

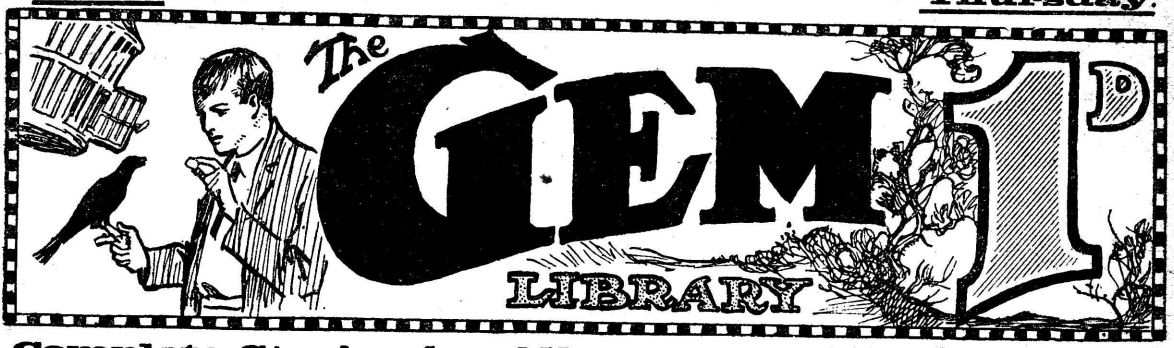
NEXT THURSDAY:

"SAINTS v. GRAMMARIANS."

Another Splendid Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and their Rivals of the Grammar School. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

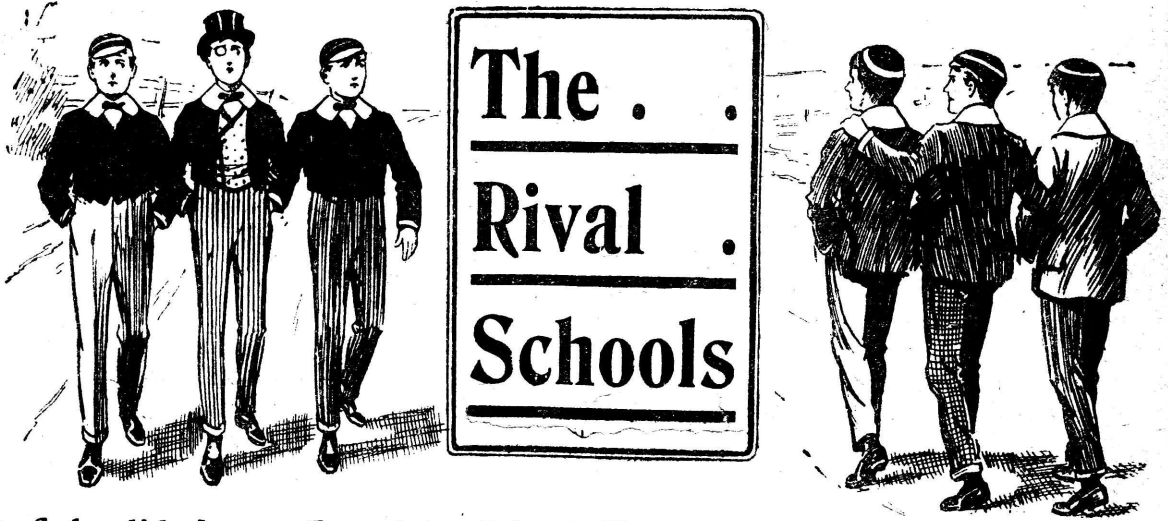
Every

Thursday.



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[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]



A Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of TOM MERRY & CO. and FRANK MONK & CO., of Rylcombe Grammar School.
 By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Figgins & Co. Have an Idea.

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther, commonly known as the Terrible Three, were sitting in their study in the Shell passage at St. Jim's, writing impositions at express speed. Save for the scratch of their pens and the occasional mutter of a Latin or German word by a harassed translator, silence reigned in the famous study.

Suddenly Tom Merry threw down his pen with a whoop of satisfaction:

"Hurray! I've done my blessed impot! Three cheers!" Manners and Lowther gave a simultaneous yell.

"Chuck it, you ass! We haven't!"

"But I have, my sons!" grinned Tom Merry. "And I'm jolly glad—"

The opening of the study door interrupted Tom Merry. It was opened by the simple method of planting a sufficiently hard kick against the panels. It flew back with a jerk and a crash, and Figgins & Co. came in. Tom Merry nodded a welcome.

Manners and Lowther looked up with a glare. Figgins & Co. came into the study, and Figgins closed the door in the same gentle way. Tom Merry looked at them curiously. Figgins, long-limbed and lean, Kerr, the canny Scotsman, and Fatty Wynn, the Welsh-partner in the "Co.," were three of the best, and though they were always at loggerheads with Tom Merry and his chums, at bottom there was a real liking and esteem on both sides.

"We've come to talk—" began Figgins.
 "You haven't!" said Manners aggressively. "Do you think I can construe Virgil while you are talking, Figgins?"
 "Do you think I can write out Schiller by the yard while you are talking, Figgins?" asked Lowther. "Don't, old fellow!"

"It's an important matter."
 "Rats! Come again another time! Scoot!"
 "Can't be did!" said Figgins. "It's an important matter, and it's got to be settled. The fact is, I've thought of an idea—"

"Excuse me, Figgy," said Kerr, "but as the idea was mine—"

"Rats!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn warmly. "It was mine! Didn't I say to you, first of all—"

"Look here, Wynn, you're not going to claim—"
 "I'm going to have the—"
 "I tell you plainly—"

Monty Lowther clutched his German dictionary, and turned a desperate eye upon the three disputants. Tom Merry was laughing like a hyena.

"Are you going to shut up?" bawled Lowther. "Go and settle the question in your own measly House—that rotten old casual-ward you call a House! Get out!"

"Travel!" growled Manners. "How on earth can I—"
 "I tell you it's an important matter!" exclaimed Figgins. "As Tom Merry is the leader of this study, I appeal to him. Do leave off laughing, Tom Merry, and attend to me. Am I or am I not to explain my idea—"

Next Thursday:

"TOM MERRY & CO." AND "THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON."

No. 167 (New Series.)

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"My idea!" interjected Kerr.
 "My idea!" hooted Fatty Wynn.
 "Scissors!" gasped Monty Lowther. "I'm not going to stand this! Will you fellows clear out or shut up? Und einmals, als ich eine lange Nacht in frommer Andacht—" he went on aloud, as he wrote.
 "Dry up!" howled Manners. "Namque, sub ingenti bistrat dum singula templo, Reginam'opperiens, dum, que

"... unter diesen Baum gessessen und dem Schlafe widerstand—" shouted Monty Lowther, his pen travelling away.
 "... fortuna sit urbi, artificumque manus inter se operumque—" hissed Manners.
 "My only pyjama hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, the tears of laughter running down his cheeks. "Shut up, some of you, or the chaps will think we've got Bedlam here on a visit."

"Done!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, flinging down his pen. "That's the last of the fifty. I don't mind if you New House duffers chatter now!"

"But I do!" exclaimed Manners. "I'm not done! I

"Now, don't you be unreasonable, Manners," said Monty. "You ought to be finished by this time. If Figgins has got anything to say, let's hear it."

"I tell you—"

"I appeal to the majority," said Lowther. "Tom Merry, isn't Manners to shove that piffle away for a bit?"

"Yes; certainly!" said Tom Merry. "You're in a minority, Manners. Shove it away!"

Manners growled, but he realised that there wasn't much chance of getting on with his work under the present circumstances, and he put it away.

"That's right!" said Figgins. "Virgil is all very well in his way, but it's no good sticking to that sort of thing when there's something serious on the carpet. This idea I've got is a really ripping, A1, first-class—"

"It just occurred to me," Kerr explained. "We were talking about the Grammar School chaps, and—"

"We were talking about the Grammar School chaps," said Fatty Wynn, "and it occurred to me that it would be a good idea—"

"Shut up, both of you!" exclaimed Figgins, in the voice of authority. "How you can come into another fellow's study and show off your egotism in this way, I can't imagine! I shall never get my idea explained at this rate—"

"You mean my idea—"

"I never saw such cheek!" Fatty Wynn observed, addressing himself indignantly to the Terrible Three. "Of course, it was my idea from start to finish—"

"Rot!" said Figgins, with great warmth. "Didn't I say to Kerr—"

"Didn't I say that if the Grammar School—"

"But when you were saying—"

"I've heard something like this before," Monty Lowther remarked, in a thoughtful sort of way. "It was in a phonograph shop, and two or three phonographs were going at once. Keep it up, Figg! You're awfully funny!"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Manners. "I'll cut off to Study No. 6, and fetch in Blake and Herries and Digby, and D'Arcy to see them doing it!"

"Here! Stay where you are!" said Figgins, and the Co. realised that they were cutting a ridiculous figure in the eyes of the School House chums. "I want to explain my—our idea—" he amended.

"That's it!" said Kerr. "It really belongs to all of us. It sort of came to all of us at once when we were talking over the matter."

"Never mind whose the idea is!" suggested Tom Merry. "You can fight over that in the New House, if you like. Let's hear the idea!"

"Well, you see—" began Figgins.

"It's like this!" said Kerr.

"I'll explain!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins gave the Co. a withering glance.

"Will you two conceited asses shut up?" he exclaimed. "Who's the head of this firm, I'd like to know? If I'm interrupted again there will be a row!"

"There has been a pretty good row already," Monty Lowther remarked. "Don't mind us, you know. We like to see you in your funny act. It's as good as a play, and—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Figgins. "Now, this is my—"

"Our!" corrected the Co., with one voice.

"Our idea," went on Figgins. "A long time ago, soon after the Rylcombe Grammar School was opened, and we got to fighting terms with the Grammarians, we formed a Co. against them—"

"Tom Merry & Co.," assented the hero of the Shell, with a nod.

"Well, we called it Tom Merry & Co.," said Figgins, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 167.

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rather disparagingly. "We let you be leader, because— because—"

"Because I was the only one that could lead."

"Nothing of the kind! But—anyway, the Co. busted up!"

"Yes; we gave the Grammarians the kybosh, and made them sign a paper acknowledging that they were licked, and there wasn't any use for a Co. after that."

"That's all very well, but the Grammar cads have got over it, and they're bucking up again. They're going to try their luck in the football-field with us again before the season closes, and they're going to have that document of surrender back again. So they say."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Let them say it, then. They won't find it so easy to do it."

"I don't know. They've been ragging a lot of our fellows lately. There was D'Arcy, of our House—they captured him in Rylcombe yesterday, and marched him up and down the main street with a donkey's collar round his neck, and a bunch of carrots tied on his hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well to laugh, Tom Merry, but it's one in the eye for St. Jim's, and we ought to put the Grammar rotters in their place. That's what I say."

"Right enough," said the Co. "We ought."

"Then you want to revive the Co.?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "It's a good idea. I have been thinking of it myself lately. Since that chap Gordon Gay came the Grammarians have been getting up on their hind legs and putting on airs again. I don't mind leading you again."

"Perhaps you don't," said Figgins, with emphasis. "But we do!"

"Oh, I see! You've thought of a new leader, have you? Now, we thrashed out that subject before, and settled that there was only one possible leader—"

"Rats! My idea is certainly to revive the Co.—you three and we three, and Study No. 6—and there'll be another in it this time—"

"Who is that?"

"Marmaduke Smythe, who used to be in our House a long time ago. You remember him, of course—the millionaire's son? He's coming down to St. Jim's for a few weeks while his father is abroad, and he's going to take his old place in our study. Of course, he'll be in the Co. But about the leader—"

"Yes—about the leader—" said the Co.

"That's where my idea comes in—"

"My idea, Figg—my idea—"

"You mean my—"

"Oh, hang it, our idea, then!" said Figgins. "For goodness' sake shut up, and give a fellow a chance to say a word! Now, our idea is this, that we're not going to have any special leader all the time, but—"

"Take it in turns—" said Kerr.

"The old Athenian method," said Figgins. "Why should one chap be leader more than any other? It's all very well to say that Tom Merry led us to victory over the Grammarians last time. They've revived again, and are as cheeky as ever, and we've got a tussle before us. Besides, I believe I could have led quite as well—"

"I know I could!" said Kerr.

"And I'm certain I could have!" Fatty Wynn remarked.

"The chaps in Study No. 6 think the same," Figgins went on. "They never had a chance. They tried what they could do singly against the Grammar cads, and so did we, and we got it in the neck. But as leader of the alliance, only Tom Merry had a chance, and I can't say that I think he did anything extraordinary—"

"Not at all!" said Kerr. "Far from that!"

"Very ordinary!" said Fatty Wynn, shaking his head.

"Extraordinarily ordinary! I mean—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "I think Figg's idea—or Kerr's idea—or Fatty Wynn's idea—whichever it is, simply rot! If there is to be a Co., of course it will be Tom Merry & Co., the same as before, and I shall be leader. What do you say, Manners?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm rather inclined to agree with Figg," was Manners' somewhat unexpected reply. "If every chap takes the lead in turn, it will give everyone a chance to show you what he can do. If we don't find it answer, we can go back to the old arrangement. What's your idea, Lowther?"

"Same here," replied Lowther. "It's a good wheeze, and worth trying, with the amendment that an unsuccessful captain is sacked on the spot. But if Tom Merry doesn't like it—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"My dear kids, I don't mind in the least. If you like to try the idea, we'll try it, and I'll make as good a follower as I make a leader, at all events."

"Well said!" exclaimed Figgins heartily. "That's just

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what we should have expected you to say, Tom Merry. It's agreed upon, then?"

"Certainly. But what about Blake and the others?" "We'll have them in, and talk it over with them," said Figgins. He opened the door. A Third-Form fag was coming down the passage, and Figgins called to him. "I say, young Gibson, cut off to Blake's study, will you, and say that Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy are wanted in Tom Merry's study on important business."

"Right-ho!" said Curly Gibson, and he cut off. He came back, grinning, in a couple of minutes.

"Well, are they coming?" said Figgins.

"No, they're not. Blake says he's sorry, but they're having tea, and you can go and eat coke."

And Curly vanished, chuckling. The six juniors looked at one another.

"Well," laughed Tom Merry, "if the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain, so come on. Follow the man from Cook's!"

And Tom Merry led the way to Study No. 6, with the others at his heels.

CHAPTER 2.

The Ballot.

STUDY No. 6 was looking unusually festive that evening.

It was always rather cosy, for Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, the occupants of the famous apartment, knew how to make themselves comfortable, but on the present occasion they had excelled themselves.

The fire burned brightly in the grate, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sitting on a hassock before it, making toast, of which the fragrant smell pervaded the study. There were chestnuts roasting on the bars of the grate, too, and D'Arcy was keeping an eye on them. Blake had just made the tea, and was standing the teapot on the trivet to draw. Herries was not in the study, but Digby was cutting bread-and-butter.

Blake, having arranged the teapot to his satisfaction, turned back to the table. The table gleamed with a wonderfully white cloth, and there was an unusual array of crockery and cutlery, borrowed from half-a-dozen studies up and down the passage.

Tea in Study No. 6 was always a meal worth partaking of, when the juniors were in funds, but seldom had the study seen such a spread as the present one.

The explanation was that Blake & Co. all found themselves in funds at the same time, by some extraordinary chance, and they had resolved to celebrate the joyful occasion fittingly.

"How jolly that toast smells," said Digby, sniffing appreciatively. "You're growing useful as well as ornamental, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah!" said the swell of the School House, turning a crimson face from the fire. "I am weally a wathah clevah chap at makin' toast, you know. It's beastyly warm, don't you know, deah boys!"

"Never mind, stick to it, Gussy!" said Blake encouragingly. "Another plateful will be enough. Hallo, here's Herries!"

Herries came into the study. He had been down to the school shop, and the extent of his purchases had delighted the heart of Dame Taggles. He had bundles under each arm, and parcels were bulging out all his pockets.

Digby gave a whistle.

"My hat! We're doing this thing in style! Ham, pickles, tongue, jam, and marmalade, steak pies, and currant-cake! My word!"

"We don't all find ourselves flush every day; as a matter of fact, there's been famine in the land for a long time," grinned Blake. "Shove 'em on the table, Herries, old man. Here's Kildare's soap-dish for the jam—Dig has washed it. You can put some of the marmalade in that extra tea-cup. Open the pickles."

"All right. You pour out the tea; we don't want it stewing."

"I'm just going to. I think that will do, Dig. Buck up with the toast, Gussy, and don't forget the chestnuts."

"Yaas, wathah; but it's beastyly warm—"

"Never mind that. Buck up! Hallo, what's that?"

Blake was pouring out the tea as he spoke. The door of the study was opened, and Tom Merry looked in. His friends were behind him, filling the passage.

Tom Merry smiled with a pleased expression.

"Tea!" he exclaimed. "Tea, and toast! Ham and tongue! My hat! We're on in this act, chaps!"

"Rather!" came in hearty chorus from behind him.

"Here, what do you chaps want?" grunted Blake.

"Blessed if— Now, then, what's the matter with you, Gussy?"

A sudden yell had broken from the swell of St. Jim's.

NEXT WEEK: "SAINTS v. GRAMMARIANS."

Blake was pouring out the tea while he talked, and his eyes were on Tom Merry, and not on the teacups, with the result that his hand, having moved a little, he was pouring the tea, not into the teacup, but down the neck of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was sitting between the table and the fire, with the toasting-fork in his hand.

There was none too much room in Study No. 6, and D'Arcy just about filled the space between the table and the grate.

Blake, unconscious of what he was doing, sent a stream of hot fluid down the back of D'Arcy's neck. The unfortunate swell of the School House gave a terrific yell, and jumped up as if moved by a spring.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Blake started back in astonishment, and made a sweep with the teapot, and Herries gave a whoop as the hot tea came streaming from the spout over his legs.

"Ow! You clumsy ass! Ow!"

"My hat!" said Blake. "What's the matter? It was Gussy's fault, jumping up like that, and startling me—"

"You howwid bwute!" howled D'Arcy. "You have scalded the back of my neck—"

"You shouldn't put the back of your neck under my teapot then," said Blake crossly. "There goes the tea, nearly all wasted, because—"

"My collah is w'ing wet, and my neck—"

"Oh, blow your neck! I'm thinking of the tea!"

"Ow, my legs!" groaned Herries. "My legs! Ow!"

"Your legs!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated. "I never heard such a fuss made over nothing. I'm getting fed up with your legs and D'Arcy's neck."

"You howwid wuffian!" moaned D'Arcy. "You have scalded my neck, and spoiled my collah, and ruined my necktie, and my waistcoat is wetted, too."

"Horrid," said Tom Merry. "Go for him, Gussy! Give him a thwashin'!"

"I have weally a good mind—"

"Oh, get a clean collar and shut up," said Blake. "It was all Tom Merry's fault, really. If he hadn't come in, I shouldn't have—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We want to talk to you fellows, and as you wouldn't come to us, we've come to you. I didn't know there was a feed on, but now we've come, we can't do better than stay, it seems to me."

"What-ho!" exclaimed Figgins emphatically.

"I should say so!" said Fatty Wynn, with a famished look at the table. "Do you know, you chaps, that I'm fearfully hungry. We had a measly tea in the New House, only a steak-pie and some rashers of bacon and half-a-dozen eggs, and I feel nearly famished. It's very nice and proper of you to ask us to this feed, Blake."

"But I haven't—"

"So it is—very decent of him," said Figgins, pulling a chair to the table, and sitting down. "That's what I like about Blake—he's generous."

"My idea exactly!" Kerr assented, coming in cheerfully. "I like Blake's feeds. They're good, and you're always welcome."

"Look here—"

"We'll pass a vote of thanks to Blake," said Tom Merry. "I'll carve this pie to start with: Not a word, my dear fellow! The trouble's nothing."

"I wasn't going to—"

"I'll fetch the plates and cups out of our study," said Manners, and he cut off in a twinkling. "I'll be back in two ticks."

"That's right!" said Lowther. "You haven't many seats for your guests, Blake, but I can make this box do. I'll start with the tongue, I think, please, Tom."

"But I tell you—"

"Don't tell us anything!" said Tom Merry. "We understand how heartily you welcome us, and we'll take all the polite speeches for granted, and get to business. I must say," said the hero of the Shell, looking round, "that Blake is doing this thing in good style. I will always say that for Blake, that he knows how to get up a study feed."

"He does!" said Figgins. "He do! I compliment Blake."

"You set of—"

"Here's the things!" exclaimed Manners, coming into the study with his arms full of crockery. "Here you are, kids! Make room, Figg!"

"Look here—" howled Blake.

But D'Arcy, who had changed his collar by this time, and was beaming again, interrupted him.

"Gentlemen," said the swell of the School House, laying his hand upon his gorgeous waistcoat, "you are all heartily welcome."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "That's just like you, Gussy! Very much like you! No need to say more, Blake; we understand your feelings exactly."

"I dare say you do!" exclaimed Blake, laughing in spite of himself. "You bouders! But now you're here, you may as well stay. What do you say, chaps?"

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and their Great Rivals. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Let 'em stay by all means!" said Digby. "Jolly glad to see their chivvies round the festive board—ahem!"
 "Good!" grinned Tom Merry. "Then that's settled. How's Gussy getting on after his little affair with the Grammarians yesterday, by the by?"
 "So you've heard about that, have you?" chuckled Digby. "It's all over the school by now, I suppose. Well, it was funny. Ha, ha!"

"It's no laughin' mattah," said D'Arcy, rather indignantly. "I am weally surprised at you, Digbay. If you had been pawaded up and down the High Street of Wylcombe with a donkey's collah wound your beastly neck, you would not have considahed it funny."

"Perhaps not!" agreed Digby. "But as it is, I consider it awfully funny. You must have looked ripping."

"They tied a beastly bunch of cawwots on my hat!" said D'Arcy warmly. "The beastly cads, you know! A beastly bunch of beastly cawwots, deah boys!"

"Did you eat any of them?" asked Digby innocently.

D'Arcy laid down his knife and fork, and looked steadily across the table at Digby.

"Pardon me!" he said, with frigid politeness. "Would you have the extweme kindness to wepeat that we mark, Digby?"

"Certainly!" said Digby obligingly. "Did you eat any of the carrots?"

D'Arcy rose to his feet.

"It is with extweme wegwet that I say or do anythin' to disturb the harmony of this convivial meetin'," he said; "but, weally— Blake, let go my sleeve!"

"Sit down!"

"I wefuse to sit down! I have been insulted."

"Sit down!"

"I distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the kind. Pway wlease me! I object stwongly to bein' jerked at in that extwemely unpleasant mannah. If you do not immediately wlease me, Blake, I shall no longer weguard you as a fwieend."

"Sit down, fathead!"

"I object to bein' chactewised as a fathead! The term is most oppwobwious! Digby has insulted me, and it is not possible for me to overlook—"

"Honour the guest that is within thy walls!" said Tom Merry severely. "Gussy, I'm surprised at you!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I did not think," said Tom Merry, looking round, "that Arthur Augustus could be so rude, so impolite, so discourteous as to quarrel with his study-mates in the presence of guests. If Skimpole, our tame Socialist, were here, he would say that it was due to his bad bringing up, the base and sordid surroundings of his youth—"

"Oh, Tom Mewwy—"

"I think Gussy should apologise to Digby at once!" said Figgins. "It's the only thing he can do, in my opinion."

"Oh, weally, Figgins—"

"Of course!" said Blake. "Apologise—that's the only thing to be done now. We're all ashamed of you, Gussy. I'm blushing, for one."

"I'm blushing, for two," said Monty Lowther. "I never thought it of Gussy!"

The unfortunate swell of the School House looked from one face to another, wondering whether the juniors were "rotting" or not, but every face was sober and solemn.

"I'm waiting for that apology," said Digby seriously.

"I weally considah," said D'Arcy, "that, as the person insulted, I am entitled to the apology, you know, but I am willin' to suwwendah to the opinion of the majowity of the gentlemen pwesent. I apologise, Digby."

"Accepted," said Digby graciously, "but don't do it again, D'Arcy. And now you have apologised, pray answer my original question. Did you eat any of the carrots?"

"No," said D'Arcy, with a stately and chilling dignity. "I did not eat any of the cawwots."

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Figgins, his gravity giving way at last. "Gussy will be the death of me one of these days, I know he will!"

Arthur Augustus sat with a solemn and dignified brow while the study roared.

"I weally do not see what all this absurd cacklin' is about," he remarked. "It seems to me that you fellows gwow more absolutely idiotic ewvery day. Pway pass me the jam, Blake, and twy not to be a silly ass, deah boy."

Blake chuckled and passed the jam.

"I say, what did you fellows come to talk about?" he asked. "Is it a new wheeze? We were thinking of starting a row with you, Figgins, but—"

"Rows are off!" said Tom Merry. "It's an alliance against the Grammar School again, but on new lines. I suppose you chaps don't know anything about Greek history in the Fourth—"

"Eh? What's that?"

"Well, if you do, you know the old wheeze of having

a lot of generals, who took the command turn and turn about—"

"Yes; and a nice hash they used to make of it. Of all the idiotic ideas—"

"That's what I thought, but the idea comes from the New House, so you can't expect much of a thing. Figgyp proposes that we should organise a Co., on the same lines, and every fellow take his turn as leader."

"Oh, I see!" said Blake, changing his tone. "That alters the case. I think it's a jolly good idea!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It doesn't take you long to change your views. Still, I don't mind. Our old chum Marmaduke Smythe is coming down to the New House for some weeks, and he'll be in the Co., and take his turn as leader. The captaincy lasts for one day, turn and turn about for all of us, but unsuccessful generals get the sack on the spot. You start with me as captain—"

"Excuse me," said Figgins politely, "you start with me as captain—"

"Come, no rotting!" said Blake warmly. "Of course, I take first turn as captain—"

"Weally, deah boys, I wegard the pwoposal as extwemely impertinent. In the nature of things, I must be captain first, because—"

"Oh, you take a run, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to take a run! You wequire a fellow of gwreat tact and judgment for a thing of this sort, and so I—"

"Dry up, Gussy!" said Kerr. "I don't like to disagree with the rest, but I think that any reasonable fellow will admit that if there's a Scotchman in the party he ought to take the lead first, to show the others how to—"

"Nuff said, Kerr. Don't be an unspeakable Scot, old chap," said Lowther. "Of course, if you let the thing go by merit, I ought to take the first—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Suppose we leave it to chance," he said. "Write all the names on slips of paper and shove 'em in a bag. Then the one that's pulled out first is leader."

"Good!" said Figgins. "And he holds the command for one day, and then another name is drawn. It's a good idea."

"Then we'll do it!" exclaimed Blake, with a wave of the hand. "That's settled! Gentlemen, the campaign opens to-morrow! Figgyp, old kid, when do you expect the great and only Marmaduke down here?"

"By the afternoon train to-morrow," said Figgins. "He's made it Wednesday because that's a half-holiday."

"Good! We'll all go to meet him."

"That's a good idea," assented Figgins, very pleased. "Marmaduke's a good sort, and we want to make much of him, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Do you wemembah what a feahful wottah he was when he first came to St. Jim's—always talkin' about his gowernah's millions, and puttin' on no end of side? We cured him—"

"You needn't talk!" said Figgins. "We had to cure you, if you remember, Adolphus. Don't you recollect what an absolutely funny and screamingly idiotic ass you were?"

"No, Figgins; I weally do not wemembah anythin' of the kind," said D'Arcy, with stately dignity, "and I will thank you not to—"

"Rats! I say, we may fall in with some of the Grammar cads to-morrow," Figgins remarked. "We ought to have our leader all ready in case of rows. Let's get that drawing lots business over."

Tea was finished, and the juniors proceeded to draw lots. Ten names were placed on slips of paper in a bag, and then one was drawn out by Tom Merry.

Nine heads craned forward eagerly to look at it.

"Jack Blake!"

Nine juniors read out the name in tones of disappointment, one in a voice of exultation. Needless to say, the "one" was the chief of Study No. 6.

"Well, it's all in the game," said Figgins, with a look of resignation. "Blake's leader for to-morrow, and I only hope he won't make too bad a hash of it."

"Don't expect too much," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "We must look for a bungle of some kind, and then—"

"Perhaps you are looking for a thick ear, too!" suggested Blake pleasantly. "You're mighty near getting one, the pair of you!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard these comments as bein' bad form. Blake is leadah, and we are bound to follow him to the bittah end—unless he feels the wesponsibility too heavy; and in that case I should be perfectly willin' to weliieve him of it, and lead—"

"I think I can manage the job," said Blake disdainfully.

"I mayn't be any gwreat shakes as a leader—"

"Quite right," said Kerr. "You won't be."

"But I shall have the consolation of knowing that I can do

"The trick better than anyone else in this Co.," said Blake. "That's enough. Now then, I'm going to issue orders—"

"You're going to do what?" demanded half a dozen rebellious voices.

"Issue orders!" said Blake firmly. "You will kindly listen to my instructions and remember them, or you will hear of it! What time does Marmaduke's train come in to-morrow, Figgins?"

"Three o'clock," said Figgins.

"Very well. You will all be ready at the gate of the school to follow me down to the village at half-past two," said Blake.

"Of all the confounded cheek—"

"Oh, play the game!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Blake is leader—for the time. We've got to take his orders."

"Yes, that's all very well; but—"

"No 'buts'!" said Blake incisively. "'Buts' are barred. All of you turn up at the gate at half-past two to-morrow afternoon, and mind you don't fail!"

And the Co. with some hesitation, agreed that they would.

CHAPTER 3.

The Grammarians' Captive.

"PORTER!"

"Yessir!"

"Take care of my boxes, please. Don't let them be banged about like that. I am very particular about my boxes."

"Yessir!"

"You need not grin, porter! If you do I shall probably not give you the half-crown I intended to give you. Let me see, I think your name is Trumble?"

"Yessir!" said the porter of Rylcombe Station, becoming as grave as a judge instantly on the mention of the half-crown.

"Perhaps you remember me," said the youth who had just stepped from the train in Rylcombe Station, languidly. "I used to be at St. Jim's you know."

Trumble stared at him.

"Yessir! I think I know you agin, sir. You are Master Smythe, sir."

"Exactly, Trumble! I remember your carrying my box the first time I came to St. Jim's, in the same careless way, and I was compelled to reprimand you at the time."

"Yessir!" said Trumble.

"As a matter of fact, you are a careless beast, Trumble. Lift the boxes gently on the trolley and you will not damage them."

"Certainly, sir," said Trumble, wondering whether it was worth the sacrifice of the half-crown to give Marmaduke Smythe a "oner" on his prominent nose.

"Is there a vehicle waiting for me from the school, Trumble?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Dear me! That is very careless of Dr. Holmes. Place my boxes on the hack, then, Trumble."

"Yessir!"

Marmaduke Smythe followed the porter from the station. Marmaduke was a well-fed youth, and extremely well dressed, and he had a ring on his finger, a gold watchchain of great thickness across his red-striped waistcoat, and diamond pins and studs and sleeve-links. He carried a gold-headed walking-cane, and the gold head of that cane usually reposed at the mouth of Marmaduke, as though he found it had a pleasant flavour.

Marmaduke followed Trumble out, and cast a disparaging eye upon the hack. It was a very ancient vehicle, and the horse had seen better days—a considerable time ago, too. The porter piled up the boxes, and the driver of the hack left off chewing a straw and climbed into his seat.

"What an excessively rascally-looking turn-out!" Marmaduke remarked. "Very different from the equipages of my father's establishment in Park Lane. I suppose I must be content with it, though. It is very curious that at least Figgins & Co. have not come to meet the train. By the way, I hear that a Grammar School has been opened in the vicinity of Rylcombe, Trumble."

"Yessir! And rare rows the boys has with the St. Jim's fellows, sir," said Trumble.

"Yes, so I have heard. I should like to see—"

"There's some of them, sir," said Trumble, pointing to four youths who were strolling past. "They're always in Rylcombe on a Wednesday, which is a half-holiday at the Grammar School. They're looking at you, sir."

Marmaduke looked at the boys with interest.

The quartette were well known to the boys of St. Jim's—Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, the son of the head-master of the Grammar School, and his chums Lane and Carboy. They

stared at Marmaduke, and Gordon Gay, catching sight of the address on the boxes, uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo, that's a new kid for St. Jim's!"

Monk & Co. fixed their eyes upon Marmaduke.

"Looks a funny sort of a waster!" said Lane, loud enough for Marmaduke to hear. "Wonder where it was dug up?"

"Let's ask him," suggested Carboy. "I say, freak, where were you dug up?"

Marmaduke stared haughtily at the Grammar School youths as they approached him. The four were ripe for mischief, and, as a matter of fact, they had been in quest of some St. Jim's fellows when they fell in with Marmaduke. The chance of ragging a new "kid" destined for the rival school was too good to be lost.

"Pray do not talk to me!" said Marmaduke, with his nose in the air. "Porter, be quicker with those boxes! I desire to be gone."

"New kid for St. Jim's?" asked Gordon Gay.

"No," said Marmaduke haughtily; "I am not a new kid, as you vulgarly express it—I am an old boy returning to the school for a period—"

"Oh, so you've been there before, have you?"

"Yes, I certainly have been there before."

"Rotten sort of hole, isn't it?" said Monk cheerfully.

"No, it is not a rotten sort of hole. But I shall not argue the point with persons of your description. Porter, here is your half-crown. Driver—"

"High and haughty, ain't he?" grinned Gordon Gay. "Shall we teach this youthful wounder a lesson, Frank?"

"As a matter of duty, I think we ought to do so," assented Frank Monk. "He has evidently too much cheek to live. If he puts on airs like that he will come to a bad end, and it is only right and generous for persons of our description to give him a lesson."

"You will keep your distance," said Marmaduke. "Otherwise—"

"I like his waistcoat," Carboy remarked, giving Marmaduke a dig in the said waistcoat. "D'Arcy of St. Jim's goes in for fancy waistcoats, but this one beats him hollow."

"Hands off, you rude rotter, or—"

"His hat is too small for such a swelled head," remarked Lane, knocking the hat off Marmaduke's cranium. "Sorry, kid! What do you mean by putting your hat in the way of my fist?"

Marmaduke swung up his cane, crimson with anger.

"I will give you—"

"Hallo, he's getting dangerous!" exclaimed Frank Monk, in mock alarm, winking at Gordon Gay, and dragging Carboy and Lane back as he spoke. "Let us fly!"

And, followed by Gay, Frank raced off, and Carboy and Lane, as he had a firm grip on their arms, had to go with him. They disappeared in a moment, and Marmaduke gazed after them in surprise mingled with satisfaction.

"What are you running away for?" howled Lane.

"You're not afraid of that image, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Gordon Gay.

"Then what are you running for?"

Frank stopped, out of breath, outside the Rylcombe tuckshop. Then he condescended to explain.

"My dear kids, I know who that chap is, now I come to think of it. He used to belong to St. Jim's, and his name's Smythe—Marmaduke Smythe, the son of the millionaire Smythe. He belongs to those three freaks who call themselves Figgins & Co. He used to be one of the Co. We're on the warpath now, and this is our chance! No good wiping up the ground with him. I've got a better wheeze than that."

"Oh, if you've got a wheeze—" said Carboy and Lane together, mollified.

"Of course I've got a wheeze!" said Frank Monk indignantly. "Do you think I would run away from that fat-faced whipper-snapper in dead earnest?"

"Well, I suppose not; but you've given him that impression."

"He won't keep the impression long," said Frank, with a chuckle. "Come on! We're going to wait for that hack in the lane. We couldn't carry out the plan in Rylcombe, but in the lane there won't be anyone to interfere. Call two or three of our fellows out of the tuckshop, and let's be off!"

The two or three recruits were easily found. Half a dozen Grammarians hurried out of the village, and lay in ambush among the willows in Rylcombe Lane, half-way to St. Jim's. Monk kept a keen look-out, and the rattle of the old hack and the clattering of the ancient horse were soon heard on the hard road.

"Here they come! Mind you don't let the hack get past you."

"What-ho!" answered the grinning Grammarians.

The Rylcombe hack came clattering by. Marmaduke, leaning back upon the ancient cushions inside, was thinking of his coming meeting with his old chums at St. Jim's.

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NEXT WEEK: "SAINTS v. GRAMMARIANS." Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and their Great Rivals. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Marmaduke had come to St. Jim's in the first place a regular "bouncer," with his head filled with ideas of his own importance, and the thought of Smythe senior's millions never absent from his mind. The juniors of St. Jim's had reformed him. But it was possible that since leaving the school Marmaduke had somewhat fallen from grace.

The adulation a millionaire's son naturally received from toadies of all sorts, the spoiling by a fond mother, and the obsequiousness of a tutor, had perhaps revived in Marmaduke some of the faults which the boys of St. Jim's had ruthlessly cut out of him while he sojourned among them.

Marmaduke was sucking the gold head of his cane and thinking of various things, when the hack came to a sudden halt. He looked out of the window with an annoyed expression.

"Driver, what do you mean by stopping? I told you that I was in a hurry to get to the school. You are actually causing me inconvenience—Dear me!" Marmaduke broke off. "It is the Grammar cads again!"

Two Grammarians were holding the horse; two more were bandying words with the driver, and warning him that he would be pulled down and ducked in the ditch if he used his whip on the boys at the horse's head.

Two—Monk and Carboy—were running to open the door of the hack. They had it open in a twinkling, and before Marmaduke realised what was happening, they had jerked him out into the road.

"Hands off!" shouted Marmaduke. "Hands off, you beastly cads! I'll have you—"

"Ha, ha! Driver, go on to the school, and deliver the property of the respected Marmy, and tell them he's not coming yet."

The driver hesitated. He didn't like to go on without his passenger, and yet he could certainly do nothing against six Grammarians. And it is quite possible that the trace of uppishness in Marmaduke's manner had put the driver's back up, and made him far from unwilling for the heir of millions to have a lesson.

"Look 'ere, I protest against this 'ere!" he said.

"That's all right, chappy; protest as much as you like," said Monk cheerfully. "Only drive on while you're doing it, or we shall turn your rattle trap over into the ditch."

"Yes, but look 'ere, young gents—"

"Turn him over into the ditch!" shouted Monk.

The threat was enough. The driver whipped his horse, and the hack lumbered on. Marmaduke made a frantic attempt to rush after it, but in vain. Monk and Carboy held him fast.

"Oh, come, don't be cruel!" said Monk pathetically. "You don't want to run away and leave us just as we are growing fond of you, do you, Marmy dear?"

"Let me go! I'll have you punished! I—"

"Nice sort of critter, ain't it!" said Carboy, in tones of disgust. "Wonder how the chaps there can stand it. I couldn't. Beastly rotter!"

"All the more reason why nice fellows like us should give him a lesson," said Monk. "Go into the field there, and catch your relation, Lane."

Lane looked puzzled.

"My relation! What are you driving at?"

"There he is—you can hear him."

Hee-haw, hee-haw, hee-haw!

The musical notes of a donkey sounded over the hedge. Lane turned red.

"Look here, Monk, if you're setting up as a funny man—"

"I'm not," said Monk. "I mean it. That's Farmer Jones's donkey, that he lets out for rides to the village kids. I've been on his back often enough. He's as easy to catch as this brother of his we've got here. Go and catch him."

"What for?"

"My dear chap, do as you're told. What's the good of being a giddy captain if you have to give reasons? Go and bring that donkey here."

"Oh, all right!" said Lane. "Blessed if I see the game, though!"

"You'll see it soon enough. Buck up!"

Lane disappeared through a gap in the hedge. Mr. Jones's donkey was a very tame and quiet creature, and would eat out of anybody's hand. Lane had no difficulty in catching him, and bringing him into the road. Meanwhile, Marmaduke, wondering what was to be done with him, was looking sullen.

Sullenness had been one of Marmaduke's failings in the old days, and it seemed to have revived during his life in the luxurious mansion of Smythe senior, in Park Lane. That may have had something to do with his papa sending him back to St. Jim's for a time, though Marmaduke himself did not suspect it.

"Now," said Frank Monk, addressing himself to Marmaduke, while the eager Grammarians hung on his words, "I

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dare say you know we're at war with the fellows of St. Jim's, and I really wish it happened to be Blake, or Figgins, or Tom Merry that we had hold of now. But as it isn't, you'll serve our turn. We shall score over them just the same, and I fancy I can see their faces when you arrive at St. Jim's. I hope this lesson will do you good. I hear that you are a giddy millionaire, and have more sovereigns than other fellows have tanners. Perhaps that's what made you a rotter—for you are one."

"I shall have you punished if you—"

"Hark at the cad, chaps! Fancy Tom Merry taking it like that, or Figgins! The question is, ought we to larrup him before we send him home?"

"Yes," said Gay promptly. "A couple of dozen with a buckle belt, well laid on, would do him no end of good. I can recommend it in such cases."

"If you dare to—"

"It's not a question of daring," said Monk. "We can do as we like. But we'll let you off the hiding, for I'm pretty certain that you'll get plenty at St. Jim's if you carry on like this when you get there. Mount the millionaire, kids."

Monk's plan had dawned upon the Grammarians by this time. They chuckled joyously as they seized the vainly-wriggling Marmaduke, and swung him upon the donkey's back.

"Face to the tail," exclaimed Gay. "That's right! Neddy doesn't seem to quite know what to make of it. He's never had one of his own race on his back before."

"You impertinent ruffians—"

"Fasten his legs under Neddy's tummy," grinned Gay. "We musn't allow the dear boy to fall off. Now tie his hands, and run that cord under Neddy, too. Do you think you are safe now, Marmalade?"

"My name is Marmaduke—"

"My mistake. Do you think you are safe now? Here's another length of rope, so you may as well shove it on him, Carboy. Nothing like making sure. Has anybody got any paint?"

There was a general murmur of regret. Nobody had any paint. The opportunity of adorning the countenance of Marmaduke had to be lost. Done in red and green, as Carboy remarked, he would have presented a unique appearance.

"But there's plenty of mud in the ditch," suggested Lane. "Nice, thick, black mud, as good as black ink for ornamental purposes."

"Good idea!" exclaimed Monk, slapping him heartily on the back. "Get some, old chap."

"Get it yourself," said Lane. "I can't stick my fingers in that stuff."

"I'll stick your head in it if you don't obey orders! Who's captain?"

"Oh, all right! Wish I hadn't spoken."

"Well, you do not speak too much as a rule. That's right—plaster his face so that his dearest friend won't know him. They'll have to scrape that off before they can kiss their dearest Marmaduke. Jump on his silk hat, somebody. As he's a millionaire he can easily get another. Make it as much like a concertina as you can, and stick it on the back of his head."

"You—you beasts! I'll—I'll—"

"There!" said Monk, stepping back a pace and surveying the Grammarians' handiwork with great satisfaction. "There, I think that's about as near perfect as we could possibly get. Are you satisfied, Marmaduke?"

"You—you horrid, rotten cad—"

"Nice way he has of speaking, hasn't he? I've half a mind to let him have that thrashing after all. He needs it. Never mind, let him go. He looks too funny to live, and I know the Saints will be pleased to see him. Lead Neddy on. We'll send him in at the gate of St. Jim's and he can trot round the quadrangle, and show the kids there that the Grammar School is on the warpath, and can knock spots off them any time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians roared at the idea. It seemed too funny for words to send Marmaduke right up to the doors of St. Jim's in that style. It would be a blow at the prestige of the college which would take a lot of wiping out.

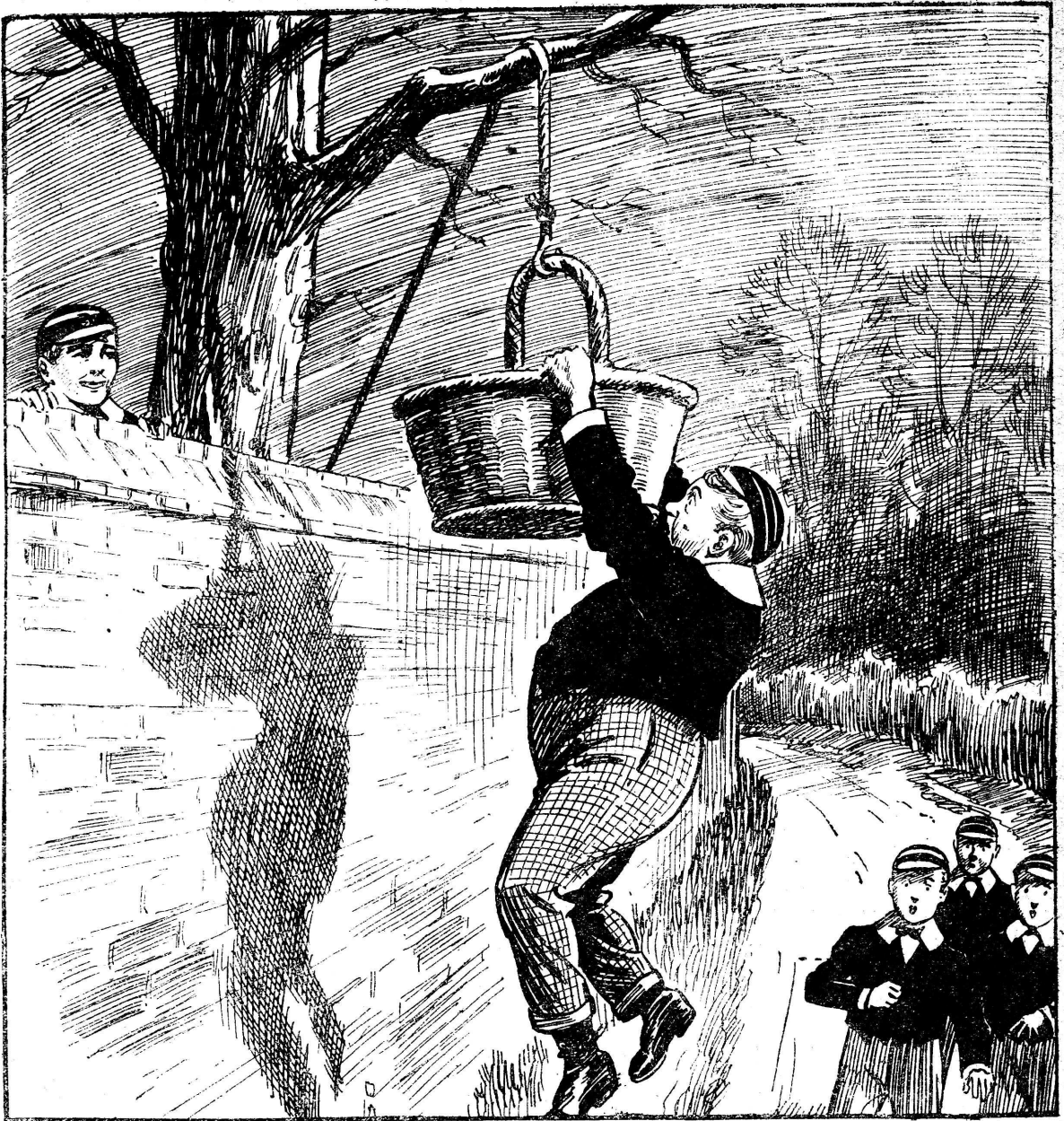
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, I won't have it!" roared Marmaduke. "Release me immediately, you cads! Let me get off this brute! I'll give you a sovereign each—"

"Hark at the rotten money-monger!" exclaimed Monk, in deep disgust. "I shall really have to change my mind about this thrashing. Anybody got a stick?"

"Let me down! I won't go to St. Jim's like this—"

"Seems to me you've got no choice in the matter. Forward, Neddy!"



Fatty Wynn gave a terrific gasp as he shot up into the air. He did not even think of letting go of the basket, which meant the loss of the provisions. "Help!" he gasped faintly. (See page 21.)

The donkey, surrounded by the laughing crowd of Grammarians, trotted off in the direction of the school. The juniors kept pace with him, and Marmaduke's furious protests were lost in their yells of laughter. St. Jim's came in sight, and right up to the ancient college swept the Grammarians with their prisoner.

CHAPTER 4.

A Strict Disciplinarian.

AND meanwhile, where were Blake and his merry men? Blake, having been duly appointed leader of the Co., had given strict injunctions to his followers to be at the school gates at half-past two, ready to march down to the village station to meet the train Marmaduke was coming by.

But discipline was not yet firmly established in the St. Jim's forces.

Jack Blake arrived at the gate at half-past two exactly, reaching the rendezvous as the clock was chiming out the half-hour. He had cut across from the gym. to be there in time, but when he arrived he found nobody else there.

Herries came along a few minutes later. Blake gave him an indignant glance.

"You're three minutes late, Herries."

"Am I?" said Herries. "I'm sorry. The others don't seem to be here, so I can't see that it matters very much."

"Where's D'Arcy?" asked Blake, with a sniff.

"He was polishing his silk hat when I left him, and he said he would come along in a few minutes. He's put on a new topper to meet Marmaduke."

"I'll new topper him!" said Blake wrathfully. "I'll show you bouncers who's captain! Let him come along in a new topper, that's all!"

Sure enough, five minutes later, Blake espied the swell of the School House coming up to the gate clad in his most gorgeous raiment, with a shiny silk topper set a little on one side of his head in a decidedly rakish manner.

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NEXT WEEK: "SAINTS V. GRAMMARIANS." Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and their Great Rivals. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

It was difficult to say whether the shinness of the silk topper, the gorgeous hue of the waistcoat, the brilliancy of the boots, or the spotlessness of the high collar was the most conspicuous of D'Arcy's many beauties. But Blake looked upon the swell of St. Jim's with an eye of disfavour.

"You're eight minutes late for the rendezvous," he said grimly.

"I am weally sowwy, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "But you see, I had to get myself up in decent style to greet our friend Marmaduke. He comes from a vewy swell place, you know, and he weally keeps up a first-class appearance, and as he lives in town he has the advantage of keepin' up with the vewy latest fashion. You see, we must keep our end up as much as we can, deah boy."

"Nobody is allowed to be late for a rendezvous while I am captain," said Blake. "Not without severe penalties."

And with a calm and considerate air he knocked the silk hat off D'Arcy's head, and it splashed into a puddle of muddy water.

Arthur Augustus gave a shriek of anguish.

"Oh, Blake, you bwute! You howwid wuffian! My new silk toppah!"

"Sorry," said Blake, kindly but firmly. "Nobody is allowed to stop and put a silk topper on when I order him to the front. Discipline must be maintained. Where are those other rotters? They're not in sight."

Blake anxiously scanned the quadrangle. It was close on a quarter to three, and yet nothing could be seen of the chums of the Shell, or of Figgins & Co. But a couple of minutes later Tom Merry was sighted, scudding across the quad: as if he were on the cinder-path. Blake clenched his fists and looked warlike.

"What do you mean by being late?" he demanded, as Tom Merry came up breathless.

"Sorry," panted Tom. "That blessed Schneider spotted me, and kept me for a quarter of an hour. I believe he knew I had an appointment."

"Oh, if that's it, you're excused," said Blake, mollified. "You can't get away when a master collars you, I admit. Hallo, here's Digby! What makes you late for the appointment, Dig?"

"Sorry," said Digby, coming strolling up with his hands in his pockets. "Young Curly has been showing me his white mice—Ow!"

Blake's right had suddenly lashed out, and Digby received it on his nose, and he sat down in the puddle where D'Arcy's silk hat had reposed. The swell of the School House was standing near, mournfully wiping his silk topper with a cambric handkerchief. Digby's flop into the puddle sent up a splash of muddy water, which spotted all over the beautiful and immaculate attire of Arthur Augustus.

"Ow!" repeated Digby, sitting in the puddle and staring up at Blake as if he thought the chief of Study No. 6 had suddenly gone mad.

"You howwid ass!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You have splashed my twousahs!"

"Oh, blow your trousers!" said Digby, getting up. "What did you do that for, Blake? Have you gone right off your silly rocker, or are you hunting for a black eye?"

"Neither," said Blake severely. "I'm maintaining discipline. Everybody who comes late for the rendezvous gets a dot on the nose."

"Look here, I'm not going to—"

"Nuff said. Here comes Lowther. I wonder what's detained him?"

Monty Lowther could be seen making his way towards the gateway. He was walking easily, with his hands in his pockets, and apparently did not consider his unpunctuality a matter of moment at all. That got Blake's back up at once. It really looked as if the Shell boy did not much respect a captain selected from the Fourth Form.

"You are late, Lowther," said Blake, with ominous calm, while the others grinned and looked on. "What made you late, may I inquire?"

"Blessed if I know," said Lowther cheerfully. "I expect I'm late because I'm late, or else I'm not early because I'm not early, or else—O-o-o-o-oh!"

Blake's right came out like lightning, and Monty Lowther staggered against the gate, and slid down to a sitting position.

"Every kid who is late for the rendezvous gets a dot on the nose," explained Blake.

"Does he?" yelled Lowther, jumping up. "Then the captain gets two or three dots on his chivvy in exchange."

And Lowther rushed at Blake. But Herries and Tom Merry held him back.

"Discipline must be maintained," said Tom Merry. "I agree with Blake. We're all going to be captain in turn, and we shall expect to be obeyed."

"Let me go! I'm going to wipe up the ground with him!"

"No, you're not. Quiet, Monty. Blake is quite right."

"Hallo, here's Manners!" said Blake. "Well, Manners, you're nearly twenty-five minutes late for the meeting. What's the reason?"

"I thought I'd better write out an impot first, and get it done—Ow!"

Manners fell to a right-hander on the nose. He sprang up again, and went for Blake without waiting to ask questions. They closed and staggered to and fro in mortal strife.

But Monty Lowther, having been calmed, Tom Merry and Herries seized Manners and dragged him off Blake, and jammed him against the gate, while they explained to him that discipline had to be maintained. Blake set his collar straight, and looked out for Figgins & Co. Figgins and Kerr were coming from the direction of the New House, whistling as they came.

"You're late," said Blake, with forced calm. "Any explanation?"

Figgins was inclined to treat the question facetiously. So was Kerr. They looked at each other with exaggerated gravity.

"We are late, Kerr," said Figgins.

"We are, Figgy," said Kerr.

"Why are we late, Kerr?"

"Perhaps it is because we are not early, Figgy."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder, Blake. Perhaps it's because we're not early. We—Oh!"

"Oh, oh!" howled Kerr.

Left and right Blake hit out, and Figgins and Kerr rolled on the cold ground. In a twinkling they were on their feet and rushing at Blake. But the Terrible Three rushed between. Whatever Manners and Lowther might think of their own treatment, they were more than ready to back up a School House fellow against New House rebels. Figgins and Kerr were promptly collared.

"Peace, my infants," said Tom Merry soothingly. "Discipline must be maintained. Blake is quite right. You've got off cheaply."

"Do you think we're going to put up—"

"Yes, I do. You'll have the same privilege when you're captain. Peace, my children. Now, where is Fatty Wynn?"

Figgins rubbed his nose and looked daggers at Blake. But he allowed himself to be pacified. Perhaps he was thinking of the time when he would be captain, and would be on the alert for any neglect of discipline on Blake's part. "Wynn! Oh, he's playing diablo. He's caught the bobbin ninety-eight times, and he says he can't leave off. He can't come."

"Can't come, can't he!" exclaimed Blake wrathfully. "We'll see whether he can't come! We're all here, except Fatty. We'll go and fetch him. Follow your leader!"

"But look here, Blake—"

"Obey orders! What's the use of being a blessed captain if your orders are not obeyed? Follow me, and shut up!"

"Quite right," said Tom Merry. "Follow your leader."

"I suppose—" began Kerr.

"Do your supposing presently," rapped out Blake, "and come on!"

The Co., though with rebellious looks, followed Blake. Nine juniors marched up to the New House, and marched in, and Blake led the way up to Figgins' study. He knew the way well. The door was open, and the juniors, crowded in the passage, looked in and saw Fatty Wynn hard at work. His hands held the sticks, and his eyes were fixed upon the spinning "devil," which he was tossing and catching with astonishing rapidity.

"Hundred and fifty-five, hundred and fifty-six," he said, in a sort of chant.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "That's a record for the New House!"

"Hundred and fifty-seven."

"Wynn, how dare you play diablo instead of coming to the rendezvous?" demanded Blake.

Fatty Wynn did not even look at him. His plump face was red with exertion, and his forehead wet with perspiration. His eyes were on the "devil."

"Hundred and fifty-eight—"

"Stop that, Wynn, and—"

"Hundred and fifty-nine—"

"Chuck it, I say, and—"

"Hundred and sixty—"

Blake made a dive forward. The "devil" dropped to the floor, and Fatty Wynn gave a fearful yell as Blake snatched at the string.

"You've spoiled my record—you—you—"

Blake did not argue. He hit out, and Fatty Wynn sat down on the study carpet.

"Discipline has to be maintained," said Blake. "The meeting was for half-past two, and now it's past three. Come along. Marmaduke will be at the school before we've started to meet him."

Fatty Wynn growled wrathfully.

"You've spoiled my—"

"Rats! Come along!" said Figgins. "Diabolo's out of date now, and anyway, Blake's right. When I'm captain, just you see how I'll keep you lot in order. March!"

"Not much good going now," remarked Manners, as they left the New House in a body. "Marmy's train has been in more than a quarter of an hour."

"Who's giving orders here?" asked Blake politely.

"Oh, rats! I only remarked—"

"Then don't remark. I'll do all the remarking that's required. Come along, and we'll meet Marmaduke on the road, anyway. How do we know that those Grammar cads haven't got hold of him. If they saw him in Rylcombe, that's just what they would do."

The ten juniors marched down to the gate. As they reached it, there was a roar from the road outside—yells and cheers and laughter. Blake gave a jump.

"That's the Grammar cads! What's up?"

"Let me go! I won't go in like this—"

"Marmaduke's voice!" yelled Figgins. "They've got him!"

The next moment a startling sight burst upon the view of the amazed and indignant Co.

CHAPTER 5.

The Grammarians' Triumph.

MARMADUKE!"

The juniors of St. Jim's shouted out the name in a kind of chorus.

The donkey, urged on by the shouts and yells of the Grammarians, came careering up to the gates of St. Jim's. The figure seated upon its back, with his face to the tail, would never have been recognised as Marmaduke but for the well-known voice. When the movements of the donkey allowed the face to be seen by glimpses, the thick coating of black mud upon it rendered the features indistinguishable. And the battered tile, stuck on the back of the unfortunate rider's head, did not look much like the headgear of the heir of millions.

The sight was so utterly ridiculous that some of the Saints could not help grinning. The Grammarians, catching sight of the crowd in the gateway, gave a yell of defiance. Monk rushed the donkey right up to the gate, and gave him a smack that sent him clattering through the crowd, and the Saints, taken by surprise as they were by the whole occurrence, slithered to right and left, and the donkey and his burden tore through. That was just what Monk wanted—to send Marmaduke into the quadrangle, and display his plight to all St. Jim's.

But Tom Merry and his chums were quite as well aware as Monk was of what a terrible blow that would be to their prestige.

In a moment Tom Merry recovered himself.

"Catch the moke! Quick!"

The Terrible Three made a rush at the donkey. Figgins and Kerr were after them like a shot. Under ordinary circumstances, the catching of Neddy was a simple matter; but the rapid run, and the wild yells of the Grammarians, had startled Neddy almost out of his asinine wits, and for once in his career he was shy and skittish. He ran and dodged, and trotted away at a pace the boys could hardly equal, right towards the School House.

Tom Merry and his companions chased the donkey desperately. Marmaduke, terribly jolted in his uneasy position, was calling for help.

Blake and some of the Co. had rashly issued from the gate to attack the Grammarians. But Frank Monk and his friends, as they were outnumbered, had retreated promptly, quite satisfied with the success of the "jape." They tore off to the Grammar School to spread the tale, and throw their schoolfellows into hysterics with it. Blake and the rest hurried in at the gate, and a woeful sight met their gaze.

The donkey, with Marmaduke still sitting face to the tail, was careering wildly round the quadrangle. Tom Merry and half a dozen juniors were chasing him with energy, but Neddy showed a facility in dodging that would have made the fortune of a Rugby three-quarter. Neddy was frightened, and Neddy did not mean to be caught.

The quadrangle at St. Jim's was generally pretty lively on a half-holiday, and the masters and prefects usually turned a judiciously deaf ear to noises proceeding therefrom. But it was impossible for the present disturbance to pass unheeded. Seniors and juniors crowded out of both houses, from the gym. and the football-field, to watch the wild antics of Neddy, and the wild-looking figure on his back. Yells of laughter greeted the unhappy Marmaduke wherever the vagaries of Neddy carried him.

"Catch him!" shouted Blake. "Why don't you catch him?"

"Why don't you?" bawled Lowther. "It's more in your line. Talk to him in his own language. You can do it."

"Head him off!"

"Collar him!"

"Now's your chance!"

"We shall have the doctor out soon."

If the doctor had been stone-deaf, he must have heard the terrific din. As a matter of fact, he was already looking out of his study window in wonder and annoyance. Mr. Railton, the house-master of the School House, came out, looking very exasperated, and Mr. Ratcliff, the head of the New House, put his head out of the door, with a scowl upon his thin, sour face. The two house-masters took the scene in different ways. Mr. Ratcliff's scowl grew blacker, while Mr. Railton of the School House burst into an involuntary laugh.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What can this mean? Who can that strange-looking person be? Stop that donkey immediately, boys!"

"We're trying to, sir."

"Stop that brute!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, coming out of the New House. "Do you hear? Who has dared to play this rascally trick? Stop that brute at once!"

The boys tried to stop him. But most of them were laughing too much to be able to effect anything. And Neddy was still apparently under the impression that he was playing Rugby, and dodging an extra large number of opposing backs.

Mr. Ratcliff, aflame with anger, rushed forth to stop the careering donkey himself. He planted himself in Neddy's path, and made a valiant clutch at him. What happened next he never quite knew. Something butted him somewhere, he thought, but it was not quite clear. What was clear was that he was sitting down in the quadrangle in a very dazed condition without knowing how he got there.

"Stop him, Kildare!"

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had come off the football-field in his playing garb, and was running a neck-and-neck race with Neddy. He got a grip at last on Neddy's neck, and by sheer force brought him to a halt. Then a crowd of boys closed up round the captured donkey, and he was easily secured.

Neddy stood panting and gasping and blowing and trembling in every limb, apparently in fearsome expectation of a beating. And he would have got one, too, if Gore of the Shell had had his way. Gore had received a kick in his attempts to stop the donkey, and he was prepared to return the painfulness of it with interest. He was one of the first to reach Neddy, and he whirled up a big stick to take summary vengeance. But before the blow could fall, Tom Merry jerked him away, and the stick swept the empty air. Gore staggered and nearly fell, and then turned furiously upon Tom Merry.

"Hands off! I'm going to lick that brute—"

"Not at all," said Tom Merry cheerfully; "or if you do I'll lick you."

"He kicked me!"

"You got in his way, then."

"I'm going to—"

Gore rushed at Neddy spitefully with his stick; but Kildare caught him by the collar this time, before Tom Merry could interfere, and slung him away.

"Enough of that, Gore. Don't be a brute!"

"He kicked me!"

"Serve you right; clear back!"

There was no opposing the captain of the school. Gore slunk back scowling. Mr. Ratcliff, looking very dusty and ill-tempered, reached the spot. Kildare was soothing the frightened donkey, and Tom Merry and Blake were trying to unfasten Marmaduke. But that was not easy. The Grammarians had well secured their prisoner.

"What does this mean?" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Who are you, sir? How dare you come into the quadrangle of this college!"

It was a ridiculous question, for it was plain enough that Marmaduke had not come into the quad. in that state of his own accord. But Mr. Ratcliff was too angry to be reasonable. Indeed, he seldom was reasonable.

"I'm Marmaduke Smythe—"

"Smythe! Do you mean to say that you are the boy who was coming to this school, whose boxes arrived half an hour ago? How dare you come here like this?"

"Do you think I could help it?" hooted Marmaduke.

"Don't address me like that! How came you in this state?"

"I was collared by a lot of beastly ruffians as I was coming to the school. They took me out of the hack, and tied me up on the donkey."

"Infamous!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, his wrath taking a new direction. "Who were the rascals? Could you identify the dastardly scoundrels?"

"Yes, of course I could. I—"

"It seems to me that this is some boyish joke," said Mr. Railton, coming up. "It is a rough sort of joke, but I think a mistake would be made in regarding it as an outrage."

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him coldly. There was no love lost between the two House-masters at St. Jim's.

"I think it is an outrage," said the New House-master tartly. "If Smythe can give the names of the ruffians, their punishment shall be secured."

"I can give you their names— Ow, ow, ow!"

"What do you mean by making those ridiculous noises, Smythe?"

"Tom Merry pinched me, sir."

"Take more care in unfastening that cord, Merry, not to hurt Smythe. Is it very tight?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry demurely.

"Now, Smythe, give me the names of the authors of this dastardly outrage!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, with a side glance of half-concealed defiance at Mr. Railton. "They shall be found out, and severely punished. Were they village boys?"

"No, sir, they belonged to the— Ow, ow, o-o-o-h!"

"Is that impertinence, Smythe?" asked Mr. Ratcliff sternly.

"No, sir. That cord pinched me again."

"Will you be more careful, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. I was very careful, sir—very careful indeed."

"Then, as you are so clumsy, step aside, and let Figgins unfasten Smythe. Now, Smythe, you were telling me—"

"Yes, sir. The brutes belonged to the— Oh, my eye! Oh!"

"Smythe!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. Mr. Railton concealed a smile.

"I couldn't help it, sir," mumbled Marmaduke. "That cord Figgins is unfastening pinched my leg horribly. It felt just like a finger and thumb gripping my calf."

"Figgins, be more careful. It is cruel and inconsiderate to hurt Smythe."

"I can't be more careful than I am, sir."

"Then leave that to Blake. Blake, unfasten that cord, please."

"Certainly, sir!" said Blake cheerfully, and, exchanging a wink with Figgins as he took his place, and began industriously to unfasten the cords which secured Marmaduke to the donkey.

"Now, Smythe, I am waiting to hear—"

"I've been trying to tell you, sir. The rotters who tied me up like this were not boys from the village; they belonged to— O-o-o-o-h!"

"Smythe!"

"It was Blake, sir. He hurt my leg fearfully."

"It seems to me!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff furiously, as he caught a grin on several faces—"it seems to me that this is a plot to prevent Smythe from telling me the names of the ruffians who assaulted him! Stand back! I will release Smythe myself. I—"

"Pray what does this mean?"

It was the voice of the doctor. The crowd parted respectfully for the Head of St. Jim's. He was looking very grave.

"This is Smythe, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "He has been tied up in this manner by some roughs, whose names he can tell us. I think—"

"Allow me," said Mr. Railton, quietly but firmly. "I think this is another outcome, sir, of the rivalry between this school and another in the neighbourhood, and that inquiry into the matter will lead to no good result."

Dr. Holmes understood. He nodded his head slowly.

"I quite comprehend, Mr. Railton. I really think that this is carrying a jest much too far, but I know that my boys have not been blameless in the matter—and, in fact, have—have really—"

"Licked the Grammarians lots of times, sir," suggested Tom Merry.

"Ahem! I do not want to cause any ill-feeling between the schools. Unless, therefore, Smythe himself complains of ill-usage, I shall not—"

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip.

"But I do com—" began Marmaduke hotly. "O-o-o-o-h!" It was a wail of anguish. "Someone stuck a pin in me!"

"Indeed," said the Head, who saw a pin in Blake's hand, but affected to see nothing, and he looked very coldly at Marmaduke—"indeed, Smythe! Figgins, you had better unfasten Smythe, and take him to the New House. He is to share your study there, as when he was previously at this school. Let him be cleaned as soon as possible. He is in a

shocking state. If he then wishes to complain to me of the treatment he has received, he can come to my study."

"Certainly, sir."

Kildare took out his pocket-knife, and cut Marmaduke loose. The doctor, with a sign to the two house-masters to accompany him, left the spot. Mr. Ratcliff went very unwillingly. Marmaduke was jerked off the donkey's back. And while a couple of juniors rode Neddy away to take him back to his native pastures, Figgins & Co. escorted Marmaduke into the New House. They shoved him into a bath-room, and told him to clean himself, and when he had done so to come to the study; which Marmaduke did. He came into Figgy's study ten minutes later, looking much more presentable, and he was greeted with a chilling silence and stony stares.

CHAPTER 6.

A Lecture for Marmaduke.

BLAKE and his three chums looked into Tom Merry's study in the School House. The Terrible Three had taken off their overcoats, and had just decided to go over to the New House to see Figgins when the chums of Study No. 6 looked in.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "The walk to Rylcombe's off, as you fellows made such a muck of it by turning up late. What do you think of Marmaduke?"

"Got some of his pleasant old ways back again, apparently," Tom Merry remarked.

Blake nodded with a grin.

"Yes, he was a howling bounder when he first came to St. Jim's, but we cured him. I suppose the old plutocratic surroundings have spoiled him again, and he wants another cure. He'll get it. I don't envy him his next talk with Figgins. But we're going over to the New House to see about it. Come along!"

"Eh?" said the Terrible Three simultaneously.

"I said come along," said Blake. "Are you deaf all of a sudden?"

"Yes, you said 'Come along!' and it was like your cheek."

"Check! What do you mean? Ain't I your leader, and isn't it my place to give orders?" Blake demanded rather excitedly.

"No, you're not our leader, and it's not your place to give orders," answered Lowther categorically. "You know the articles of agreement."

"Of course I do. Each chap takes command for one day—"

"Unless he proves himself incapable, and then he gets the order of the kick," said Manners. "That's the agreement, Blake."

Blake turned red.

"Do you mean to say that I—"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "We agreed that a defeat was to be accounted a proof of incapacity to lead, and haven't we been defeated by the Grammarians since you started in life as a general?"

"Why, you horrid rascals, it was all your fault! If you had turned up at the rendezvous—if you had been in time—if we—"

"Oh, go easy with the if's! Anybody can make excuses. Excuses are all very well, but they don't alter facts. We've been defeated by the Grammar cads."

"While you were leader, Jack Blake—"

"Therefore, it's perfectly plain—"

"That you're no good, and you get the order of the boot."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I admit that Blake has causes of complaint on his side, but there's no gettin' o'vah the fact that we have suffahed a defeat while undah his leadership, and Blake is deposed accordingly."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "I agree with Gussy. Don't you, Dig?" And Digby nodded.

"Well," said Blake, containing his wrath with a great effort, "I think you're a lot of silly asses, but I'm not going to kick against the rules. We'll see what Figgins says. Come on, and let's get to the New House!"

The seven juniors crossed the quadrangle. Many glances, more or less hostile, were cast at them by the New House juniors as they entered the rival building. But they were not interfered with. When the Terrible Three were allied with Study No. 6 they made too strong a team to be lightly tackled.

Tom Merry announced his arrival by a thump on Figgins's door, and Blake backed it up with a kick, with the result that the door, which was on the latch, flew violently open.

Marmaduke had entered the study only a minute before, and he was standing uneasily, looking in a very dubious way at Figgins & Co., who still preserved a chilly silence.

The door, as it flew open, smote Marmaduke on the back, and he pitched forward, and fell into the arms of Figgins.

ANSWERS

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"My word!" gasped Marmaduke. "What—why—how—"

Figgins jerked him off, and the heir of millions staggered against the table and slid down to a sitting posture on the floor.

"Sorry," said Tom Merry, with his sunny smile, as he came in. "Didn't see you, Marmaduke."

"I don't see how you could see me, when the beastly door was shut," said Marmaduke, picking himself up. "I've been very unlucky to-day, and I don't get any sympathy. There's Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn staring at me as if I were a stuffed dummy, instead of an old chum come back to the school."

And Marmaduke's expression as he said this rather softened Figgins & Co.

"Well, we're sorry," said Figgins. "It can't be helped. Come in, you fellows. I suppose you've come to have a look at Marmaduke and see what's to be done with him?"

"Yaas, wathah! We considah—"

"Wait a bit," said Tom Merry. "You remember the rules of the Co., Figgy. A defeat counts as a proof of bad generalship, and a bad general is chucked out on the spot. We're agreed that Blake gets the order of the push. Are you?"

"Rather!" said Figgins & Co., with one voice.

"Oh, very well," said Blake, with a sniff; "I don't mind! Let's get a new chief, and if I don't make him toe the line, you can use my napper for a football."

"We'd better draw lots again," said Digby. "It's hard cheese on Blake, but the game's the game. Shall we put down Marmaduke's name?"

"Of course you will!" exclaimed Marmaduke hotly. "I'm one of the Co., I suppose! What do you mean, Digby?"

There was an uncomfortable silence.

Marmaduke looked round the study.

"I came expecting to find friends here," he said, with rather a shake in his voice. "I didn't think you would have forgotten an old chum so soon. But if you don't want me—"

"It's not that," said Figgins hastily. "All the chaps can tell you how we've looked forward to your coming, and the larks we've planned to have together. But—"

"But—," said Kerr, shaking his head.

"But—," said Fatty Wynn, and he wrinkled his brows.

"But what? Don't beat about the bush. I've got to stay here for some weeks now, while my pater is away, or blessed if I wouldn't clear out this minute!"

"Well, the fact is—," said Figgins awkwardly.

"Look here," said Tom Merry, in his frank, direct way.

"It's a thorny subject, but it's no good fooling over it. Let's have it out. You acted like a cad to-day, Marmaduke."

Marmaduke Smythe turned crimson.

"Yaas, wathah! A weally wotten cad, you know!"

"You were going to give away the Grammarians," said Figgins. "You know old Ratcliff. He's always looking for trouble, and he'd have been only too glad of a chance to make bad blood with the Grammar School masters. He was simply itching for an excuse to send a letter of complaint to Dr. Monk, and get the chaps flogged for tying you on the donkey."

"Serve 'em right," said Marmaduke.

"Oh, if that's how you look at it, I've no more to say," said Figgins coldly. "A nice set of sneaks the Grammarians would have thought us. Why, we've given them the kybosh many a time, but do you think they've gone sneaking to their masters and complaining?"

"Not a bit of it," said Blake. "They stood the racket like men and decent fellows, and never whined when they got it in the neck."

"We had to stop your peaching," said Figgins. "You were hurt, and it served you right. I tell you plainly you've had wrung your neck if you'd succeeded in giving the Grammarians away over that matter."

Marmaduke's face had gradually been growing sullen during this little lecture. He probably realised that he was in the wrong, but the obstinacy latent in his nature would not allow him to admit it.

His brow was dark as silence fell again in the study.

"I don't see it like that," he replied. "I was used in a ruffianly way, and I'm not going to stand it. I—"

"Very well," said Figgins quietly. "I don't want to argue about it. You've forgotten what St. Jim's is like, I suppose; and, anyway, you've forgotten what we are like if you think we are going to chum up with a fellow who tells tales."

"I don't tell tales! I—"

"What do you call it, then?"

"Well, I hadn't time to think; and I was savage, and—"

"You had no right to be savage. You ought to take the things in a good spirit. We've given the Grammarians worse things than that to stand, and Gay or Monk or Lane never

showed a bad temper over it. We made them write out and sign a document once acknowledging us to be the top school, and they haven't cut up rough over even that. The fact is, old fellow, that you're a spoiled bouncer, and you—"

"If you call me a bouncer, Figgins—"

"Well, what will you do?" said Figgins disdainfully.

Marmaduke clenched his fists. His face was dark with anger, his eyes burning. His wilful and wayward nature was quite roused by this lecturing. But Tom Merry pushed him back.

"None of that!" Tom exclaimed. "It hasn't come to that, I suppose, between such chums as we've always been? Marmaduke can't come into the Co. unless he turns over a new leaf, that's pretty clear. But there's no need to quarrel."

Marmaduke turned sulkily towards the door.

"Hang the Co.!" he said rudely. "I don't want to come into it! Hang the Co., and hang you!"

And he went out of the study and slammed the door violently.

The chums looked at one another uncomfortably.

"That's rather a disappointment," said Figgins. "He can't be in the Co. I rather wish he had never come to the school. It's—it's beastly!"

"Oh, I dare say he'll see things in a better light in time!" said Tom Merry. "It would be a miracle if a millionaire's son didn't become a bit of a snob, with rotters of all kinds flattering him and fawning on him all the time. I dare say we shall cure him. We did it with Lumley-Lumley, and we can do it again with Marmy. But now to business. Who's to be leader?"

"I'll write out the slips," said Blake.

The names, as before, were put into the bag, and one was drawn. The name upon the lucky slip was Montague Lowther.

Lowther swelled visibly.

"Any orders?" asked Blake, with mock humility.

"Yes," said Lowther, with his nose in the air. "All of you be ready to come out in a quarter of an hour, and mind you're not late. Meet me at the School House steps."

"What's the game?"

"I'll tell you that when the time comes," said Lowther.

"We're going on the warpath, that's all. Just you turn up. You know what will happen to your nose if you're late, Blake!"

And the meeting in Figgins's study broke up.

CHAPTER 7.

On the Warpath.

MONTY LOWTHER did not have to complain of late-comers at the rendezvous. The quick way with lags which Blake had adopted, it was Lowther's intention to imitate, and the Co. knew it, and acted accordingly. Lowther, as he came down the steps of the School House, was accompanied by Tom Merry and Manners, and he found Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. waiting for him.

"Glad to see you all here," said Lowther, glancing round, and rather disappointed because there was no excuse for dropping on Blake. "Come along!"

"Whither bound?" asked Digby.

"Follow your leader!" said Lowther haughtily.

They followed their leader. Lowther led the way out of the school gates and took the road to Rylcombe.

"But what's the programme?" demanded Tom Merry.

The great chief of the Co. condescended to explain.

"We're going to get our own back on those rotters!" he said. "Although Marmaduke isn't admitted to the Co., still he's one of us, and that joke was one in the eye to all of us. We're going to get our own back."

"Yes, but how? We all want to do that," said Blake.

"But what's the wheeze?"

"We shall find them at the tuckshop."

"We may find twenty of them!"

"If you're afraid of the Grammar cads, Blake—"

"Who says I'm afraid?" demanded Blake, looking warlike.

"Don't answer me back! I'm chief of this Co., and I'm going to maintain discipline. You've shown me the way yourself," said Lowther, with a grin. "If I have any insubordination, there's a dot on the boko waiting for the insubordinator—"

"For the—the what?" howled Blake.

"The insubordinator!" said Lowther defiantly. "I dare say you've never heard that word?"

"You're right—I haven't."

"Well, you kids in the Fourth Form have a lot to learn."

"More than you bouncers in the Shell can teach us, I think! And if you start inventing long words that you don't understand— Ow!"

Blake sat down in the dusty road as Lowther's fist came with a heavy thump upon his nose. He jumped up in a fury.

"Stand back," said Lowther coolly. "That's to maintain discipline. No member of this Co. is allowed to call his leader a bouncer."

Blake contained his wrath. It was only fair—he had set the fashion himself. He rubbed his nose ruefully.

"Oh, all right, you bound—I mean, all right," he said hastily. "Just you wait till my turn comes round again, that's all!"

The juniors marched on, and soon came in sight of Rylcombe. There was a frown of thought upon the brow of Monty Lowther. Blake murmured to Herries that the Chief had no idea of what to do, and was only leading them on with an air of solemnity to keep up appearances. And Herries nodded.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, who overheard the remark. "You are quite wight, Blake. In my opinion, Lowthah has not the faintest idea of the best thing to do, and is simply leadin' us on a wild-goose chase, don't you know?"

Monty Lowther pretended not to hear the remark. He walked straight on towards the village tuckshop. Some of the Grammarians were pretty certain to be encountered there on a half-holiday; but whether Lowther had any definite plan in his mind was a secret. Probably he had none; but, having assumed the post of leader, he could not allow his term of generalship to pass without being signalled in some way.

They came in sight of the tuckshop, and Lowther grinned with satisfaction. Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the heroes of the Grammar School, were leaning against the big tree outside, talking, and not another Grammarian was in sight.

Lowther turned a triumphant glance upon his followers.

"Well, what do you say now?" he exclaimed.

"You didn't know they were here alone," said Blake.

"Rats! Here they are, and here we are, and we've got them in a clef stick. We'll make them sing small now! Surround 'em!"

The St. Jim's juniors rushed on. The Grammarian trio saw them coming, but betrayed no symptoms of alarm. Carboy picked up his glass of lemonade from the little table under the tree and sipped it. Monk went on eating chocolate-creams.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "There's a nerve for you!"

Tom Merry was looking suspicious.

"Looks to me like a trap," he said. "Do you think it possible—"

He paused.

"Think what's possible?" asked Blake.

"Well, it looks suspicious. I'm not leader, but if I were, I should suspect that they had had a scout out on the road, and knew we were coming, and—"

"And what?" demanded Lowther.

"And laid a little trap for us," said Tom Merry. "That's what it looks like to me. Those three bouncers wouldn't be so jolly cool about it if they hadn't help near."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther, unwilling, like most leaders, to confess that an inferior officer saw things more clearly than he did. "Rats to all that! Come on!"

The Co. obeyed. With a rush they came up under the tree and surrounded the Grammarians. Monk nodded to them coolly.

"Good-afternoon!" he said. "Nice weather for this time of the year, isn't it? How's that old workhouse you call a school getting on?"

"Collar them!" shouted Lowther.

"Hallo! Got a new leader? My word, if you're not off! What have they given you the order of the boot for, Tom Merry? Here, hands off! Rescue!"

"Rescue!" yelled Lane and Carboy.

In a moment the door of the tuckshop was crammed with boys in Grammar School caps, pouring out to the rescue, under the leadership of Gordon Gay.

Tom Merry's suspicions had been well founded.

It was a trap, and Monty Lowther had led them right into it in a way that the Grammarians must have regarded as extremely obliging.

Grammarians poured out of the tuckshop in a crowd. They had been lying low there; but now that they showed themselves, their numbers were overwhelming.

In a few seconds twenty youths were rushing at the Saints, and Monty Lowther realised his mistake, and gave the order for retreat.

But it was too late!

Monk, Lane, and Carboy each seized a foe, and Lowther himself, with Blake and Figgins, struggled in the grasp of the Grammarians. Then came the Grammarian rush, and the rest of the St. Jim's juniors were simply swept away.

Tom Merry stood his ground nobly, hitting out right and left, and several Grammar juniors went rolling over; but he could not stem the tide of such odds.

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The Saints were scattered like chaff, and each of them as he reeled or ran was pursued by two or three yelling Grammarians.

Figgins tore himself loose from Carboy, and ran, and Blake escaped from Lane. They fought their way through the Grammarians who would have recaptured them. But Monty Lowther was not so lucky. Monk would not let him go, and several pairs of hands came to his aid. The unfortunate leader of the Co. was a prisoner!

"Keep him safe!" chuckled Monk. "He's their giddy leader, and we'll make an example of him. Mind he doesn't get away. Line up! Here come those fellows again!"

The defeated and roughly-handled Co. had rallied some distance down the village street. Some of the Rylcombe folk had come to their doors to see the row, but they only grinned, and never thought of interfering. Dusty, dishevelled, defeated, the Co. rallied a hundred yards from the scene of the unequal conflict, and turned upon their pursuers. The Grammarians promptly fell back towards the tuckshop.

Tom Merry's flashing eye glanced round upon the defeated band. He noted the absence of Lowther. Only one of the Co. was missing, and that one was the leader.

"They've got Monty!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Come on! We've got to rescue him!"

Tom Merry, at this crisis, naturally dropped back again into his old position as leader of the Co. The juniors had no thought of disputing his authority then. He was the leader they needed at that moment, and they would have followed him anywhere.

Back they dashed, the nine of them, ready to try their fortune a second time. Several Grammarians who had ventured recklessly too far went flying, knocked aside like nippers, and the St. Jim's juniors rushed into the fray again.

But they met double their number of Grammarians, lined up and ready for them. Behind that line lay Lowther, with a couple of Grammarians sitting on him to keep him safe.

Gallantly the St. Jim's party attacked. But it was in vain. The odds were too great. Back they reeled, and the rush was stopped. Then the Grammarians advanced in their turn, and the Co. was driven helplessly back.

Tom Merry snapped his teeth as he saw Monk and Lane hustle Lowther into the tuckshop. The Grammarians crowded round the door, yelling defiance at Tom Merry & Co., and ready to repel a fresh rush. But there was less chance than ever now of an attack proving successful, and the exhausted juniors gathered on the opposite side of the street to consult as to what had better be done.

CHAPTER 8.

Monty Lowther Gives In.

FRANK MONK was laughing almost hysterically as he dragged Lowther into the tuckshop, aided by Gay and Carboy. As many of the Grammarians as the shop would hold followed, the rest blocking up the doorway.

Mother Murphy looked on from behind her counter in amazement and alarm. Frank Monk hastened to reassure her.

"Don't be alarmed, mother," he said. "It's only a little game. We haven't come to raid the tommy, you know. There's nothing to be worried about. You'd better go back into your little parlour. Now, Lowther, here you are!"

"Rats!" said Lowther, shaking himself free, and facing the Grammarians. He had certainly fallen into a very easy trap; but, whether he was a good general or not, he had plenty of coolness and pluck. "Rats to you! Go and eat coke!"

Frank Monk laughed. "You're a prisoner. I understand that you're leader of that precious gang now. Is that the case, my pippin?"

"What if it is?"

"I'm going to explain. How would you like to be loaded up in an egg-box, and sent back to St. Jim's by carrier, 'this side up, with care'?"

"You—you wouldn't dare—"

"That's all you know! But it's possible we may let you off. You're our prisoner, and if you're good we may be kind enough to hold you to ransom."

Lowther stared at the grinning faces round him.

"You—you don't mean to say that you want tin—"

"Ha, ha, ha! No, we haven't come to that yet. We don't mean that kind of ransom. You've got to buy yourself off, though, all the same, or else we shall put you through something that will turn your eyebrows grey. Suppose, for instance, we were to mop your head into that box of eggs—all warranted old and wheezy?"

Monty Lowther shuddered at the suggestion.

"Well, what do you want?" he said. "I know when I've had enough, and I give you best, if that will satisfy you."

"But it won't," grinned Monk, "not by long chalks! Do

you remember a certain occasion a long time ago when Tom Merry & Co. had us cornered by the river, and made us sign a document of surrender?"

Lowther grinned, and nodded.

"If you think I'm going to sign anything of that sort, you're mistaken," he said. "I bar that! You can do what you like, but I won't, and that's flat!"

"I fancy we'd make you if we wanted to," said Carboy.

"But we don't," said Monk. "That wouldn't be any good from Lowther without the signatures of all the rest, and we haven't got them here. By the way, what are they doing?"

"Talking on the other side of the street," said Lane, from the door.

"Well, they can keep that up as long as they like," grinned Monk. "That won't hurt anybody. They can't get at us here. Now, you Lowther, you remember that document? I hear that after you got it there was a row in the Co. about who should have it, and it was torn into three, and you divided it."

"Yes, Figgins & Co. had one bit, Blake another bit, and we had the third," grinned Lowther. "We've got them stuck up in our studies, too."

"I thought so. Well, my buck, that's your ransom—your share of the paper. We're on the warpath, you see, to get that document back. A third part of it to start with isn't so bad. Will you hand it over?"

"Can't! It's stuck up in the study at St. Jim's."

"I didn't suppose you had it about you. We'll take your word to send it by post as soon as you get back to the school. You see, we trust you."

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort!"

"Very well! Mother Murphy, what is the price of those eggs?"

"Fourteen a shilling, Master Monk."

"Rats! I mean, how much for the whole box? Make it as reasonable as you can, old dear, for they won't last long."

Mother Murphy made a rapid calculation.

"You can have the whole box for six shillings, young gentlemen," she said, "and I will send them up to the school for you."

"Ha, ha! We don't want them up at the school. To judge by that broken one, they're too whiffy. I'm not sure that I shall want them at all. It depends on this boulder. Lowther, are you going to ransom yourself with that document, or are you not?"

"It belongs to Tom Merry and Manners as much as to me, and they wouldn't agree," said Lowther, who perfectly understood the meaning of the negotiations for the eggs.

"We'll let you call to them if you like."

"Oh, rot! Of course, they would leave it to me."

"I thought so. Are we to have that document?"

"No!" shouted Lowther; and he made a wild rush for the door. The Grammarians closed round him, and he was pinned in a moment.

"Dub up, kids!" said Monk. "We've got to make up six shillings for Mother Murphy between us. A few pence each will do the trick."

"My dear young gentlemen—"

"Here you are, Mother Murphy! There's your six bob, and now the eggs are ours. Collar him by the back of the neck, kids, and let him have it."

"Stop!" yelled Lowther, struggling furiously. "Stop!"

"Are you going to pay your ransom?"

"No!" Lowther shouted. "No, I won't! I'll— Oo-oo-ooch!"

At a sign from Frank Monk, the youngsters who were holding Lowther jammed his face down into the box of eggs.

It came up again smothered! And from the smell that arose from the egg-box, it was very evident that those eggs had been better days, and seen them some time ago.

"Gr-r-r-roo-oo-oo-i-i-o-o-o-r-r-roo-oo-ooch-gr-r-r!" Such was the remark Lowther made. It wasn't very intelligible, but his meaning was clear. He didn't like the eggs.

"Now, then," said Monk, "are you going to pay your ransom?"

"No!" spluttered Lowther. "No, I'm not! I— Oh, oh! Groo! Don't! I'll send you the beastly thing by post to-night! I can't stand that again."

"Honour bright?"

"Yes, confound you! Oh, I shall never get rid of this horrible niff! Beasts! Lemme go! Gr-r-r-r! Let me get out!"

"Here they come!" shouted Lane. "Look out!"

"Let them come!" grinned Monk. "Here's their giddy leader. They can have him now."

The Grammarians parted to allow Monty Lowther to pass them. They gave him plenty of room, not from politeness, but out of respect for the great strength of the eggs with which his face was plastered.

Lowther, dabbing at the sticky stuff with his handkerchief,

and crimson with rage, strode to the door of the tuckshop and passed out, followed by a yell of laughter from the Grammarians, who were almost in hysterics.

Tom Merry & Co. had indeed made a rush towards the tuckshop, determined not to stand idle without while their leader was in the enemy's hands, though they could not hope to effect his rescue.

They had almost reached the door when Monty Lowther came staggering out, dabbing at his face, and only half recognisable.

They halted and stared at him. Blake sniffed. Manners sniffed. They all sniffed. Monty Lowther joined them, and they drew away from him.

"Hallo, they've given him an egg-bath!" said Blake. "Don't come too close, Lowther; you are not nice."

"Nice lot you are, to leave a chap in the enemy's hands."

"We did our best," said Tom Merry. "We couldn't do much against such odds, and we've all got something to show for our pains."

"Yaas, wathah! I have a gweat, painful bump on my head, deah boys, and it weally twoubles me vewy much. I am extwemely doubtful wethah my silk hat will sit stwaight till that foahful bump has gone away."

"Well, they've let you off lightly," said Figgins. "They might have rolled you in the eggs, you know. Did they make you pay for 'em?"

"No," growled Lowther. "And they'd have done worse if I hadn't caved in."

"Here, come along!" said Herries. "They're coming out! We've had enough fighting for one afternoon."

And the St. Jim's juniors drew off, leaving the Grammarians in possession of the field of battle, and followed by hoots and cat-calls from the victorious foe.

"What do you mean by caving in?" asked Tom Merry.

"How did you get off?"

"I've agreed to the ransom they fixed."

"The what?" ejaculated the astonished Co.

"They know about that precious document of theirs being divided into three, and stuck up in the studies at St. Jim's. Our third of it—"

"You don't mean to say they had the cheek to ask for that!" said Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Yes, they had," said Lowther, "and I promised to send it by post to-night. That's the ransom."

"You couldn't promise to give away our property!" said Manners, rather excitedly. "Like your cheek! We're not going to give it up!"

"It's rather hard cheese on us," Tom Merry remarked.

"Oh, rats! What could I do when I was helpless in their hands?"

"Oh, nothing, I suppose! You ought not to have fallen into their hands, you know. It was your own fault."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther. "Perhaps you'll lead better when your turn comes."

"I hope so, weally," said D'Arcy. "He weally could not lead worse—that is one beastly comfort, you know. I have a feahful bump on my head—"

"We must stand by what Lowther has promised," said Tom Merry. "No good growling, Manners, old chap. The word of one binds all three. That's the old rule, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know!" said Manners. "But— Well, Lowther's not leader any longer, thank goodness! I think anybody would soon get fed up with his generalship. The Grammar cads can have that card, for all I care. After all, two-thirds of it will remain at St. Jim's—enough to show anybody and everybody that we really did lick them hollow that time."

"And we'll take better care of our bit," Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we of ours," grinned Figgins. "Let's get back to the school and clean up. I feel as if I had been used for a duster."

Most of the juniors felt the same. They were glad to return to St. Jim's, and they left the Grammarians victorious, for the second time since the new campaign had opened. That evening the share of the precious document belonging to the Terrible Three was posted to Frank Monk at the Rylcombe Grammar School, to the huge delight of the Grammarians when they received it.

CHAPTER 9.

Taggles Sees a Ghost.

FIGGINS & CO. sat in their study in the New House at St. Jim's.

Twenty-four hours or so had elapsed since the encounter with the Grammarians, and as the dusk of evening spread once more over the quadrangle at the old school, Figgins lighted the gas in the study, and sat himself down at the table again.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were working. Marmaduke was

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in the study, sitting a little apart from Figgins & Co., and doing his prep. In the old days he had been a member of the Co., but those days were gone. Marmaduke was still in disgrace.

Matters were rather uncomfortable in the usually cheery study.

Figgins & Co. had looked forward very keenly to the return of Marmaduke, and their disappointment was in proportion to their anticipation.

Marmaduke felt the coldness of the Co. towards him, though the three juniors were scrupulously polite, and as kind as they could be.

They didn't dislike Marmaduke, but he was impossible! They didn't want to hurt his feelings, but the magic circle of the Co. was closed to him.

But Marmaduke's obstinacy was as strong as ever, and it was tinged with sullenness. He would not admit himself to be in the wrong, although old associations were already waking old ideas in his mind, and he realised how wrong he had been. Marmaduke had not quite learned his lesson yet.

Figgins put his books away at last with a sigh of relief. "That job's jobbed!" he remarked. "How are you getting on, kids?"

"Nearly done," said Kerr, without looking up.

"Done!" grunted Fatty Wynn. "Where are the chestnuts? I'll roast 'em while you finish, Scotty. You can lend a hand, Figgy."

"Right you are! I say, Smythe, are you getting on all right?"

He had always been Marmaduke or Marmy, but now he was Smythe, and the change of appellation showed how widely he was estranged from Figgins & Co.

"I'm getting on all right!" he said sulkily.

"I'll help you if you like, you know."

"I don't want you to."

Figgins sniffed. He helped Fatty Wynn roast the chestnuts at the cheerful fire in the grate, and when Kerr had finished his work they ate them. Marmaduke was asked to join in, but he declined, and having at last put his books away, he left the study.

Figgins wrinkled his brows a little as the study door closed behind the heir of millions.

"Quite his old self," he remarked. "I can't stand that much longer, I'm afraid. Yet he has the makings of a decent chap in him, if he wasn't so spoiled. I'm sorry. But to come to business. What about the Grammar chaps?"

"We haven't elected a new leader yet," remarked Kerr. "I should think it is time the post came to one of us. Have you an idea?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Not the ghost of one yet. I think we ought to give the Grammarians another football match before the season ends, but licking them on the football field isn't everything. I hear that their team is a great deal stronger than it was last time, and, naturally, they will play on the home ground, which will make things easier for them. But I suppose we should lick them."

"Of course we should," said Fatty Wynn; "but that isn't everything. The kind of wheeze I should like to work off on them would be collaring their grub some time—as we've often done to the School House kids."

"Yes," said Figgins, with a sniff, "that's about your mark—always grub! Let's take a turn in the quadrangle, and see if we can think of something."

The three New House juniors went out, and in the dusk they saw Marmaduke Smythe, with his coat on, going down to the gates. Locking-up was not yet, and it was clear that Marmaduke was going out. Figgins called after him.

"Hallo, Marmy! Where are you going?"

"Out!" replied Marmaduke, without turning his head. And he walked on. Figgins wrinkled his brows.

"The ass!" he muttered. "He's in a sulky temper, and he's going out alone. If he falls in with the Grammar cads, he'll have a lively time, and serve him right."

Figgins & Co. went into the gym. They found Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three there. The juniors indulged in a little exercise, and Figgins was just showing what he could do on a horizontal bar when there was a buzz in the gym.

"Look there!"

"What's the matter with Taggles?"

The juniors looked towards the door, whither every eye was directed. Taggles, the school porter, was looking in from the gloom, and the face of Taggles was as pale as a sheet, and his eyes seemed to be starting from his head.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, ran towards him. Others crowded round, Tom Merry & Co. among the first, eager to know what was the matter.

"What is it, Taggles?" asked Kildare. "Has anything happened?"

"The—the—g-g-g-g-gh—"

"What is he talking about?" exclaimed Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. "He's frightened out of his wits, I think. Has he been drinking?"

"The—the—g-g-g-g-g—" stammered Taggles.

"Speak out," said Kildare; "you're safe here, whatever it is." The porter was casting frightened glances into the dusk behind him. "What has happened?"

The captain of St. Jim's shook the porter by the shoulder. Taggles seemed to gain courage from the touch of his strong hand.

"It's—it's—the—g-g-g-ghost!" he stuttered.

"The what?" cried a dozen voices.

"What is the idiot talking about?" exclaimed Sefton. "He's gone balmy in the crumpet, I think. Give him a shake."

"It's the g-g-ghost!" gasped Taggles. "I s-s-s-saw it when I w-w-went to c-c-close the g-g-g-gates—"

"Oh, rats!" said Sefton. "He's drunk!"

Kildare laughed.

"Better go and have another look, Taggles," he said. "I dare say you'll find the ghost gone by this time."

But Tom Merry & Co. had already slipped out of the gym. That Taggles had seen a ghost they did not, of course, believe, but they were curious to know what he had seen. And so were several other juniors who hurried along with them.

It was very dusky in the quad. As a matter of fact, Taggles had left the locking-up later than he should have done. It was quite dark at the gates. One side of the big bronze gate was closed, the other stood open. Gore was the first to come in sight of it, and he gave a jump as he caught a glimmer of white.

"Look! L-l-l-look!" he stammered. "There's—there's something!"

There certainly was something, and even Tom Merry was startled.

Dimly through the dusk a figure in glimmering white could be seen close up against the open half of the gate, silent and motionless.

It seemed to be the form of a boy, but the head was bare, and the face and hair were of the same ghostly whiteness as the clothes.

Not a sound or a movement came from its lips.

"My hat!" muttered Tom Merry. "What is it?"

"It's some jape!" muttered Figgins. "Some boulder playing a practical joke on us. Shy something at it."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Gore, picking up a stone.

Tom Merry put out his hand to stop him, but too late. The stone flew, and struck hard on the body of the "ghost." It fell to the ground with a clink, and still no sound came from the figure.

The boys looked at each other in a rather scared way. The

"GEM" FREE HAMPER WINNERS.

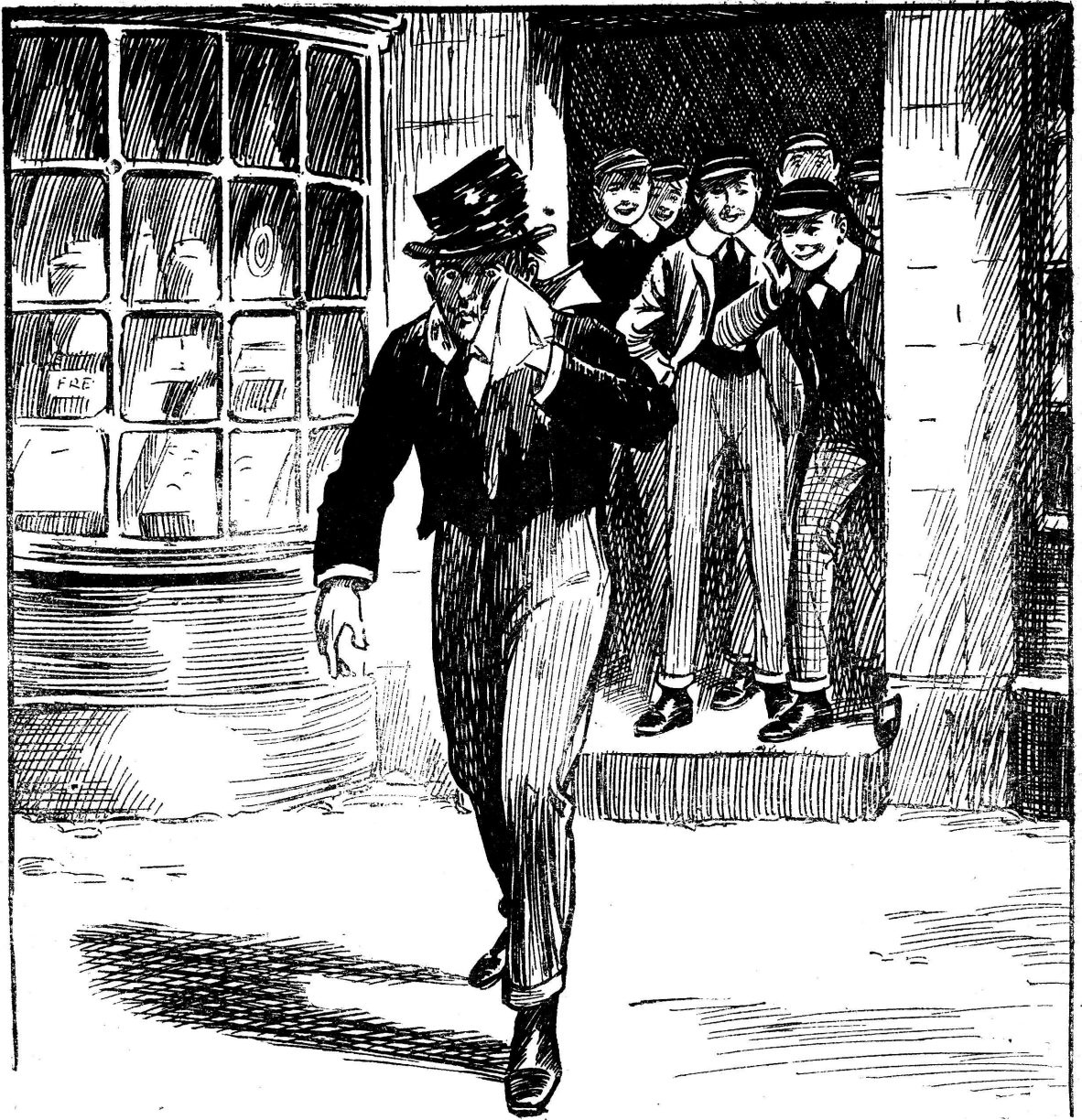
The Six boys marked with a X on the photographs, published on the back page of No. 161 of the GEM Library, having sent in their applications, have duly received the six GEM Free Hampers. The names and addresses of the lucky winners, who attend the Liverpool Collegiate School and St. Francis Xavier's College, Liverpool, are as follows:

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 MASTER CHARLES A. VAN NOYEN, 32, Balmoral Road, Fairfield, Liverpool.

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER'S COLLEGE.

MASTER HENRY J. BYRNE, 26, Newark Street, County Road, Liverpool.
 MASTER R. McCORMACK, 40, West Derby Road, Liverpool.
 MASTER F. J. NORTON, 137a, West Derby Road, Liverpool.



Monty Lowther, dabbing at the sticky eggy stuff with his handkerchief, and crimson with rage, passed out of the door of the tuckshop, followed by a yell of laughter from the Grammarians. (See page 13.)

stone must have hurt the figure if it had been human, yet there had been no sound, hardly a movement.

"Here, I'm off!" muttered Mellish; and he scuttled away, followed by several others.

Tom Merry stood his ground, and, after a few moments' reflection, he advanced closer to the mysterious figure.

As he drew nearer, he could see that it was a boy, and also that he was bound to the gate with a rope.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Tom Merry, catching the stranger by the shoulder. "How on earth did you get like this?"

There was a faint gasp from the prisoner, but no word.

"It's all right, you fellows," called out Tom Merry; "it's only a kid, and some cads have tied him to the gate. I don't know why he doesn't speak."

"I do!" grinned Figgins. "Look there."

In the glimmer of the light the prisoner's face could be seen. An apple was jammed into the mouth, and held there by a handkerchief knotted round the prisoner's head. It was too large for the unfortunate fellow to chew away, and it gagged him effectually.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Flour!"

There was no doubt about it now that the match was struck.

The boy was smothered from head to foot in flour, and that was what imparted to him his ghostly appearance. Figgins was peering into the stranger's face by the light of the match, and he, too, uttered an exclamation.

"Marmaduke!"

"Marmaduke!" echoed a dozen voices.

Tom Merry pulled off the handkerchief and extracted the apple. The unfortunate Marmaduke spluttered and gasped.

"Is it you, Marmy?" exclaimed Figgins. "Poor old chap! I suppose this is the last lark of the Grammarians. Taggles took you for a ghost. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't see anything to laugh at!" growled Marmaduke. "Can't you untie me, some of you, instead of standing there, cackling like asses?"

Tom Merry opened his penknife, and began to sever the cords.

"How did it happen?" asked Figgins curiously.

"Those rotters met me in the lane," growled Marmaduke.

"The miller's cart was waiting outside the Plough and Horses, and they must have dodged behind it when they saw me coming. They rushed out and collared me, and I kicked—"

"You did what?"

"Kicked," said Marmaduke sullenly. "They were four to one—Monk, Gay, Lane, and Carboy. I hurt Lane's shin, and then they—"

"Whatever they did, deah boy, it served you wight," said D'Arcy. "I weally think we should expess our wegrets to the Gwammawians for the disgvaceful occuwnence."

"Oh, you shut up!" snapped Marmaduke. "Then they opened one of the miller's sacks, and emptied half the flour over me, and brought me here and fastened me up. The beasts!"

"I suppose they were going to jape you," said Figgins, "and you were spiteful, and they gave it to you stronger in consequence. Serve you right!"

"Serve you right!" echoed the Co.

"Yaas, wathah! Serve you awfully, feahfully wight!" Marmaduke growled. Tom Merry finished cutting him loose. The hero of the Shell had not said a word. Marmaduke looked round for sympathy, and found none.

"I suppose you all blame me?" he said shortly.

"You acted like a cad," said Tom Merry. Marmaduke made no reply to that. He swung away and strode off towards the New House to get the flour cleaned off. The juniors followed more slowly.

"There it is!" It was a sudden yell from the gloomy quadrangle, in the voice of Taggles. "There's the awful hobject I saw at the gate. It's coming towards us!"

Taggles was leading a party of seniors towards the gate, to discover the terrible object that had scared him so much, and he was startled almost out of his wits by seeing the ghost coming swiftly towards him.

Some of the fellows scattered, but Kildare and Monteith and some others stood their ground. Taggles jumped behind the captain of the school.

"Stop!" exclaimed Kildare. "Who are you?"

"I'm Smythe. I've been covered with flour by a lot of cads," growled Marmaduke. "Do you think I'm a ghost, you silly asses?"

"That's not the way to speak to Sixth Formers," said Kildare sternly.

"I'll speak how I like. My father could buy up this place, and all of you, too, if he chose. I don't care for any of you."

And Marmaduke stalked off towards the New House. Monteith made a movement to follow him, but Kildare tapped him on the shoulder.

"Leave the young brute alone," he said. "I fancy he's been roughly handled; and if that's the tone he takes, the juniors will be hard enough on him."

Monteith nodded. The heads of the two houses in the Sixth were on the best of terms. They returned to the gym., and Marmaduke stalked on to the New House.

As it happened, the excitement in the quad. over the supposed ghost had brought Mr. Ratcliff, the New House master, out of the House to see what was the matter. He was coming towards the gate, with a cane in his hand, when he caught sight of a figure in white advancing upon him.

Mr. Ratcliff was not a brave man. The quadrangle was dark and lonely; the ghostly figure seemed to be rushing upon him from the gloom. Mr. Ratcliff's knees knocked together, and he stood staring helplessly at the strange form. And Marmaduke, who did not see him in the darkness, ran right into him, and sent him flying.

The rough contact was a sufficient proof to the New House-master that he had flesh and blood to deal with. He regained his balance, and sprang at the ghostly figure. Marmaduke, who was dazed by the concussion, had no time to escape. He was seized by the collar by the angry House-master.

"Who are you? How dare you—"

"I'm Smythe! Let me alone!"

"You—you young scoundrel! Come with me!"

Straight into the New House Mr. Ratcliff marched the culprit, and into his study. There, slamming the door, he fixed an angry glare on Marmaduke.

"Now," he thundered, "explain yourself! What does this mean?"

Marmaduke was silent. His painful experiences had roused all his sullenness, and he would not speak. An absurd object he looked in the flare of the gas, covered with flour from head to foot, though he was not quite so floury as before, as a considerable quantity of it had come off on the House-master's clothes when they met.

Although they did not know it, there were eyes upon the two. From the darkness of the quadrangle, Figgins & Co. looked into the lighted window of Mr. Ratcliff's study. The blind was not down, and the New House trio saw clearly into the room.

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "Marmaduke is in for it! He—"

"He'll complain about the Grammarians," said Kerr.

"He'll give them away to save himself a licking, anyway," Fatty Wynn remarked.

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Come to London

To See the Coronation:

Figgins's brow darkened.

"He can't! He sha'n't! Nice things the School House would say about us—and the Grammar cads, too. Come on! Ratty's window is open, and we may be able to chtip in if the fellow starts saying too much."

It did not seem very feasible. But Figgins & Co. cut across to the open window of the study, and reached it in time to hear the angry words of the House-master.

"Smythe! Answer me! I may excuse you if you tell me who put you into this state. Was it Merry, of the School House?"

And Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glinted spitefully. He would have been very glad to find so fair an excuse for complaining of Tom Merry to the master of the School House. But it was not to be.

"No!" growled Marmaduke.

"Ah, I understand! I suppose you have been the victim of the Grammar School boys again? Is that so, Smythe?"

Figgins & Co. held their breath for the reply. Was Marmaduke going to sneak? They waited and waited; but the reply did not come.

"Answer me!" thundered the master of the New House, amazed and exasperated by the obstinacy of the junior.

But Marmaduke Smythe did not speak. And Figgins & Co. hugged themselves outside the window. Marmaduke would not disgrace them, after all.

CHAPTER 10.

True Blue.

"SMYTHE!" Mr. Ratcliff thundered out the word. Marmaduke set his lips hard together, and a gleam of defiance was in his eyes. The obstinacy, which was his chief fault, was turned into a right channel this time, and he was not to be bullied into acting as a sneak.

"Smythe, am I to understand that you refuse to answer my question?"

Marmaduke was still silent.

The House-master's hand closed tightly upon his cane. His face was white with anger, and his eyes had a deadly gleam in them. Mr. Ratcliff never could keep his temper—a very bad trait in a master at a school—and he had quite lost it now.

"Smythe!" He tried to control himself, to speak calmly, but his voice was trembling with anger. "Smythe, I am amazed by this effrontery! You have been treated brutally by some set of ruffianly boys—"

"It was only a joke!" growled Marmaduke.

"A kind of joke that it is impossible for me to approve of, and—"

"Besides, I hacked their shins, and it served me right what I got!"

Mr. Ratcliff stared.

Outside the window, Figgins gave Fatty Wynn a dig in the ribs that took his breath away.

"Do you hear him?" murmured Figgins delightedly. "Didn't I tell you he was true blue, after all? He's as obstinate as a mule, I know; but I told you all along that he was the right stuff."

As a matter of fact, Figgins had told them nothing of the kind; but the loyal Co. would not remind him of that little fact. Fatty Wynn, in fact, was in no condition to remind anybody of anything. Figgys's enthusiastic dig in the ribs had almost winded him, and he was gasping for breath.

"Smythe"—Mr. Ratcliff's voice had a grinding sort of sound in it—"I do not know whether your words are intended for deliberate impertinence. The authors of this outrage must be punished, whether you forgive them or not. Am I right in attributing the whole affair to the boys of the Grammar School at Rylcombe?"

Marmaduke remained silent.

"You do not answer. Listen to me, Smythe! I am determined to put down this strife and hooliganism between the two schools—I am determined that it shall cease! I intend to catch those ruffianly young rascals in the act of some hooliganism, and lay a proper complaint before their head-master. Now there could not be a better case than this. If you can identify the boys who attacked you and treated you in this scandalous manner, Dr. Monk can scarcely fail to inflict a severe punishment upon them. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, sir," said Marmaduke ungraciously.

"Then you must tell me all you know. Could you identify your assailants?"

"Yes, I suppose I could."

"You know them by sight and by name?"

"Ye-e-es," said Marmaduke.

"Then tell me whom they were."

But Marmaduke's lips were closed again.

"Answer me, Smythe!"

"I can't, sir."

"You can't!" The House-master's knuckles grew white with the hard grip he was putting on the cane, showing how his fury was growing. "You tell me that you can't, Smythe! You dare to answer your House-master so?"

"It's not cricket, sir. I can't give them away."

"Do you know whom you are talking to?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

But his fury did not frighten Marmaduke. The heir of millions was, as Figgins said, as obstinate as a mule, and bullying could not make him yield. His face only took on a more obstinate and sullen expression.

"I give you one more chance, Smythe," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Will you give me the names of the boys who assaulted you?"

"They did not assault me; it was only a joke."

"Will you give me their names?"

"I can't!"

"Hold out your hand!"

Marmaduke took a quick look at the House-master, and held out his hand. He thought he had better. The cane came down upon it with a fearful slash, and Marmaduke gave a howl of pain. It was a blow such as no master ought ever to have dealt; but Mr. Ratcliff was too furious to care how much he hurt the junior.

"Will you answer my question now?"

"No," howled Marmaduke, hugging his hand to his breast—"no, I won't! I won't sneak, and you can cut me to pieces first!"

Mr. Ratcliff looked as if he would gladly have cut the obstinate junior to pieces. But as he could not very well proceed to that extremity, he ordered him, in a voice of thunder, to hold out his other hand.

Marmaduke obeyed, and the cane went up with a whiz and came down with a terrific slash. But Marmaduke did not leave his hand there to receive it. He drew it away quickly, more by instinct than intention, and the cane swept the empty air. And there was no stopping its force. Before Mr. Ratcliff could think of arresting his descending arm, the cane had crashed on his own shin.

He gave a howl of agony, and dropped the cane to the floor.

"Ow! Oh, heavens! You young villain!"

He clasped his injured leg, hopping on the other. A sour grin came over Marmaduke's face as he watched his antics.

But Mr. Ratcliff recovered himself in a moment. He seized the cane with his right hand, and Marmaduke's collar with his left.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

Figgins sprang to his feet.

"I'm not going to stand this!" he exclaimed.

And in a moment he was climbing in at the open window of the House-master's study.

Mr. Ratcliff, who had his back to the window, and, moreover, was too excited to see anybody or anything but the boy who was thrashing, did not notice him.

Figgins had had no very clear idea in getting in at the window—he only knew that he wasn't going to stand by quietly while Marmaduke was used so brutally; but as he slid in at the window an idea flashed through his mind.

He reached up to the gas and turned it out. The study was immediately plunged into darkness, and the next moment, as the astonished House-master's blows ceased, Figgins gripped him by the shoulders and swung him away from Marmaduke Smythe.

Mr. Ratcliff went reeling in the unexpected grip, and before he could recover his balance he crashed against the table and rolled on the floor.

Marmaduke was as much amazed as Figgins by the sudden fall of darkness and the cessation of the attack. A whisper in the gloom enlightened him:

"Bolt!"

He knew the voice of Figgins. The advice was too good to be neglected. He stumbled to the door and escaped from the study. Figgins followed him, and, catching his arm, hurried him up to their study.

Mr. Ratcliff staggered to his feet in the darkened room. Exactly what had happened he did not know—only that someone had somehow gained admittance to the study, turned out the light, and dragged him away from his victim.

He was murmuring with fury, and he felt blindly for the matches, and knocked over an inkstand and sent a pile of books crashing to the floor before he found them. By the time he struck a match and lighted the gas Marmaduke and Figgins were far away.

"Who was it? Who could it have been?"

The House-master glared out of the open window. But the Co., of course, were gone by this time. He was strongly inclined to raise a hue-and-cry through the New House for the delinquent. But he remembered that he had gone a little

too far already. The terrible thrashing Marmaduke had received must have left marks upon him.

If the Head of St. Jim's knew what had happened during the last few minutes Mr. Ratcliff would have had an uncomfortable time before him, and an inquiry would make the affair noised through the school.

It was better to let sleeping dogs lie, the House-master reflected. But he mentally vowed to find out, in a quiet way, who his assailant had been, and to make him suffer for what he had done.

Meanwhile, Figgins had led Marmaduke to the juniors' study, where they were joined by the Co. Marmaduke staggered into the easy-chair, as white as a sheet, his face drawn and haggard. Mr. Ratcliff would have been alarmed if he could have seen the victim of his cruelty at that moment.

Figgins & Co. were certainly alarmed. Figgins loosened his collar, and Kerr filled a tooth-glass with currant-wine and placed it to his lips. Fatty Wynn wildly snatched out a plateful of sausage-rolls from the cupboard, with a vague idea that they might be of use.

Marmaduke drank the currant-wine, and it seemed to do him good. He sat up in the chair and tried to grin. It was a very watery grin.

"My dear chap," said Figgins, "how do you feel now?"

"Rotten!"

"Did he hurt you much?" said Kerr.

It was rather a superfluous question; but Kerr only meant to be sympathetic. Marmaduke grinned faintly.

"Rather!"

"Will—will you have a sausage-roll, Marm?" said Fatty Wynn.

"Not just yet, Fatty," chuckled Marmaduke.

"Fatty thinks a feed is a cure for all evils," said Figgins.

"They're jolly good sausage-rolls!" said Fatty anxiously.

"A fellow would feel all the better for one at any time."

"He did lay it on!" said Marmaduke. "The old beast! Vicious brute! I've never had a hiding like that in my life before; though I remember I did have a rough time when I first came to St. Jim's."

The chums looked at one another.

This was more like the old Marmaduke—the Marmy they had chummed with and liked. They felt the old chummy feeling reviving in their breasts.

"He must have hurt you, the way he was laying it on," said Figgins. "Let's get your jacket off, and get rid of some of that flour. You must be feeling pretty sore. My word!"

Figgins stared at the red marks across Marmaduke's bared shoulders. He pulled down the shirt and saw that his back was scored in the same way. His eyes blazed with indignation.

"Get your jacket on, Marmy!" he exclaimed.

"I feel more comfy without it."

"You've got to come with me!"

"Come with you! Where?"

"To the Head!" said Figgins with blazing eyes. "Come along! We'll see what Dr. Holmes has to say when he sees those marks on you. The cowardly brute!" Figgins was referring now to Mr. Ratcliff. "The cruel beast! This will mean the kick out for him, I should think, and serve him jolly well right! Get your jacket on and come!"

Marmaduke did not stir.

"Do you hear, Marmy?"

"Yes, Figgy, I hear; but I'm not coming!"

"I tell you—"

"Not good enough, Figgy! I'm not going to sneak!"

Figgins & Co. stared at the heir of millions. This was rather a new and surprising line for Marmaduke Smythe to take.

"Not going to sneak!" said Figgins. "But this isn't sneaking. The hound ought to be shown up! You know he had no right to strike a boy like that, and the Head would be wild if he knew about it."

"I dare say he would, but I can take my medicine without complaining. After all, it must have annoyed Ratty when he got that cut on the shin."

"Serve him right. He ought to be kicked out of the school!"

"Very likely. But I'm not going to have anything to do with it. Go easy, Figgy! No good losing one's temper over a little thing like this, you know."

Figgins calmed down somewhat.

"Perhaps you're right," he said slowly. "But—but this is a bit of a change in you, Marmy. I shouldn't have exactly expected you to take this line."

Marmaduke coloured so deeply that his blush showed through the powdering of flour upon his face.

"I suppose not," he said, in a low voice. "I—I know I was in the wrong that time, Figgy, and—and—I'm glad I didn't give the Grammar kids away, now. I know I'm a

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sullen beast," said Marmaduke, with astonishing frankness. "It's my nature, I suppose. But—but I'm going to play the game in future, I assure you."

Figgy raised his hand to give him a hearty slap on the shoulder, but he remembered himself in time, and shook hands with him instead.

"Good old Marmy! That's all right! I knew you were true blue. I know what Ratty licked you for, too, and I know you mean it."

"Did you see—"

"We were outside the window all the time. That is how I came on the scene just then," Figgins explained. "Ratty seems to have let the matter drop. Knows what's good for him, I suppose—the cad! Marmaduke, old chap, I take back all I said that time—you're a member of the Co., if you like."

"Right-ho!" said Marmaduke. "I won't disgrace you!"

"You've done us proud this time," said Figgins, "and we're proud of you; and so will the rest of the Co. be when we tell 'em how you stood up to Ratty."

"Oh, there's no need to go talking—"

"Rats! Come and get some of that flour cleaned off! You're in a shocking state. Then we'll go over and see Tom Merry and explain to him that Marmy is a partner in the Co."

CHAPTER 11.

Figgins Takes Charge.

TOM MERRY came out of the Shell class-room after morning school the next day with a cheerful countenance. Manners and Lowther were with him, and they looked at him with mute inquiry, guessing that something was working in the active brain of their leader.

"I say, kids," said Tom Merry, "I want to hold a meeting of the Co. in the wood-shed and expound an idea I've got in my head."

"Thought you had," said Manners. "Well, that's easily done. Monty can go and call in Study No. 6, and I'll pop over and see Figgins & Co. I hear that Marmaduke is in the Co. again now, and those New House fellows are as thick as ever."

"Yes; he seems to have stuck it out when Ratty got hold of him, and redeemed his character," said Tom Merry. "I'm glad of it. I know it was a blow to Figgy, Marmaduke turning out so rotten. Get them to the wood-shed as quick as you can. I'll be there."

Figgins & Co.—the four of them—were going down to the football-field when Manners found them, but they gave footer up at once to come to the meeting. They repaired to the wood-shed with Manners, and when they arrived they found Tom Merry waiting for them. Study No. 6 came in a few moments later, and the meeting was complete.

"Glad you're all here," said Tom Merry. "I've got something to say, and so let's get on to selecting the giddy chief for the day; unless you would like to elect me to the post, and make it Tom Merry & Co. once more."

To which ten voices in unison replied:

"Rats!"

"Very well," said Tom Merry, quite cheerfully. "Get on with the drawing lots, then, and if I'm captain for to-day, I'll expound my wheeze."

The slips of paper containing the names of the candidates were put in the bag, and Monty Lowther groped for them. There were only nine names, Blake and Lowther having already had their turn at the generalship.

"Here you are!" said Monty Lowther, drawing out a slip at random, and holding it up to the light. "G. Figgins! Figgy takes the cake!"

Figgins gave a gleeful grin.

"Hurrah!" said he. "Now I'll show you bouders what generalship is like. I'll make you stand up to the Gram-mar-ians this time, and don't you forget it!"

"Right you are!" said Tom Merry. "What are the orders? We're all ready to follow your lead, Figgy, if you've got anywhere to lead us to!"

Figgins wrinkled his brows for a moment.

"I suppose I'm not supposed to get a wheeze in my head instanter?" he said. "A chap must have time to think, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake at once. "Think of something or resign! When I was leader I thought of something on the spot."

"And so did I," said Monty Lowther.

"Yes; and a nice old muck you made of it, didn't you?" said Figgins.

"That's not to the point. You're not going to waste our time like this. Just you work out a wheeze, or resign the job to somebody who can handle it," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, that's all right! What was the wheeze you were speaking of yourself, Tom Merry?"

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"That's my business!"

"Now then, no insubordination! Who's captain of the Co.?" demanded Figgins.

"You are—of a sort!"

"Well, then, I order you to assist your leader with advice. Tell me that wheeze, or take the punishment of a giddy mutineer!"

"Oh, I say, that's not playing the game, you know!"

"You'll do as you're told, Tom Merry! Do you expect to have your orders obeyed when you become captain? Well, do as you're told, then!"

"Oh, very well! I suppose you can't be expected to think of anything yourself—"

"My dear chap, a great general never takes the trouble to think for himself if he can get it done," said Figgins serenely. "Under my leadership the wheeze will be a success, and that's enough. Now, get it off your chest!"

Tom Merry was fairly caught, and he made no further demur.

"Well," he said, "you may or may not know what to-day is—"

"Yaas, wathah! It's Fwiday," said D'Arcy.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry. "What I mean is—"

"I wufese to be called an ass!"

"Shut up!" said Figgins.

"I wufese to shut up if I am chawactewised as an ass! I distinctly wufese—"

"Shut up!" howled eight or nine voices.

And Arthur Augustus, finding the majority against him, relapsed into indignant silence.

"What I mean is," went on Tom Merry, "that I happen to know that to-morrow is Frank Monk's birthday, and that there are certain to be some festivities at the Grammar School. Monk has lots of pocket-money, and he always does things in style. My idea is that Monk, Lane, Gay, and Carboy will be giving a dormitory feed. I know they did when it was Gay's birthday, for I heard about it from Gay himself."

Figgins nodded thoughtfully.

"You know there's no school-shop at the Grammar School as there is here," went on Tom Merry, "and Dr. Monk is very strict in the matter of allowing the kids to get in extra supplies after school from Mother Murphy's tuckshop in Rylcombe. But I haven't the slightest doubt that they will do something of the sort to-night."

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened.

"My aunt!" he exclaimed. "That's the cheese! That's what I call a ripping wheeze! Collar their grub—that's it!"

"Good old Fatty!" said Blake. "Always thinking of grub, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't rot, Blake!" said Fatty Wynn. "There isn't a better wheeze you can work off on the Grammar kids than to collar their grub, and as they served me a trick like that once, it will only be tit-for-tat!"

"Hallo! When was that? I didn't hear of it."

"Only a few weeks ago," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "They collared a dozen tarts—mind you, twelve new, fresh, beautiful tarts in a paper bag! I've never quite got over that, as a matter of fact. Twelve tarts—"

"Why, you giddy Falstaff!" said Figgins. "Didn't Kerr and I stand you a dozen tarts in Dame Taggles's shop to make up for it?"

"Yes, I know you did, Figgy; but that doesn't alter the case. You might have stood those, anyway, and that would have made twenty-four. I'm a dozen tarts behind—"

"Ha, ha! See the tears in his eyes?" said Monty Lowther.

"I tell you I'm a dozen tarts behind," said Fatty Wynn. "and they'll weigh on my mind till I've done the Grammar cads for a feed!"

"Well, we'll do them for a feed this evening, I think," grinned Figgins. "I'm obliged for the information you have given, Tom Merry. Your idea is rather good!"

"Rather good!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "What the dickens do you mean with your rather good? It's the best idea that has been mooted since we started ragging the Grammar School, and chance it!"

"My dear chap, it's rather good, and I've said so, and that's all the commendation you're entitled to, and you won't get any more. Under my guidance, I have no doubt that we shall be able to knock the Grammar cads into a cocked hat, and collar their tommy, and give a royal spread within the ancient and honourable walls of this college."

"To tell the truth, Figgy, I've my doubts about it. The idea is good, I admit, but I can't say much for the leadership we're going to have," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

"Yaas, wathah! That's the consideration that twoubles my mind, don't you know. I wearly think that Figgins would be wise to gwacefully wetege, and leave the mattah in my hands, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"I'll gracefully dot you on the boko if you don't shut up!" said Figgins. "Now then, kids, the giddy plot is laid, and it only remains to carry it out—"

"And bury it!"
"And knock the Grammarians into the middle of next week, or as far along the calendar as we can make it. Gentlemen, the meeting is over!"

"And now let's get down to the footer," said Kerr. "We've got to put in some practice yet before we meet the Grammarians on their own ground."

"And we haven't sent them the challenge yet," said Tom Merry. "Never mind, there's still time for that. By the way, as there are just eleven of us here, we'll make up the whole team amongst ourselves. It won't be a match for the regular Junior Team, but for the new Anti-Grammarians Co."

"Good!"
"Yaas, that is a good ideah. Have you decided yet, deah boys, whethah I am to be captain on the beastly football-field, you know?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, "we've decided—you're not! As a matter of fact, I think you're rather out of place on the football-field at all, Gussy. Your proper place is on the front page of a comic paper."

"I object to that remark, Tom Mewwy! I shall be sowwy to bweak up the harmony of this meetin', but I must insist upon your withdwawin' that obnoxious remark. I—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.
And he walked out of the wood-shed with Manners and Lowther, and Blake, Herries, and Digby, with some difficulty, prevailed upon the swell of the School House not to follow and exact summary vengeance.

The meeting broke up. During afternoon school Figgins, the new leader of the famous Co., thought a great deal about the plan, and he had to admit that Tom Merry's idea was a good one. It was the kind of joke that the two rival Houses at St. Jim's had often played on one another, but it was a new departure in the warfare with the Grammar School.

Figgins thought more about the coming expedition, in fact, than he did about his work, and, easy-going as Mr. Lathom was, he dropped on Figgins at last. When Figgins declared that the successor of William the Conqueror on the throne of England was Frank Monk, and that the reign of Queen Elizabeth was chiefly famous for a dormitory feed given by King Philip of Spain on the bowling-green at Plymouth, the little master of the Fourth thought it time to complain.

"You are not thinking of your lessons, Figgins," he said severely, as if that was about the heaviest charge that could possibly be brought against anybody.

"Yes, sir," said Figgins. "I mean no, sir—yes, sir!"
"Will you kindly tell me what you are thinking about, Figgins?" asked Mr. Lathom, with heavy sarcasm.

"Certainly, sir," said Figgins, to gain time.
"Very well, then. What is the subject of these intensely interesting reflections which keep you from bestowing proper attention upon your work, Figgins? You may tell the class and myself, and I have no doubt that we shall be extremely edified."

"Certainly, sir. I was thinking of—of—"
"Go on, Figgins."
"I was thinking of a plan for giving a little surprise to some friends of mine in Rylcombe Grammar School, sir," said Figgins demurely.

Mr. Lathom beamed through his big spectacles.
"In that case I can excuse you, Figgins. I am very pleased to hear that you have such a friendly feeling towards the boys of the Grammar School, especially as I understand that there has been much mutual bickering. But, laudable as this object is, you must not think about it during lessons. Not a word, Figgins. You are excused, and you will now go on construing."

So Figgins construed Virgil, and the class chuckled.
But when Herr Schneider took the Fourth in German later in the afternoon, he did not let the preoccupied chief of the New House off so lightly.

"Bin ich als edler Junker hier," said Herr Schneider. "Vat is tat, Figgins?"

"German, sir," said Figgins, thoughtlessly.
"Ach! I tink I know tat! Vat does it mean in te English, foolish hoy?"

"Mean, sir?"
"Ja! Do you not understand your own language after before?"

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. I understand your English, sir, because you speak it so beautifully, Herr Schneider."

But Figgins's soft answer failed to turn away Herr Schneider's wrath.

"Vat is tat line pefore, Figgins?"
Figgins scratched his head. He had heard the line only imperfectly, and he knew that it was no use to ask the Herr to repeat it, as Schneider had specially picked upon him because he was not listening as he should have been.

"It means, sir—it means— Do you want me to construe it, sir?"

"Ja, Figgins, ja, mein hoy."
"Easily done, sir. It—it means— For mercy's sake tell me what the old ass said, Mellish," Figgins whispered to the junior next to him.

"Oh, it's from 'Faust,'" said Mellish spitefully—"Das ist die ewige Gesang—"

"Thanks. 'That is the eternal song,' sir."
Herr Schneider picked up his pointer.

"Figgins! You translate tat line like tat, ain't it! Bin ich als edler Junker hier—tat is vat I said—and you say it mean—"

"I—I didn't hear you, sir," said Figgins, with a wrathful look at the grinning Mellish. "You—you rotten cad, Mellish!"

Mellish only grinned. He did not like Figgins.
"Mein Gott!" said Herr Schneider. "Tat line mean 'I am here as a noble cavalier,' Figgins. Tat line vich you say comes later in te poem, and tat show tat you not listen but answer at random, ain't it. You will write both dose lines vun hundred times and pring dem to me to-morrow afternoon, ain't it, pefore?"

"Yes, sir," said Figgins, considerably troubled by the imposition, but glad at the same time that he was not detained after hours the present afternoon. "Certainly, sir."

Herr Schneider kept a watchful eye on Figgins for the rest of the afternoon, and Figgins, fearful of detention, gave his very best attention to the lesson, and escaped further calling over the coals.

It was greatly to his relief when the class was dismissed at last, and the boys poured out into the quadrangle.

CHAPTER 12.

Figgins's Expedition.

FIGGINS had been thinking over the matter a great deal, as we have seen, and it had not been without result. He went over to the School House after tea to tell Tom Merry his plans.

"Ready for us?" asked Tom Merry. "We're only waiting for the word, you know."

"Not quite," said Figgins. "What do you think will be the best time for catching the Grammarians on the hop?"

"Well, of course, it's impossible to be certain," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But I suppose they will go down to the tuckshop after tea at the Grammar School to get in the grub?"

"From what I hear about them, the masters there are likely to be on the watch," Figgins remarked. "I remember hearing that Gay was nearly spotted last time. My idea is that Frank Monk is more likely to leave it till after locking-up time and calling over, so as to be quite safe from interference."

Tom Merry nodded.
"That's right, Figgy. I think it's very likely. But in that case it makes it pretty difficult for us to lay for them."

"If there's eleven juniors missing from St. Jim's at call-over there will be a row," grinned Monty Lowther.

"I've thought of that," said Figgins. "That won't do, of course. My idea is, cut off directly after call-over, and get out of the school by the old place in the wall."

"Good! If your idea about the time the Grammar kids will do the trick is correct, it's the only thing to be done."

"Then I want you all to come down to the old spot as quickly as you can get away after calling-over," said Figgins. "You'll pass the word to Blake and his lot."

"Right you are!"
And Figgins left Tom Merry's study.

"He won't make a bad leader after all," Tom Merry remarked. "Of course, I'd rather the matter were in my hands—"

"Or mine," remarked Manners.
"But Figgy will manage it pretty well, I dare say. Anyway, we'll back him up for all we're worth," Tom Merry declared. "We'll make it a success if we can."

"Oh, yes, we'll play the game."
Promptly to time the Terrible Three turned up at the familiar spot where the juniors of St. Jim's had more than once crossed the wall into Rylcombe Lane.

Figgins was already there with Kerr and Wynn, and Study No. 6 arrived almost at the same time.

"Nobody missed you?" asked Figgins.
"No, we've been very careful," said Tom Merry. "We're not missed, and sha'n't be till bedtime, I expect. How about you, Blake?"

"Same here," said Blake. "I was careful."
"Yaas, wathah, so was I," said D'Arcy. "Mellish had the feahful cheek to ask me what I was gettin' into my oval—"

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coat for, and I told him that it was a gweat secwet, and not to be curious about it, you know."

"So he won't be," said Kerr sarcastically. "Oh, Gussy, you ought to have a tin medal for your sagacity, you ought really!"

"Pway do not address me in that dispawagin' tone—" "Shut up!" said Figgins. "Over the wall with you, kids!"

"Give us a bunk-up, then."

The juniors, aided by the ivy, clambered over the wall. They gathered in Rylcombe Lane in the darkness, and took the road towards the Grammar School.

A huge black mass looming up through the night warned them that they were near their goal. Dark and silent was the Grammar School, and the big gates were fast closed.

"Do you think you fellows had better keep back while I do some scoutin'?" asked D'Arcy. "We can't be too beastly careful, you know."

"I think you had better dry up," said Figgins, "or else I think you will probably get a thick ear, Gussy."

"If there's any New House wottah who can give me a thick eah, I shall be extwemely pleased to weceive it," said Arthur Augustus disdainfully.

"Now then, no house-ragging now," said Tom Merry. "I'm surprised at you, Adolphus. Why don't you play the game?"

"Yaas, wathah, I withdwaw my wemark," said D'Arcy gracefully. "If there is any New House wottah who can give me a thick eah, I shall not be pleased to weceive it. I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean," said Figgins. "Dry up! I heard something just then."

"So did I," whispered Digby.

The juniors crouched in the dense shadow of a great tree that overhung the wall from inside the Grammar School grounds. The trunk grew close to the wall inside, and the branches spread far over the road.

There was certainly some sound audible in the darkness, but exactly what it was the juniors could not at first determine. It was a sound of scraping or scratching. But the sound that followed was unmistakable—that of a human voice.

"Let go my ankle, Lane, you silly fathead!"

The juniors nudged one another.

It was the well-known voice of Frank Monk. And in reply came another voice they knew well.

"It nearly slipped, Frank. It's all right now."

"Is it? You nearly had me down."

"A miss is as good as a mile."

"Might have broken my neck."

"Not much loss if you had."

"Oh, shut up, you two," said a third voice, that of Carboy.

"You'll have some beastly master hearing you and coming down on us like a sack of coke."

The voices were silent again, but the scraping sound continued.

The juniors of St. Jim's knew what it was now.

The scraping was made by the juniors inside forcing a way upward to the top of the wall, by squeezing themselves between the wall and the tree-trunk that grew close to it.

Evidently the Grammar School chums were just about to leave the place, and it was pretty certain that Tom Merry's surmise as to their movements was quite correct.

They were going to Mother Murphy's tuckshop to obtain supplies for a little birthday celebration. The Saints were in good time.

Figgins nudged his companions, and they drew away from the spot. Crouching there in the shadow of the tree, they were invisible; but they might have been dropped on—literally—by the Grammarians from above. Three dim forms came into view on the top of the wall.

Monk sat astride, while Lane dropped into the road. Frank Monk's voice was audible again, in tones low and cautious, but which reached plainly to the ears of the St. Jim's juniors only a dozen paces distant.

"You know what you've got to do, Carboy. Don't leave the place. I know it's a bit cold sticking out of doors for half an hour, but it's the only way."

"That's all right, Frank, I don't mind."

"Keep in sound of our whistle. There's no reason why you shouldn't take a run to keep yourself warm, you know. But you must be on the spot to help us in, especially with the grub, and I can't say exactly how long we shall be."

"That's all right. You'll find me ready."

"When we whistle, get into the tree, and lower the rope for the grub. The basket will weigh pretty heavy, you know. There's no other way of getting it over the wall."

"I understand. I shall watch for you, and I expect I shall see you coming, and have the rope ready. Better not whistle if it can be helped; we don't want to run risks."

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Come to London
To See the Coronation:

Frank Monk dropped into the lane.

A rope came dangling down after him, with a big hook on the end to which a large basket was hung. Frank unhooked the basket, and the rope was drawn up again to the top of the wall by Carboy.

Quite unaware of the proximity of the St. Jim's juniors, Frank Monk and his companion strode away towards Rylcombe Village.

Carboy slung the rope to the inside of the wall, and looped it over a branch of the tree to be in readiness. Then he dropped into the close to take a little exercise to keep himself from freezing while he waited for the return of his comrades.

CHAPTER 13.

The Ambush.

FIGGINS drew a quick, deep breath.

"Got 'em!" he whispered.

The St. Jim's juniors drew over to the further side of the wide road, where they could speak without fear of being overheard by Carboy. They were chuckling silently with satisfaction.

"The game's ours," said Tom Merry. "We've only to wait for Monk and Lane to return, and then collar them and their precious basket."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you think of me as a captain?" said Figgins, grinning. "Of course, it was plain all along that a New House fellow would have to take the lead if we were to make any headway against the Grammar School."

"Wait and see," said Digby. "We haven't got the grub yet, Figgy."

"We've only got to wait for it and collar it."

"And, anyway, it was Tom Merry's idea."

"Oh, rats! I'm captain, and I've led you into this, and it's about the best wheeze we've ever worked off on the Grammar School," declared Figgins.

"I say, deah boys, it's awfully cold waitin' here! Suppose we have a game at leapfrog to keep ourselves warm, you know?"

"A good idea—I don't think!" said Lowther. "Carboy would hear us. We've just got to lie low and say nuffin'."

"That's it," said Figgins. "A wheeze like this is worth a bit of waiting."

The juniors agreed to that, but they found the waiting weary work. The night was bitterly cold, and a mist was creeping from the direction of the Ryll.

They stamped and exercised to keep their blood in circulation, and listened eagerly for the chimes from Rylcombe Church, telling the hour.

"Half an hour," said Figgins at last, in a low voice.

"They ought to be somewhere about by this time."

"Yaas, wathah! Do you know, deah boys, my extwemities are weally almost fwozen!"

"Never mind," said Fatty Wynn. "Think of the feed we are going to have when we get that grub back to St. Jim's."

"I am not such an extwemely gweedy person as you are, Wynn, and I fail to find solace in the wefection for my fwozen feet," said D'Arcy.

"Who are you calling greedy?"

"I natuwallly chawactewised you as gweedy, my deah fellow. I appeal to Figgins if the description is not quite cowwect."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Figgins.

"I wufuse to go and eat coke—I wufuse—"

"Shut up!" said Marmaduke, in a whisper. "I can see somebody on the wall."

"I wufuse to—"

Marmaduke's hand on D'Arcy's mouth effectually stopped him. In the dimness the form of Carboy could be faintly seen on the wall. The rope—a thick and strong one—probably the same that the Grammarians had sometimes used for descents from a dormitory window—was dangling over a branch of the tree that overhung the road. The end with the hook on it touched the road; the other was in the hands of Carboy.

"Silence!" whispered Figgins.

Even Arthur Augustus understood the necessity of silence. It was evident from Carboy's preparations that he had seen, from the top of the wall, the two Grammarians returning from Rylcombe with the basket of provisions for the dormitory feed.

"Ready!" Figgins murmured.

Two forms loomed up in the shadows of the school wall, carrying between them the big basket.

"Forward!" shouted Figgins. "On the ball!"

And the St. Jim's juniors rushed on.

See this week's number of
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A FREE OFFER!

CHAPTER 14.

Done Brown!

PROMPT as had been the action of the Co., Frank Monk was not caught napping. He was well on the alert, although he had no special suspicion of foes being near at hand. And Carboy, too, saw the rush of the Saints. "Pull up!" yelled Frank Monk, instantly placing the handle of the basket over the big hook at the end of the rope.

The basket swung off the ground, and Monk and Lane turned desperately to stem the rush of the Saints before they could seize it.

They faced the odds gallantly, hitting out with all their strength, and for a moment the Co. were checked, Tom Merry and Figgins going down under the blows.

But it was only for a moment.

The two Grammarians were literally swept away, and hurled to the ground by the heavy odds against them.

Fatty Wynn, who had an eye on the basket from the instant it came into sight, sprang to seize it as it swung. He clutched at the basket and caught it, and the ascent of the rope was checked.

Carboy set his teeth. He was quick to act, and his presence of mind was the only thing that could have saved the situation.

The rope, as we have said, passed over a branch of the tree, and Carboy had only to throw his weight on it to pull the basket into the air.

As Fatty Wynn hung on the rope, Carboy threw himself from the wall inside the school grounds, and his weight and the impetus of his fall dragged both the basket and Fatty Wynn into the air at the other end of the rope.

Fatty gave a gasp as he shot up into the air. He did not even think of letting go of the basket, which meant the loss of the provisions.

Fatty Wynn did not mean to lose that feed, into whatsoever perils the pursuit of it might lead him.

"Help!" he gasped faintly.

And, clinging to the rope with one hand, and the basket with the other, he shot up to the overhanging branch of the tree.

Carboy knew by the tug of the rope what had happened, and he was quick to take advantage of it. The moment he touched the ground inside the wall, he took a turn with the rope round the trunk of the tree, and by his swift action prevented the weight of Fatty Wynn from dragging it back again.

The grip of the rope on the rough bark prevented it slipping, while Carboy knotted it, and thus made assurance doubly sure. Then he was free to think of his comrades.

The sudden flying away of Fatty Wynn naturally amazed his chums of the Co. Figgins made a hasty snatch at his leg and missed. Marmaduke jumped valiantly after him, and received Fatty Wynn's final kick on the chest, and dropped into the road with a bump and a loud gasp.

Tom Merry sat up, rubbing his nose, which had been rather flattened by a terrific right-hander from Frank Monk.

"Where's the grub?" he exclaimed.

"Look!" said Kerr. "They've got the grub, and Fatty Wynn, too!"

Tom Merry leaped to his feet.

High up against the branch of the tree swung the big basket and Fatty Wynn, the legs of the latter flying about spasmodically.

"Hold on!" shouted Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn did not need telling to hold on. He was thinking only of the endangered feed. But, as a matter of fact, he would have been considerably hurt if he had let go the basket at that height from the ground.

"Great Scott!" gasped Figgins. "We must get him down. Hold on, Fatty! You'll break your giddy bones if you fall!"

"Help! I'm holding on! Help! They'll have the grub!"

"I say, you fellows, let him down!"

Carboy reappeared on the top of the wall. "Rats!" he replied cheerfully. "He can let go if he likes."

"Where are those other rotters?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"There were two of them here! Where are they?"

Where, indeed, were they?

Frank Monk and Lane had lost no time in making themselves scarce. Scarcely a minute had elapsed since they were bowled over, and already they were out of sound and sight.

"They're gone!"

"Yaas, watah!"

"You asses to let them go!" howled Figgins.

"You asses to let us let them go!" retorted Monty Lowther. "What sort of a leader do you call yourself? Whose business is it to look out for things like that. If I were leader—"

"You'd act the giddy ox, just as you've done now."

"Lowther's right!" exclaimed Digby warmly. "It's your business as leader to lead, Figgins. If you find the job too big for you, chuck it up!"

"Just so," said Blake. "Dig's right. And as I always said—"

"Oh, rats to what you always said!" snapped Figgins. "Look for those bounders. They mayn't be very far away."

Tom Merry was already looking for them. But the Grammarians were gone. The search was soon over, for the voice of Frank Monk was heard on the top of the school wall. It was evident that Monk and Lane had found another way into the school grounds.

The juniors of St. Jim's gathered again under the tree. Frank Monk and Lane were on the wall beside Carboy, chuckling with glee. It had not taken them long to get into the Grammar School grounds after escaping from the enemy.

"Oh!" growled Figgins. "So you're there!"

"Yes, here we are!" said Monk cheerfully. "I say, what's that curious-looking object hanging on to our basket? Is it the Fat Boy of Peckham, or a baby walrus?"

"A sorter cross between the two, I think," said Carboy. "It's a thing called Wynn, otherwise known as Fatty, and it's found in a rotten place called St. Jim's, or anywhere where there's any grub going."

"Help!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "I can't hold on much longer!"

"You'll be hurt if you fall," said Frank. "Better get on the wall here. I'll lend you a hand, Fatty. There you are!"

Fatty Wynn was close to the wall, and his wagging feet had kicked it several times. Monk seized him, and dragged him on the wall, where he was promptly collared by Lane and Carboy.

"Let me get down, you beasts!"

"Not so fast!" said Frank Monk coolly. "You're a prisoner of war, my beautiful Falstaff! We're too fond of you to let you go."

"Let him come down!" howled Figgins angrily from the road.

"Go and eat coke, Wiggins! Or is your name Higgins?"

"Figgins, you cad! Let him come down!"

"Sorry, Piggins, but I couldn't think of it. You're rather unreasonable, Biggins. We're too fond of this fat oyster of yours to part with him, Diggins!"

Figgins gasped with fury. Some of his followers were grinning, which did not help to calm him.

"We'll jolly soon rescue you, Fatty!" he exclaimed.

"Come on, chaps! We've got to get over that wall!"

And Figgins retreated across the road to get a start.

"Don't be an ass, you know!" remonstrated Blake. "We can't get over a wall twelve feet high; and especially with those rotters on top ready to knock us down!"

"If you're funky—"

"Gr-r-r! Lead on, Macduff, and I'll show you if I'm funky!"

Figgins was not in a mood to listen to reason. His captivacy had opened so well, and was ending so disastrously, that he had lost his coolness. He was determined to get the better of the Grammarians and rescue Fatty Wynn, and, as it were, to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

But it was not easily done. He took a rapid run, and sprang up the wall; but his hands failed to reach the top, desperately as he sprang, and he dropped into the road, and sat down with rather a shock.

The Terrible Three tried less desperate measures. Tom Merry, exchanging a word with Manners and Lowther, planted himself against the wall, and in a twinkling Manners had scrambled up on his shoulders, and Lowther was climbing over both of them.

It was so quickly done that Lowther had his arms over the wall before the Grammarians could deal with him.

But Frank Monk was quick to act.

He squirmed along the wall to the spot, and soon had a grip on Lowther's hair, and shoved him away from the wall.

"Look out!" yelled Lowther.

He went plunging down, and dropped into the road, and the shock sent Tom Merry and Manners to the earth together.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Frank Monk.

And Lane and Carboy joined in.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Saints gathered wrathfully under the wall. It was evidently impossible to get at the Grammarians, though Figgins was loth to give up the attempt. Fatty Wynn was a prisoner in the enemy's hands, and rescue was out of the question.

Frank Monk reached out to the still swinging basket, and unhooked it from the rope in the sight of the furious Co. beneath it, and slung it inside the wall.

Fatty Wynn gave a hollow groan as he saw it go. He cared little what happened to him now; the feed was evidently gone for good.

"Well, are you going to keep us waiting here all night?"

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NEXT WEEK: "SAINTS v. GRAMMARIANS." Another Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and their Great Rivals. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

asked Figgins, at last. "Don't you think this jape has gone on long enough?"

"Oh, certainly! We're satisfied, if you are."

"Then let Fatty Wynn come down."

"Not a bit of it, unless you ransom him."

Figgins's heart sank.

He knew what was coming now.

"What are you driving at?" he asked uneasily.

"You know what I'm driving at," said Frank Monk cheerfully. "You've got a third part of that cardboard sheet that has the surrender written on it."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Only this—that that's Fatty Wynn's ransom."

"Beasts! You sha'n't have it!"

"Right-ho! We'll tie Fatty to the tree here, and sit on the wall and wait till you make up your minds to it," said Monk.

"You—you beast—"

"Don't lose its lickle temper," said Monk. "All's fair in war, you know. You had us at a disadvantage when you made us sign that paper, you know, and now we've turned the tables on you. We're going to have it back, or bust something!"

"No good kicking, Figgins," said Kerr, with a heavy sigh. "They've got to have it, and we may as well own up to it first as last."

Figgins grunted.

"What do you fellows say?" he inquired, looking round at the Co.

"Nothing," answered Blake politely. "We've got nothing to say. You're the giddy leader in this Co., and you can decide for yourself."

"That's only fair," said Digby. "You may as well give in. You've got to, you know, unless you want to leave Fatty there all night."

Figgins seemed to gulp something down.

"All right," he said; "I agree. You shall have the rotten document by the first post in the morning, young Monkey!"

"Right you are, Figgins!" chuckled Monk. "I know I can take your word. Here's your prize oyster."

And Fatty Wynn was slung off the wall by the Grammar School chums, who levered him by their hands and let him drop.

Monk, Lane, and Carboy disappeared within the wall. They were off to the dormitory feed in great glee. The defeated Co. were decidedly glum as they took the homeward route to St. Jim's.

Not a word was spoken till they separated in the quad-

rangle to go to their respective houses. Then D'Arey aired his opinion.

"My word!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "We've had two weally wotten leadahs, Figgins, but I weally think you are the wottenest of all. Weally, how a fellah like you could have the feahful nerve to set up to lead a fellah like me—"

The swell of the School House broke off there. He had intended to go on for some time; but Figgins, whose patience had been sorely tried, dotted him on the nose just then, and Arthur Augustus staggered away.

Figgins & Co. marched off to their own house. D'Arey recovered himself, and made an attempt to rush after Figgins. Blake and Digby caught him by the arm, and jerked him back.

"Welease me!" exclaimed D'Arey. "Figgins has stwuck me! He has stwuck me on the beastly nose, you know. Welease me at once!"

"Oh, come home!" said Blake. "It's too late to make a row to-night. You'll have a lot of prefects jumping on you!"

"I do not desire to make a wov; but—"

"Oh, do what your uncle tells you!" said Blake. "Come home!"

And the indignant swell of St. Jim's was dragged away by his chums. As the seven School House juniors tramped across the dusky quad, towards their house, a gloomy silence settled down upon them, even Arthur Augustus's indignant mutterings subsiding. All seven were thinking—thinking deeply, and the thoughts of each one were running on the same subject.

As they reached the School House entrance, Tom Merry paused a moment, and broke the silence.

"Chaps," he exclaimed, in a low, earnest whisper—"chaps, we've been done—done brown by the Grammarians, and it won't do. We can't stand it! And I for one am not going to rest until we've won back the prestige of St. Jim's!"

"And so say all of us!" came the fervent murmur out of the darkness from six throats simultaneously.

"Then it's Saints versus Grammarians!" exclaimed the hero of the Shell in thrilling tones. "It's war—war to the knife between the Rival Schools!"

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. and their Rivals of the Grammar School next Thursday, entitled: "Saints versus Grammarians," by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of the "GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)



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A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure.



By **ROBERT W. COMRADE.**

INTRODUCTION.

Frank Kingston, a young Englishman, is engaged on a secret campaign against a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, his aim being to break up the society by ruining the members of the Inner Council. He has the assistance of Miss O'Brien, an accomplished young lady, Professor Graham Polgrave, a clever scientist and inventor, Carson Gray, a detective, Fraser, his man, and a lad named Tim.

Kingston has brought eight prominent members to book, and is proceeding to ruin the ninth—a certain Dr. Julius Zeetman, who is in charge of the Grange Private Lunatic Asylum. He learns that many of its inmates are not lunatics, but perfectly sane people. Under the pretence of being a lunatic, Kingston, and Miss O'Brien as his nurse, obtain rooms in the asylum under the names of Mr. Meredith Hall and Miss Thurston. Kingston decides to rescue all the sane inmates of the asylum, and manages to get two of them out of the building. He then overhears a conversation between Zeetman and his head-keeper, a man named Stevenson. Zeetman tells Stevenson that he intends to run no more risks of losing any more of his patients, and that ten men are coming down from London to guard the building from the outside.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Eavesdropper.

"The men will come provided with rope-ladders," continued Zeetman, "and will simply spread themselves round the building, and remain on guard throughout the night. At the first sign of light, however, they will immediately take their departure. The nurses must know nothing whatever of their presence, neither must Miss Thurston."

"They'll be here at midnight, sir. Will that be in time?"

"That is an unnecessary question, my man, for your own sense must tell you that nobody would endeavour to effect a rescue until the small hours of the morning, when everybody is settled for the night. Twelve o'clock will be exactly right."

There was a moment's silence, and Frank Kingston, who had heard every word, congratulated himself on having thought of the really good idea of impersonating the gorilla. Had it not been for this animal's presence next to Zeetman's library he would never have been enabled to overhear this conversation.

"And what time do I go on the roof, sir?" asked the keeper.

"At twelve o'clock, Stevenson," replied the doctor comfortably—it was very pleasant for Zeetman, who intended having a good night's rest, to give these orders—"at twelve o'clock. You will gain the roof by means of one of the corridor skylights, which are, of course, very ordinary affairs with no outer fastenings. You will simply stand on the roof, and make no effort to communicate with the men below; that is, of course, taking it for granted that nothing out of the ordinary occurs."

"Then I ain't to speak to 'em, sir?"

"Not at all, Stevenson. There is no necessity for such a thing, and it would only mean unnecessary shouting about. And that might possibly give everything away. Now, I think everything is clear to you."

"Oh, yes, sir, it's clear enough, and it'll be a very clever man who succeeds in breakin' away to-night. Shall I go and give the orders to the others, sir?"

"At once," replied Dr. Zeetman. "Let them know exactly what they have to do. And by the by, get to know if my supper is prepared."

"The housekeeper told me it was most ready as I passed through, sir, so it's sure to be served by now."

"Very good, my man; I will come," replied the doctor, pushing his chair back and rising to his feet. "Now that I have told you all the plans, there is no reason why I should remain longer. The gorilla is settled for the night!"

Kingston heard the sounds of the two men preparing to depart. There was nothing whatever surprising in the fact that Zeetman was leaving the room so conveniently. Indeed, Kingston had expected as much, for, the private conversation over, there was no object in prolonging the stay.

A minute or so later the door slammed, and the key was turned in the lock. Dr. Zeetman had left. He had spoken to Stevenson there for the express purpose of being private, and fondly imagined that the conversation had been so.

And yet every word he had uttered—every secret he had revealed to the head-keeper—had been overheard and memorised by the very man who was causing all the trouble. Frank Kingston, by taking the place of the gorilla, was conversant with the whole scheme, and nothing now remained but for him to gain the grounds again and set machinery in motion which would result, before morning, in the mysterious disappearance of six further patients—or, rather, prisoners—of Dr. Julius Zeetman.

The Avenger Lays His Plans.

"Nine o'clock!"

Kingston murmured the words as he glanced at the dial of his watch. He had waited for a minute while the footsteps of Zeetman and the head-keeper died away. He was alone—alone with a senseless gorilla, with three locked doors between himself and liberty.

To Frank Kingston, however, this was merely a detail. One glance round the bare apartment was enough for him; he saw immediately that he had left no traces; that there was nothing to show Zeetman that somebody beside the rightful occupant had been present.

The key was turned in the lock as before, and in less than a minute Kingston was in the library, inserting a skeleton-key into the further door. Everything was straightforward now, and he easily gained the passage. The outer door itself—the one giving on to the garden—presented some little difficulty, but after a couple of minutes careful and patient manipulation, Kingston found himself clear of the building.

It was raining in that miserable, drizzly way which is twice as bad as a downright, honest downpour, and would have upset many a man's spirit. Kingston, however, never even noticed the discomfort.

"Past nine, and the car is to start from London by ten," he told himself. "By Jove, it will be a close shave, and no mistake! But it's the only way, and I am sure Gray can be trusted to see it through satisfactorily. If Tim isn't waiting outside, though, everything will be spoilt."

But Tim was waiting outside.

He emerged from the trees the very instant Kingston appeared. Tim was a shrewd lad, and was not deceived for an instant by his master's extraordinary disguise.

"Lummy, sir," he whispered, "but you don't 'arf look a sight!"

"Never mind about that, Tim," interrupted Kingston quickly. "There's work for you to do."

"Work, sir! What's happened, then?"

"There's not a moment to lose, Tim, so I cannot tell you anything at present," replied Kingston. "Go to Fraser immediately, and give him these instructions. He's to go to the nearest station, or telegraph-office, and wire to Mr. Carson Gray."

"Is 'e comin' into it as well, sir?"

"Please don't interrupt, Tim. Fraser knows the ciphers, and is to ask Mr. Gray to prevent at all costs a car leaving the district superintendent's house in Lambeth Road, near St. George's Circus, at ten o'clock precisely."

"But there ain't time, sir," protested Tim. "It's past nine already!"

"If you are quick, my lad, the wire can be delivered by about ten minutes to ten, and Mr. Gray will, in some way or other, stop the car."

"But 'e can't git to Lambeth in the time, sir."

"Very likely not, Tim. There are other means, however, by which he can prevent the car reaching here. If everything else fails, and he finds it impossible to do anything himself, he can wire to the police at one of the towns through which the car has to pass, and order them to be detained on some trumped-up charge."

"It could be done that way, o' course, sir," grinned Tim. "I've caught on to everything, sir, an' know exactly wot to do. Good-bye, sir!"

"Good-bye, young 'un! And don't forget to be back here again by eleven o'clock. I shall want to speak to Fraser personally. And, Tim!"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Fraser to inform Mr. Gray in the wire where the car is making for. Now you can be off!"

The next second Tim had disappeared into the darkness of the night, and Kingston stood there in the rain looking after him, feeling absolutely confident that his instructions would be carried out.

"A smart lad," he told himself. "He will tell Fraser everything to the letter. I think I can rely on Gray to intercept the car, and shall set about my work as though it were already done."

The grounds were still deserted, and Kingston made his way across them with perfect confidence. The night was dark and wet, and he was sure that nobody would be on the watch so early, especially after what Zeetman had said. After so much practice it was quite an easy matter for him to clamber to the roof and descend into the sitting-room.

The latter was well lighted, and Dolores was sitting before the cheerful fire reading a novel. She laid the book down as Kingston appeared. In a moment he had divested himself of the gorilla skin, and seated himself leisurely in an armchair.

"Have you succeeded?" whispered Dolores eagerly. "But, of course, that is a needless question, for I have never known you to fail."

Kingston laughed softly.

"That does not mean to say that I shall not do so," he murmured. "Yes, Dolores, I have succeeded, and am in possession of all Zeetman's plans, and have already taken steps to frustrate them."

"But how did you get to know?" inquired Dolores. "Please—tell me all about it, for I have been terribly anxious."

So Kingston thereupon related everything that had occurred while he had been absent. He told it in such a manner that it was possible to think he had had a very quiet time of it, and that there had been no excitement whatever. Dolores knew perfectly well, however—or guessed—that had really occurred.

"But with all those men on guard, Mr. Kingston, it will be a stupendous undertaking to release six men and get them away in safety."

"When I set to work," replied Kingston languidly, "there will be nobody on guard whatever."

"Nobody on guard!" exclaimed Dolores, in surprise. "You have told me how you mean to rid yourself of the ten men from London, but how can you deal with the others—the head-keeper on the roof and the others in the passage below?"

"That part of the business will be equally as simple as the other," returned the Avenger, looking very unlike that character as he lolled in the easy chair. In a few moments he had told Dolores what he intended doing. "The time is early yet," he concluded, "so I will just make my preparations, and then settle down to a quiet read before the fire previous to venturing out into the rain."

The gorilla skin was stowed away in one of the trunks, for now it had served its purpose—and served it extremely well—there was no further use for it. For several minutes Kingston was busy with certain articles which were to play an important part in the night's work. Then, having nothing else to do until eleven when he was to see Fraser, he picked up a magazine, and was soon interested in its pages.

The whole building was in a state of absolute quietness, and it was difficult to imagine that anything out of the usual was to happen before dawn. The quarter of the building occupied by the latest arrivals was left entirely to itself, and, indeed, the quietness there was more absolute if anything than in the other parts of the asylum. At five minutes to eleven exactly "Mr. Meredith Hall" rose to his feet.

"Well, Dolores," he said quietly, "it is time I was on the move. I don't suppose you will see me again until about one o'clock, when everything will have been accomplished."

"You will not run any unnecessary risks, will you?" she asked rather anxiously.

"There are no risks to run," said Kingston lightly.

"Really, Dolores, this is one of the easiest cases I have ever undertaken. It will not be very cheerful in the rain, but on the whole this weather is rather welcome."

He smiled at her in his usual languid fashion, and to Dolores it seemed rather peculiar and out of place on the face of this decrepit old gentleman.

There was nothing about his movements to suggest age, however, for he swung himself on to the roof with the agility of a monkey. The skylight dropped quietly into its place, and Dolores could hear nothing but the patter of the fine rain as it fell upon the glass.

It was a miserable night indeed, and Kingston found the garden still lonely and deserted. The common-members from London were not expected till midnight, and Stevenson would not take up his post on the roof until the stroke of that hour.

Kingston was getting rather accustomed to scaling the wall, so by now it was quite an easy task. He found both Tim Curtis and Fraser waiting for him to appear. The manner in which his assistants were helping him over this case was very gratifying.

"Well?" he whispered shortly.

"I sent the wire off all right, sir," exclaimed Fraser, although he had been talking to his master in the study at Cyril. "They told me it would be delivered by a quarter to ten, so I think it'll be all right about that gang, sir."

"Good, Fraser! You have been very prompt," replied Kingston, the tone of his voice telling the others how pleased he was. "Now, look here! The patients will not be released until soon after midnight, but before then there is a slight task to be accomplished."

"Do I help in this, sir?" asked Fraser eagerly.

"You do, Fraser, but it is nothing much. Just before midnight it is my belief that Zeetman will come into the garden to ascertain if the ten men have arrived."

"But they won't be there, sir," put in Tim, "and he'll see—"

"He will see all he expects to, young 'un," said his

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master calmly. "Zeetman will appear at the side door, and I shall want you, Fraser, to stand about ten yards distant against a clump of bushes. The doctor will immediately take you for one of the men. You are already in disguise, so no alteration in your appearance will be needed."

"And how about Tim, sir?"

"Tim's part will be a very small one," smiled Kingston.

"I shall require you, my lad, to make a slight commotion among the bushes on the far side of the garden. It is not much, I admit, but very necessary. I myself shall stand between you and Fraser, and shall call out to Fraser and ask who he is speaking to. All this together will combine to give Zeetman the impression that the ten men are in the garden. On such a night as this it is extremely improbable that he will make a tour round and investigate. If he does, I shall have to think of something on the spur of the moment to bamboozle him."

Fraser grinned in the darkness.

"You will do that, sir, right enough," he exclaimed, with confidence; "and it's a fine idea, if you ask me. The old

was an easy matter. As it happened, Kingston had done quite right in placing Fraser at his post so early, for the valet had been there scarcely two minutes when he heard the bolts of the side-door being softly drawn.

The next moment it opened, and the dismal light of a little oil-lamp shed its rays upon the weed-grown path. But not only upon the path, but upon the figure of Fraser standing close to a clump of evergreens. His figure was quite distinguishable, and Dr. Zeetman, as he stood in the doorway, uttered a quick exclamation of satisfaction.

"Good!" he murmured. "I hardly expected the men to be so prompt!"

The Rescue.

Dr. Julius Zeetman stepped out into the rain, and gave a keen glance round into the surrounding darkness. Then he looked at Fraser.

"You are here prompt to time," he said, in a low voice. "In fact, before time."



Kingston raised his peculiar weapon to his lips, and took steady aim at the head-keeper. The next moment the deadly little dart was speeding on its way. (See page 26.)

scoundrel can't help bein' completely taken in. And what do we do after that, sir?"

"Nothing at all, Fraser, until you get the word from me. As soon as Zeetman has returned to the building I shall climb to the roof and deal with the head-keeper when he puts in an appearance. After that, should events come to pass as I anticipate, you will merely have to escort half a dozen highly-pleased gentlemen to London."

"But it's only just after eleven now, sir, and you say that Zeetman won't come out until midnight."

"There is a chance that he may come earlier, so it would be advisable to be at our posts not later than a quarter to twelve. Until then you can tell me exactly how you obtained the gorilla skin, how you landed the first two patients, and, in fact, everything that has occurred. This is the first opportunity I have had of speaking to you, so we may as well compare notes."

And there, in the rain, the two men talked for close on half an hour, passing the time away as though they were waiting for a train. It was, indeed, the coolness and precision with which Kingston carried out all his plans that insured success.

At last the time came for them to move, and Tim, having brought the rope-ladder, the negotiation of the high wall

"Yes, sir," replied Fraser, in disguised tones. "The car came down very quickly."

"How long have you been here?" inquired the doctor, being quite unable to distinguish the features of the man before him.

He could only see that it was a man, and the only conclusion he could come to was that it was one of the common-members from London. Before Fraser could reply, a hoarse whisper proceeded from about twenty yards' distant.

"Who's that, Tom?" said the voice.

Zeetman looked sharply to his left, but could see nothing.

"Who're you talking to?" asked the voice again. "Anything wrong, mate?"

"No; it's all right," replied Fraser. "The gov'nor's come to see if we're here."

"Oh!" returned the voice. "Is 'e comin' to 'ave a look round?"

Dr. Zeetman did not move.

"You are all here, I suppose?" he said to Fraser.

"Everyone of us, sir," returned that individual, noting with satisfaction that Tim was doing his part of the work the other side of the garden. The noise the boy created by crashing through the bushes was plainly audible.

At the same moment a sudden gust of wind swept across

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the garden, bringing with it a heavier fall of rain, which drove into Zeetman's face with chilly and uncomfortable force.

"There is no necessity for me to venture out," he said, stepping back into the shelter of the passage. "It is most unfortunate that it should be such a wretched night, but it can't be helped. You are well provided with waterproofs, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" returned Fraser confidently. "We're used to rough work, sir, and won't come to no hurt."

"Then I will bid you good-night, my man. You know what to do, I suppose?"

"Keep watch 'ere till dawn, an' then git back to London as soon as possible. That's all, ain't it, sir? You don't want us to be seen in the morning?"

"Quite right," said Zeetman. "There is no reason whatever why you should remain after dawn. Keep a sharp look-out, and let nobody remain or enter the grounds. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The door closed, and Fraser grinned hugely as he heard the bolts being shot into their places. Through the fanlight above the door he saw the light suddenly extinguished, and knew that Zeetman would not come out again that night. To all appearances, everything had been in perfect order, and it was not in the least surprising that the doctor, astute as he was, had been completely deceived.

Fraser waited there for five minutes or more before Kingston made a move. It was extremely unlikely that the doctor would return, but Kingston left nothing whatever to chance.

"You did well, Fraser," Kingston whispered. "Zeetman was taken in beautifully. It is not quite twelve yet, but I shall climb to the roof, so as to be in readiness for Stevenson when he puts in an appearance. Remain here for fifteen minutes, in case the doctor takes it into his head to return. After that, you can get yourself ready to return to London. Once the business starts, it will not take many minutes to accomplish."

"Right, sir!"

"When I leave the building with the six rescued patients, I shall expect you and Tim to be outside the grounds, waiting to escort them to the car."

Kingston turned, and disappeared into the rain and darkness. He met Tim near the end of the building, and repeated the orders he had given Fraser. Then, with no delay, he clambered up the silk ladder to the roof. The leads were bare and deserted, the rain beating down on them a little faster than before. Kingston took up his position behind one of the chimney-stacks, well out of view. He hummed slightly under his breath as he proceeded to get the blow-pipe in readiness. He could not help thanking Providence for the step it had taken in introducing him to Professor Graham Polgrave, whose remarkable drugs were proving so extremely useful to him.

He realised that, had it not been for the professor's aid, his work would have been double as hard, and his plans much more elaborate. He knew that his work at the Grange Asylum was as good as done, and that before another twenty-four hours had passed the episode would be over.

At this moment his thoughts were interrupted by a very slight sound a little way ahead. Kingston peered from behind the chimney-stack, and saw one of the small passage skylights being raised into the air.

"The good Stevenson will soon find his troubles at an end," thought Kingston, with a chuckle. "There will be no nightwork for him in the rain—or, in fact, any work to-morrow. This little instrument I have in my hand will cause him to remain unconscious for twenty-four hours. Well, I dare say he can do with a rest."

Stevenson was attired in a voluminous waterproof, and a large sou'-wester covered his ordinary headgear. He was well prepared for his vigil. The skylight was closed down, and the two men stood on the roof alone. It was time for Kingston to act.

In the darkness it was something of a task to bury one of the tiny darts—or, rather, the point of it—into an exposed portion of Stevenson's anatomy. Indeed, the only part bare was his face, and Kingston did not wish to do the man any serious injury. But the next moment his difficulty was solved.

The head-keeper, knowing that he was to be alone all night, saw no reason why he should not enjoy a smoke. So Kingston waited while he pulled his gloves off, to enable him to easily fill his pipe.

Kingston raised his peculiar weapon to his lips, and took steady aim, allowing for the wind. The next moment the little dart was speeding on its way, and Stevenson started as the point entered the back of his right hand. He plucked it out with a muttered curse, and glanced round into the sur-

rounding darkness, evidently puzzled as to where the thing had proceeded from.

But that glance was the most he could do, for almost immediately he staggered drunkenly, then sank to the roof unconsciously. Fortunately, he had fallen clear of the skylight, near to which he was standing. In half a dozen rapid strides Kingston was by his side. He bent down and examined the head-keeper. Then he produced his electric torch, and flashed the little beam of light over the glistening leads. He had scarcely looked for more than thirty seconds when a low exclamation of satisfaction escaped his lips.

He picked up the little dart which Stevenson had thrown away, and placed it in his pocket. That done, he pocketed the torch, and felt Stevenson's pulse. There was no sign of life whatever, and Kingston smiled. The drug with which the dart had been impregnated was none other than that which Carson Gray had taken some days before.

But although the detective had taken it internally, it was introduced into the head-keeper's veins externally, for it acted just as effectively either way. To all intents and purposes, Stevenson was a dead man.

"Good!" murmured Kingston. "The rest will prove as simple as anything I have ever attempted. The path is absolutely clear now for me to get the so-called lunatics away. To ensure perfect safety, however, it will be advisable to disable the four keepers in the passage below. That will, I think, prove an easy matter."

He left Stevenson's side, and bent down over one of the corridor skylights. The glass in these was of the same opaque variety as that of the larger ones, so Kingston could see nothing in the passage below. The latter was well lighted, however. He placed his ear to the glass and listened. Not a sound of any description could be heard.

"Quite settled," he told himself. "There is practically no fear of Zeetman appearing on the scene, for he has evidently retired for the night. It is surely reasonable to suppose he will not pay another visit after everything is settled down for the night. No; the crafty doctor does not mean to be deprived of his night's rest."

Frank Kingston's reasoning was a logical one, and he proceeded with his work, taking it for granted that Dr. Zeetman was out of the way. Very quietly he raised the skylight, and looked into the passage beneath.

Nobody was within sight, so he propped the framework up, and again produced the blow-pipe. To see him working, one would imagine he had unlimited time at his disposal, and had not the least reason to fear discovery. His very audacity was a thing to marvel at, yet it was the strongest characteristic of the man. He had no nerves, and knew not the meaning of the word fear.

Suddenly he bent down until his face was on a level with the opening. He could just see the figure of one of the keepers.

"Hist!" he exclaimed, in a low voice.

The man looked up quickly, saw the open skylight, and walked up the corridor. His feet, being encased in rubber-soled boots, made no noise whatever.

"Hallo!" he whispered. "That you, Stevenson?"

He looked up into the darkness, quite unable to distinguish anything. The next moment something dropped and alighted on his cheek. The keeper started and muttered a curse.

"What are you doin'?" he muttered. "What's the game, Ste—"

The rest of his sentence trailed away into an indistinguishable whisper, and he fell back against the wall, slipping from there with a thud to the concrete floor. Kingston waited, smiling quietly in the darkness. The simplicity of the work was almost amusing.

He had not to wait long.

In a moment the three other men hastened to the skylight.

They found their companion apparently lifeless. He lay there, pale and motionless, and, as was only natural, they bent down to ascertain what the trouble was. This was Kingston's opportunity, and, with perfect coolness and rapidity, he dropped one of the deadly darts on to each of the three unsuspecting and startled men.

At the expiration of thirty seconds not one of them was conscious, and they all lay in an untidy heap on the corridor floor. No outcry had been made, and there was something uncanny about the way in which they had succumbed to the effect of the drug.

"Splendid!" murmured Kingston. "I must really congratulate the professor afresh when I see him."

He rapidly tied a thin rope round Stevenson's body under the armpits, and then lowered the head-keeper himself hand-over-hand to the mass of unconscious humanity which lay piled up in the passage.

His work now was merely a matter of brisk action. All the elaborate plans Zeetman had prepared had been frustrated with the most ridiculous ease, and the coast was now

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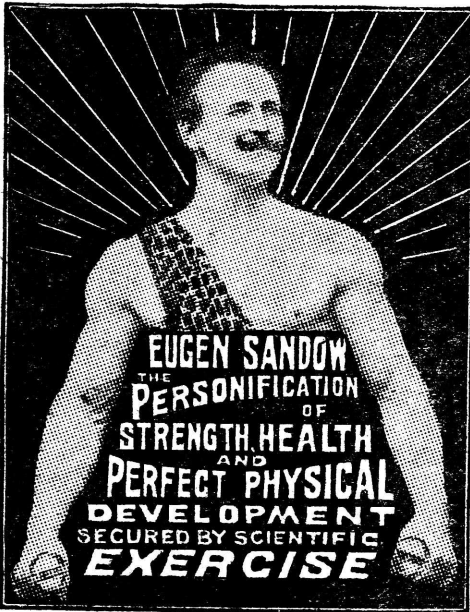
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GEM, 22/4/11.

quite clear for Kingston to effect the rescues. He quite realised that Zeetman might by chance appear, but this contingency would have to be risked.

Kingston did not waste a second once he had recovered the little darts and satisfied himself that the keepers were totally unconscious. Hanging on a chain from one of the men's belts there was a fairly large key, and Kingston possessed himself of this.

He knew exactly which wards to go to, for he had decided to rescue the six sane men who occupied the wards to the left of the passage. The key, he felt sure, was a master one which fitted all the doors. His surmise proved to be correct, for at the first attempt the door yielded readily. There was a light inside the ward, and a man of about forty sat up in bed with a start. He was a small individual, and Kingston needed no second glance to see that he had all his wits about him.

"Hallo!" said the patient, fully awake. "Who are you?" Kingston smiled at the cool manner in which the man spoke.

"I am somebody you scarcely expected to see," he replied. "My object in coming here is to ask you to get into your clothes with the greatest possible expedition."

"Into my clothes?" echoed the other. "Precisely! Before morning you will be in London, a free man, and will be clear of Dr. Zeetman and all his scoundrelly methods for ever!"

The little man opened his eyes in astonishment. "Who are you?" he exclaimed excitedly. "What does this mean? What tale is this you are telling?"

"No tale at all. Please have your clothes on in five minutes' time, for there's a chance Zeetman himself may come along and foil my plans. Above all, make no noise whatever. When you see me again I shall be at the skylight!"

"Good gracious—" Kingston did not wait to hear more; but closed the door quietly, and went to the next cell. Here he repeated his injunctions; and so on, until the whole six were engaged in dressing themselves and wondering who on earth their rescuer could be and why he was helping them. All of them, of course, thought him to be an elderly individual, with rather brisk movement and manner.

Kingston had locked them all in again, and now stood looking at the five asylum-keepers, with a smile of satisfaction on his lips. The manner in which his scheme was working out was gratifying in the extreme. Yet it was but the outcome of careful and thorough organisation. After having made plans as he had made them, it was practically impossible for them to miscarry.

"You will remain here for the present, my friends," he said, under his breath; "but if there is time when the other work is completed, you will receive my further attention."

With that he hoisted himself through the skylight opening, and gained the roof. The rain was descending as before, although not quite so heavily. After a momentary glance round into the darkness of the deserted garden, he made his way to the skylight of the cell he had first visited.

When rescuing the first two patients he had been forced to display the greatest of caution, but now there was no reason why a little noise should not be made. Not that Kingston created any unnecessary commotion. All he did was to draw the heavy bolt with all speed possible and raise the heavy framework.

The little man was already prepared to depart, and a moment later had been hoisted to the leads, where he stood, shaking Kingston's hand, almost at a loss for words.

"I thought for a moment you were a real lunatic escaped from your cell," he whispered. "I could not be-

lieve that I was to be given my liberty. I do not know what to say—what to do to thank—"

"Please do nothing," returned Kingston quickly. "Believe me, sir, every minute is of importance, and there are five other gentlemen to hoist to the roof yet."

"Five others!" muttered the other, as Kingston bent over another skylight. "Upon my soul, this is amazing! Who can my rescuer be? For an old man he is unaccountably agile."

Kingston knew that a thousand and one questions would be asked him, so he took absolutely no notice of what was said. Had he stopped to answer he would have been there for an hour.

"Please, gentlemen—please!" he whispered, as the last man was on the roof. The others were conversing together in an excited group. "If the slightest suspicious sound is heard by the doctor he will be on the spot on the instant, and my intention of rescuing the rest of the unfortunate people in this establishment will be frustrated. Having got your own liberty, you surely will not deny the remaining patients theirs?"

This had the effect of stopping the conversation. Kingston could have smiled as he saw those men there, in the pouring rain, whispering together like a lot of excited children. It was a novel spectacle indeed.

"What shall we do?" asked one of the men. "How are we going to reach the ground and gain the road? We are all in a state of wonderment. Who are you, and what is your object in delivering us from this ghastly building? My mind is in a whirl, and I cannot—"

"If you will follow me you will find yourselves all right," replied Kingston. "At the end of the building there is a rope ladder leading to the ground. Please take care to walk clear of the glass skylights. One false step and everything will be in an uproar."

And that strange procession moved silently and evenly along the wet and glistening leads.

Frank Kingston led the way across the muddy garden with as little delay as possible. The wind was rising a little, and the rain driving into his face as he proceeded. The men behind him felt no discomfort whatever, or, if they did, they made no remark. Their thoughts were too busy and their minds too excited to bother about such an unimportant item as rain.

Their surprises were never-ending, for as soon as they arrived at the wall Kingston paused before clambering up the wooden-runged rope ladder. From an inner pocket he produced a leather wallet.

"Now, gentlemen," he said calmly, "it has given me the greatest pleasure in releasing you from this establishment, and from this moment onwards you are all free men. No, do not interrupt, please! I do not suppose you have money on you for hotel expenses, etc., so I think a ten-pound note each will be rather welcome."

"But we cannot accept this from you," protested one of the men—"at least, not without knowing who you are, so that we can repay you a thousand-fold."

"My dear sir, pray do not trouble yourself as to my identity at present," said Kingston quickly. "You do not seem to realise that you are still in danger. When you get to London, you will be dropped from the motor-car, in which you travel, at different points. Now, it would be advisable to each enter a different hotel, for were the six of you seen together, certain suspicions might arise. That is all, except that I want you to say nothing whatever about this episode until you read in the papers that Dr. Zeetman's asylum has been shut up, and that will probably be to-morrow evening."

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