook to witness the document, which the ranchman did with great gusto.

Mr. Lawless folded the paper and placed it methodically in his pocket-book. The black horse was his property now—if found.

As the animal was still at large, the former owner had the "butt-end" of the bargain, as the rancher expressed it, but he did not look gratified.

Bob came back with the Canadian bills, and Mr. Lawless counted them over and laid them on the table.

"There's your money, Poker Pete!"

The cardsharp gathered up the money sullenly and savagely. He was beaten, and the money was all that remained to him.

"Now you can go, and the sooner the better!" added Mr. Lawless.

Poker Pete stepped towards the door, and Billy Cook, grinning, stepped aside to let him pass. In the doorway the sharper half-turned, his eyes gleaming.

"I'll remember this!" he said in a choking voice. "My turn will come!"

"Your turn in the penitentiary perhaps," said the rancher. "It's high time you were there, my friend. And I'll give you a warning. There's law in Canada to deal with brutes of your sort, and if you don't take mighty good care you'll find yourself inside Kamloops Prison. Now get out before you're kicked out!"

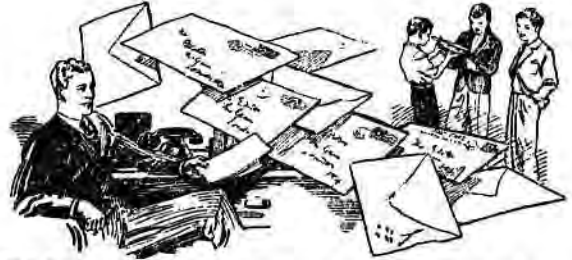
The sharper gave one last savage look of hatred round the room, and tramped out, and his footsteps died away.

Billy Cook, grinning from ear to ear, followed him out.

"Oh, dad!" exclaimed Bob breathlessly. "It was ripping! I never reckoned you'd deal with that bulldozer like that!"

"It was splendid, uncle," said Frank Richards.

(Continued on page 36.)



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

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

HALLO, CHUMS! The New Year has dawned. Once more we settle down to the work and pleasures of another year. What does 1939 hold in store for us? No one can foretell, and perhaps it's just as well for the peace of mind of many. But let's hope that there are happy and prosperous times ahead for all of us.

"THE ST. JIM'S SURPRISE PACKET!"

The GEM itself is starting the New Year well. This number contains a grand programme, and next Wednesday there are three more extra-good school stories, and also the other sparkling features.

Let us take the St. Jim's yarn first. This is one of those rollicking, humorous stories, in the writing of which Martin Clifford always excels himself. The old rivalry between School House and New House flares up again. Figgins & Co. get the upper hand first, but Tom Merry & Co. turn the tables on them to such good purpose that Figgins is ridiculed by his own supporters. Something must be done to restore the prestige of the New House. Then it is that Kerr thinks of a masterly scheme for putting them on top again. It's a real surprise packet, so don't miss the fun.

"THE HORSE HUNTERS!"

This exciting yarn of the chums of Cedar Creek is the sequel to the one in this issue. The black stallion which Frank Richards & Co. have saved from the brutality of Poker Pete is still running wild, and no one is able to get near enough to capture it. So it is that Frank and his chums decide to take up the hunt. Rancher Lawless and Billy Cook, his foreman, laugh at the schoolboy horse hunters when they make known their intention. But there is an old saying that he who laughs last laughs longest, and you will see next week who laughs longest.

"THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER!"

The exam for the Founders' Scholarship, for which Jack Drake has swotted so hard and on the winning of which depends his chance of remaining at St. Winny's, is due to be held at last. Jack's only serious rival is Estcourt, and he discovers that the scholarship means as much to his rival as it does to himself. It's very unfortunate that one of them will have to say good-bye to the Benbow, but there it is. Estcourt fears that Jack will beat him in the exam, and he takes it very much to heart. It is to be regretted that he listens to the voice of the tempter—Daubeny of the Shell, Jack's enemy. Daubeny's scheme is to "dope" Jack before the exam and so spoil his chances, and he leaves it to Estcourt to do the "dirty" work. Will the latter succumb to the temptation? You will enjoy every word of this great yarn.

To round off this tip-top story programme, our old friends Blake, Lowther, and Kerr are in fine fettle again. Jack speaks his mind to a few more readers, Monty is more mirthful than ever, while we find Kerr absorbed in a deep problem called "The Wireless Alibi." Another batch of "Pen Pals" and more prize jokes complete the number.

Chin-chin, chums!

THE EDITOR.

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Daubeny was borne to the floor under the attack of his chums, and then Torrence and Egan poured out the vials of their wrath by means of a bottle of ink on the head of their leader!

Daub's Great Wheeze!

“ONE after another!” said Vernon Daubeny. “Ahem!” remarked Torrence dubiously. “Hum!” murmured Egan.

Vernon Daubeny leaned back in the luxurious armchair in his study on the old Benbow, and regarded his chums with a sarcastic smile through the curl of smoke from his cigarette.

Generally, his faithful followers were prepared to back him up; the word of the great Daub was a law unto the bucks of St. Winifred's. But now there seemed to be considerable doubt in the matter.

“One after another,” repeated Daubeny. “Us three first—then Seecy and Chilcot can take a hand—”

“But—who's goin' to begin?” asked Egan.

“One of us,” answered Daubeny carelessly.

“We'll toss a penny for it if you like!” “That's all very well, but you know how jolly lefty Drake is,” said Egan, still more dubiously.

“Well, even a lickin' is worth while to carry out the scheme, isn't it?”

“Yes, if you get it, old chap. If I get it, I don't know.”

“Oh rats!”

Vernon Daubeny blew out a cloud of smoke. Daubeny's active brain had thought out a new plan for dealing with Jack Drake, his former pal, and present foe; and the hesitation of his followers was rather annoying.

“Now look here,” he said, “you know how the matter stands. The exam for the Founder's Scholarship comes off soon, and if Drake doesn't bag it he goes. His father can't pay his fees here next term. If only we can dish him for the exam, we're clear of the cad for good. I tell you,

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BUCKS ON THE WARPATH!

By Owen Conquest.

he's got to be dished. We've tried more than one way—”

“And failed in all!” put in Torrence.

“We shan't fail this time. This is a corker,” said Daubeny impressively. “We've got plenty of causes for quarrelling with Drake, and no fellow can find fault with being asked to have it out in the gym. He's criticised your football, Egan—said some awfully pointed things about it. That's a reason for challenging him.”

“Hum!”

“He's called you a tailor's dummy, Torrence!”

“Let him!” said Torrence philosophically. “I don't mind!”

“It's grounds for challenging him!”

“H'm!”

“With a fight on his hands every day how is he goin' to swot for the exam?” Daubeny went on. “Besides, he won't be fit. It's a splendid wheeze now the time's gettin' close!”

“Too jolly palpable!” said Egan. “Why,

Daubeny & Co. try a new dodge for upsetting Jack Drake's swotting. But it proves all too painful for the bucks of the Benbow!

every fellow on the Benbow will tumble to the game, when Drake's had a fight or two!”

“Let 'em tumble! If Drake doesn't want to be called into the gym, he should keep guard over his tongue!” said Daubeny, with a sneer. “He's called us names enough for us to get angry. I suppose you fellows aren't afraid of gettin' knocked about a bit?”

“No need for us to get knocked about!” said Egan determinedly. “You can take on Drake, as it's your idea!”

“One after another—as I said; it's got to be kept up, or the game's no good!”

“And you're goin' to begin?” persisted Egan. “I'll stroll along to Drake's study and carry your challenge, if you like, Daub.”

Daubeny knitted his brows. Excellent as his scheme was for spoiling Jack Drake's chance of winning the scholarship, he did not seem eager to carry it out personally.

There was no doubt that Jack Drake, though a peaceful fellow enough, was a fearfully hard hitter on occasion. That, undoubtedly, was a drawback in Daubeny's little scheme.

“We'll toss up for first man in,” said Daubeny

at length. "That's fair play all round. You fellows toss, and I'll toss with the loser!"

"That's all very well——"

"Oh, be sports!" urged Daubeny.

Egan and Torrence looked at one another. They could not help feeling that it was up to Daub to carry out his scheme himself, or at least to set a glorious example.

"I'm goin' to take my turn with the rest, of course," said Daubeny. "Fair play all round. Toss up for it."

"Oh, all right!" said Torrence at last.

"Turn out a coin, Egan, and look a bit more cheery about it!"

"I think it's rather too palpable," said Egan. "Mr. Paake might notice what's going on and interfere——"

"Are you goin' to toss with Torrence, or are you funk'in'?" asked Daubeny scornfully.

Egan flushed.

"Oh, I'm game!" he said. "Here you are, Torrence!"

He threw up a penny.

"Head," said Torrence hopefully.

Head it was. Torrence breathed a bit more freely. He was much more inclined now to back up Daubeny's idea with some enthusiasm. For the first fight with Jack Drake rested between Egan and Daubeny now.

Egan looked moody, however.

"Cheer up, Egan!" said Daubeny sarcastically. "Even if you scrap with Drake you're not goin' to a funeral, you know. Besides, you might lick him!"

"Oh rats!" grunted Egan.

Daubeny took a shilling from his waistcoat pocket.

"Head I win, tail you win," he said. "Right?"

"Yes, if you like; throw it clear," added Egan suspiciously. "Let it roll!"

"Certainly, old chap!"

Vernon Daubeny threw up the shilling and it struck the planks overhead. Then it dropped to the floor, struck a chair-leg, and rolled over. Evidently there was no deception about that throw.

Egan looked at it and scowled. Daubeny leaned over and smiled at the coin, which presented King George's head to the view. Daubeny had won the toss. He picked the shilling up, and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket again.

"You're the man, Egan!"

Egan grunted an ungracious assent.

And Daubeny smiled sweetly. It was not the first time that his double-headed shilling had come in useful!

On the Warpath!

TUCKEY TOODLES came into Study No. 8 in the Fourth with a grin upon his fat and grubby face. Jack Drake and Dick Rodney were in the study, comparing notes on Horace. Tuckey Toodles interrupted them without ceremony. He was not interested in Drake's work for the scholarship exam.

"I say, Drake——"

"Shurrup!"

"Daub's coming here!"

"Bother Daub!"

"But he's coming!" said Tuckey Toodles. "I say, I've heard him in the Common-room! Did you say that Egan played like a sack of coke in the Redclyffe match, Drake?"

"I dare say I did. Dry up!"

"Well, Egan's going to wallop you for it."

"Eh—what?"

"Daub's going to bring you his challenge."

"How do you know, ass?"

"He was saying so in the Common-room, before a lot of fellows. Daub's very indignant," said Tuckey impressively. "He says it's been hinted that his pal Egan has cold feet, because he let you run on about his footer. Now Egan's calling you to account."

"What rot!" said Drake impatiently. "Everybody knows that Egan plays footer like a born dummy. I suppose half St. Winifred's called him names over his last exhibition. Is he going to fight the whole school?"

"He's going to fight you, Drake," said a cool voice in the doorway. And Vernon Daubeny's eyeglass glimmered into the study.

Jack Drake looked round.

"What's the game, Daub?" he snapped.

Daubeny strolled gracefully in. Torrence was with him, and two or three of the Fourth had followed from the Common-room.

"I'm acting as Egan's second in this matter, Drake," Daubeny explained. "You've been callin' him names——"

"Rot!"

"Criticisin' him——"

"Bosh!"

"Unless you take back what you've said and apologise——"

"Rats!"

"You refuse?"

Drake laughed impatiently.

"I'm blessed if I remember half I've said on the subject!" he exclaimed. "Egan plays footer like a born idiot, and I dare say I've said so—and so has every chap in the Fourth, I suppose."

"You've accused him of foulin'——"

"I haven't accused him; I've stated the fact. A dozen fellows saw him foul in the Redclyffe match, and disgrace the school."

"Well, havin' said all that, I suppose you're not goin' to refuse to fight the fellow you've insulted?" said Daubeny, with a sneer.

"Not at all. If Egan wants a licking he can come along here and get one. I've got five minutes to spare."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a loud laugh from the juniors gathering in the passage.

Daubeny compressed his lips.

"Will you fix a time and place for meetin' Egan, Drake?" he snapped.

Drake shook his head.

"No, I won't!" he answered.

"You want to crawl out——"

"Oh, cheese it!" interrupted Drake unceremoniously. "I'm working for the exam, as you know. You've tried to muck up my swotting often enough. I'm not going to make any arrangements. If Egan wants any trouble let him come here, and I'll step out into the passage and deal with him. That's all I've got to say."

"Look here——"

"That's all, I say!" exclaimed Drake, rising. "And now you can travel, Daub, or I shall fight you instead of Egan. Savvy?"

Daubeny stepped out of the study rather hastily. Slam!

The study door closed almost on Daubeny's nose. There was a howl of laughter in the passage as the chief of the bucks turned away, his face

crimson with rage. Even Torrence was grinning a little.

"Oh, I say!" murmured Tuckey Toodles.

Rodney laughed, but his face became grave again.

"It's jolly queer Egan sending you a challenge like this, Drake," he said. "It's weeks since the footer match, and if he wanted to take offence he's had lots of time."

"I suppose Daub's at the bottom of it," grunted Drake.

Rodney nodded.

"It's another of Daub's tricks," he said. "Look here, with the exam so close at hand, Drake, you're entitled to refuse anything of the sort. What becomes of your swotting this evening if you're going to fight?"

"Oh, that's all right! Egan won't put me off my form," said Drake, with a laugh. "Daub is the only one of that set who has any beef in him, and Daub is keeping off the grass. Never mind Egan. Let's get on with this dashed Latin!"

But the "dashed Latin" was soon interrupted. There was a trampling of many feet in the passage without, and a loud knock at the door. Sawyer major of the Fourth put a grinning face into the study.

"Here they come!" he announced. "The bucks on the warpath! Egan doesn't look happy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the passage.

"Buck up, Egan! Have you made your will?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Drake rose to his feet, with a smile at Rodney. As a matter of fact, he was not sorry that study was to be interrupted for a short interval. A little exercise was a welcome change. The door was flung wide open, and in the doorway appeared Egan of the Shell, with Daubeny at his side and a crowd behind him.

Trying It On!

EGAN, as Sawyer major had observed, did not look happy. In fact, he looked the reverse of happy.

The great Daub had had his way, and his wonderful scheme was to be carried out; but there was a plentiful lack of enthusiasm on the part of his hapless follower.

"Hallo, Egan!" said Drake cheerily. "Kind of you to give me a look in. How do you do?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I've come—" began the Shell fellow blusteringly.

"I can see you've come. Will you sit down?" asked Drake politely. "Mind the chair—it's a bit rocky in the legs—"

"I haven't come here to sit down—"

"You've come to ask me to tea?" suggested Drake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've come to lick you, Drake, for your—your insultin' remarks," said Egan, as loftily as he could.

"Bravo!" said Daubeny.

"Go it, Egan!" sang out Torrence, Chilcot, and Seeley, and several more of the bucks from behind.

"Lick me," repeated Drake, with a smile. "Well, here I am, waiting to be licked, Rodney, I leave you my books, in case I don't survive. Egan won't give me time to make my will, I can see—he's thirsting for the fray!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Come to the gym, Drake!" exclaimed Egan. "There's no room for fightin' here."

"Room enough for little us," answered Drake.

"Step into the passage. You fellows crowd back. Now I'm ready, Egan."

"What about gloves?"

"We've got some gloves in the study," said Drake. "Trot them out, Rodney. Egan doesn't want to hurt me too much."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'd rather have it out in proper style in the gym," said Egan restively.

"My dear man, as challenged party, I choose time and place, and I choose here and now. Besides, I've no time to waste; I've got some work to do. Here are the gloves. Help him on with his gloves, Daub; his fingers seem to be all thumbs!"

"Pull yourself together, Egan!" Daubeny whispered in the ear of his champion.

Egan's only reply was a sullen scowl. At that moment he was much more inclined to commit assault and battery upon Vernon Daubeny than upon Drake. But he was in for it, and he adjusted the gloves with considerable slowness.

In the passage the grinning juniors cleared back to give the combatants room. Egan's unwillingness for the fray was so evident that they could not help wondering what sort of a fight he was going to put up.

"Ready?" asked Drake.

"Ye-es."

"Time!" announced Daubeny.

"Go it, Drake!"

"Go it, Egan!" chirruped Torrence and his knotty comrades.

Jack Drake advanced upon his adversary, his hands up and his eyes gleaming over them. Egan backed.

"Halt!" sang out Sawyer major, with a chuckle.

"Stand up, Egan!"

Egan backed farther and farther, the juniors making room for him, till the ladder stopped him, and he could back no farther.

"Is this a walking match, old chap?" inquired Jack Drake.

Egan made a furious spring at him, hitting out fiercely, taking his courage in both hands, as it were.

Drake staggered for a moment, and two or three fierce blows came home on his face. But the next moment he had recovered himself, and he piled in in return with great vigour.

It seemed to the hapless Shell fellow that an earthquake was happening to him during the next two or three minutes.

Bump!

"Egan's down!" yelled Sawyer major.

"Time!" exclaimed Daubeny.

Egan sprawled on the floor, dazed and breathless. He blinked up at Drake's smiling face.

"Ow, ow!" he gasped.

"Having some more, old top?" asked Drake.

"Egan's no hog; he knows when he's had enough!" chuckled Sawyer.

Daubeny gave his hapless champion a fierce look. He had not expected Egan to be successful in the fight, but certainly he had expected something better than this.

"Get up!" he muttered savagely.

"I—I can't!"

"You keeping time, Daub?" asked Drake, with a grin. "I don't want to hurry anybody, but life's short, you know."

"Ow!" groaned Egan.

"Time!"

Egan did not move. He had had enough—more than enough, in fact, and nothing would have induced him to face again the driving fists that had knocked him out. Whatever keenness he had had for Daub's wonderful scheme had quite oozed away now.

"Count him out!" said Rodney.

"Oh, let him take a rest!" said Sawyer major. "Come along to-morrow morning, Drake; you'll find him still there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'm done!" gasped Egan.

He sat up and threw off the gloves. Torrence gave him a hand up, and he stood leaning on Torrence with exaggerated exhaustion.

"All serene, old top!" said Jack Drake, with a smile. "Trot away and put your necktie straight!"

And Drake stepped back into his study cheerfully. The crowd of juniors broke up, chuckling. Drake and Rodney returned to the Latin with smiling faces. The little interlude had rather cheered them than otherwise, and Daub's astute scheme had certainly not worked successfully so far. But they were not quite done with Daubeny yet.

Not a Success!

"IN the Common-room!" said Daubeny.

"But—"

"We've got to keep it up, Torrence. Egan hasn't done him much harm, but every little helps. He won't be so fresh for you."

"Fresh enough!" mumbled Torrence.

Daubeny made an impatient gesture. This reluctance of his followers to back up his scheme was really irritating.

Egan, in his study, was nursing a damaged nose in a vile temper. His remarks to Daubeny had been of such a personal nature that Daub had been quite glad to leave him to himself.

It was Torrence's turn now. Once more Daub's double-headed shilling had served its turn; he had won the toss, and it had fallen to Torrence to be next on the list to tackle Drake.

"You'll catch him in the Common-room before all the fellows," said Vernon Daubeny. "He won't be able to back out."

"That's not what I'm worrying about!" muttered Torrence. "I—I say, suppose Seeley or Chilcot—"

Daubeny shook his head.

"They've agreed to back us up, but they stipulate that we three begin," he said. "That's only fair. Anyway, they're set on it. You go for the cad this time, and, for goodness' sake, put up a better show than Egan! Then comes my turn. You may lick him."

"I—I think not."

"Well, it's bound to tell on him," said Daubeny. "At least, it will put him off his form for swotting Latin."

"The fellows will tumble," said Torrence sulkily. "I tell you, it's too palpable—goin' for a chap, one after another, just before an exam."

"If you're thinkin' of sneakin' out—"

"Oh rats!" said Torrence uneasily. "I'll take it on. But it's a rotten idea, and I don't like it."

"The fellows are in the Common-room; I'll give them the tip. And mind you put up a good fight!"

"Oh, all right!"

Vernon Daubeny led his reluctant backer away to the Junior Common-room. The apartment was pretty well filled. Drake and Rodney and Tuckey

Toodles had come in after prep, and most of the Fourth were there and a good many of the Shell.

There was a rumour abroad already that Arthur Torrence was taking up the cudgels for his defeated chum, though most of the fellows had already tumbled to the fact that Vernon Daubeny was at the bottom of it.

Chilcot, Seeley, Chetwynd, and Upham, and most of the bucks had mustered in force to afford their champion the moral support of their presence.

Drake smiled as Torrence came in, but Rodney frowned.

"It's a plant, old chap!" he muttered. "It's as plain as anything that old Daub's fixed this! It's the same old game in a new form!"

"Looks like it," agreed Drake. "But I don't think Daub will be able to congratulate himself on the result this time. Hallo, Torrence! Looking for me?"

"Ye-es!" muttered Torrence, not particularly pleased at being met half-way, as it were, by the intended victim.

"How's Egan's nose?" asked Drake sympathetically.

"Never mind Egan's nose!" interrupted Daubeny roughly. "You look after your own nose, Drake! Torrence is callin' you to account for—"

"Oh, never mind the list of my sins!" said Drake. "Torrence is welcome. Don't you feel inclined to take a turn yourself, Daub?"

Vernon Daubeny did not reply to the question.

"He, he, he!" chortled Tuckey Toodles. "Daub comes next, you know. I heard him offering Chilcot to toss up with him for it, and Chilcot said he'd come after Daub, and not before—"

"Shut up, you fat fool!" exclaimed Daubeny furiously.

"Well, I heard you, you know; and Chilcot said—"

DETECTIVE KERR INVESTIGATES.

Solution:

KERR: Though the code message appeared to have been written by Gordon Gay, and seemed to refer to a raid to be carried out by one of his men, it was not like Gay to play a trick on his hosts. Then Talbot said Gay had been in Rylcombe at seven, showing that the fellows Fatty Wynn surprised meeting in the cloisters soon after six-thirty had nothing to do with Gay. Learning next that Racke had been in the quad—and remembering Clampe had followed Wynn into the New House—I needed only one more link. "IF FRIAR TUCK SUSPICIOUS, ENTERTAIN HIM AT TABLE." Why should Friar Tuck—Fatty Wynn—be suspicious, unless the conspirators in the cloisters were the culprits, and feared Wynn might connect them with the affair? Wynn had not been out of gates for a week—so Prince John was obviously a St. Jim's fellow. The message would then have been left under the stone next morning by one conspirator for the other, as Wynn's appearance had prevented them talking things over as they intended. So the raid—to cause bad blood between Gram-marians and Saints—was Racke's work, and, faced by the committee, he admitted it. Clampe was to have been Racke's tool—but putting his instructions in writing had disastrous results for the schemer!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He did, you know," said Tuckey Toodles, blinking round at the yelling juniors. "Chilcot said he'd be next on the list after Daub, and Seeley said it was up to Daub to set an example, so—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," roared Daub. "Torrence is waitin' for you, Drake, if you're not afraid!"

"Not at all," answered Drake cheerily. "I see you've brought in some gloves. Shut the door, somebody. We don't want a prefect to drop in. I'm sure Torrence doesn't!"

Rodney closed the door of the Common-room. The gloves were handed out and the juniors formed a ring.

Torrence advanced into it with a grim face. He was a rather more dangerous opponent than Egan, but there were few fellows present who had any doubts as to the result of the fight. Torrence's heart was not in the affair, for one thing; but at the best of times he would not have been a match for the champion athlete of the Lower School at St. Winifred's.

Daubeny took out his gold watch to keep time. Torrence drew on the gloves reluctantly.

"Time!"

Drake began with a hot attack, before which Torrence retreated. The first round was chiefly walking, and Torrence seemed relieved when time was called again. In the second round, urged on by the jeers of Sawyer major & Co., Torrence put more energy into it and attacked. He had the satisfaction of driving Drake back a few paces, and he pressed on, with a growing hope of success. But all of a sudden Drake ceased to retreat, and

his left and right came home twice—and Torrence went spinning.

There was a bump as he landed on the floor of the Common-room.

"Good man, Drake!" yelled Sawyer major. "Pick him up, Daub!"

Daubeny helped up his champion.

Torrence stood unsteadily, leaning on him and blinking. But he was not done yet.

"You can go on?" whispered Daubeny anxiously.

"Yes, confound you!" was the polite reply.

"Time!"

Torrence came on with a rush this time; but Drake did not give ground. His guard was perfect, and none of the Shell fellow's hasty and furious blows reached home. And as Torrence desisted, tired by the fury of his own attack. Jack Drake's right lashed out, and the Shell fellow crashed on the floor again.

It was not much use for Daubeny to call time after that. It was three minutes at least before Torrence was on his feet again; and, meanwhile, he had thrown off the gloves.

He gave Daubeny a bitter look as he strode out of the Common-room, followed by laughter and jeers.

Daubeny followed him. Two or three voices were calling on Daubeny to "take his turn"; it was pretty clear that Daub's scheme was becoming known. But the chief of the bucks turned a deaf ear to the suggestion.

Drake peeled off the gloves with a smile.

"No damage, so far," he remarked, as he met Rodney's glance. "But perhaps I'm not finished yet. Is it your turn next, Chilcot?"

"No!" said Chilcot promptly. "I—I mean, I don't know what you're talking about, Drake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about you, Chetwynd?"

"Oh rats!"

"And you, Upham?"

Upham did not answer; he left the Common-room with the rest of the bucks. A little later there was a general meeting of the bucks in Daubeny's study. Egan was still attending to his nose there, and Torrence had an eye that required attention. Vernon Daubeny wore a scowling brow. His wonderful scheme, which had seemed so promising at first, did not seem to be working out successfully. It had come to Daub's turn now; and the more Daub thought about it the less he liked it.

And there was general curiosity among the bucks to learn when Daub's turn was coming off.

"To-morrow," was Daub's reply to the general inquiry.

"Don't let the grass grow under your feet!" urged Chilcot.

"Rats!"

And Daub walked away.

The next morning the bucks were still inquisitive on the subject. So were a good many other fellows. Drake came in contact with Daubeny on the deck of the Benbow before lessons, and smiled at him rather ironically. Daub turned on his heel.

After morning lessons Egan and Torrence asked Daubeny when it was coming off. Egan's nose and Torrence's eye made them rather bitter on the subject, and they did not intend to let it drop.

"After tea," yawned Daubeny.

"We'll remind you," said Egan significantly.

Daubeny had rather a thoughtful look at intervals during the afternoon. He looked still

(Continued on page 36.)



Some skilful-fingered johnny, who moves like a shadow at night within Greyfriars, has been cracking cribs galore and getting away with his plunder. Who is this mysterious cracksman? Some of the juniors at Greyfriars think he's posing as their new Form-master! You'll thoroughly enjoy reading this full-of-thrills yarn, starring Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars.

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PEN PALS COUPON

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POKER PETE'S LOSING GAME!

(Continued from page 29.)

"But—but you lose your money if the horse isn't found."

"I guess Billy Cook and the rest will be hunting him to-morrow," said the rancher, with a smile. "I'll take the risk of that. But I guess he'll be found sooner or later. Now, you young rascals, get to your supper."

Frank and Bob were very cheery over their supper that evening. The affair of Poker Pete's horse had ended to their complete satisfaction.

BUCKS ON THE WARPATH

(Continued from page 34.)

more thoughtful at tea-time in his study. After tea his chums recurred to the subject.

"Shall we come along with you to see Drake?" asked Egan.

Daubeny coughed.

"The fact is," he said as casually as possible—"the fact is, I've been thinkin' it over!"

"Oh!" said Egan unpleasantly.

"The scheme seems to have got out. In fact, I think it really was a bit too palpable, just as you said at the time, Egan."

"Well?"

"So I think we may as well let the matter drop," said Daubeny casually. "I may think of another wheeze—I dare say I shall. But this one really doesn't seem much good. I shall let it drop. Here, I say—what the thump—hands off!"

As for the threatened revenge of the card-sharper, they did not give that a thought.

"Isn't the popper a brick, Franky?" said Bob Lawless, when they went up to their room that night.

"Yes, rather!" said Frank heartily. "I only hope he won't lose the money over it. If the horse isn't found by Saturday, Bob—" He paused.

Bob grinned.

"Just what I was thinking," he agreed. "If the gee's not found by then, we'll take a hand in looking for him, and show them how Cedar Creek fellows do it. It will be ripping fun."

"Good!" said Frank.

And the chums of Cedar Creek went to bed feeling quite satisfied with their day's work.

Next Week: "THE HORSE HUNTERS!"

For once in the history of the bucks of St. Winifred's, Daub's faithful followers fairly turned upon him. Egan had taken his turn; Torrence had taken his turn; and now that it had come to Daubeny's turn, the great Daub announced that the scheme was going to be dropped!

"Hands off!" yelled Daubeny, struggling wildly. "You mad duffers—I tell you—if you think I'm funkier—yaroooh! Oh, gad!"

The enraged couple attacked their leader with such vigour that the great Daub was soon borne to the floor under a shower of blows.

Before taking their departure, Egan and Torrence further poured out their vials of wrath by means of a bottle of ink, which they emptied over the head of their unfortunate leader.

Egan and Torrence left the study, feeling somewhat solaced. Vernon Daubeny sat on his expensive carpet and gasped for breath. It really looked at last as if the great Daub's star were on the wane.

Next Week: "THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER!"

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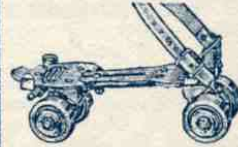
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