

NEXT THURSDAY:

"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"

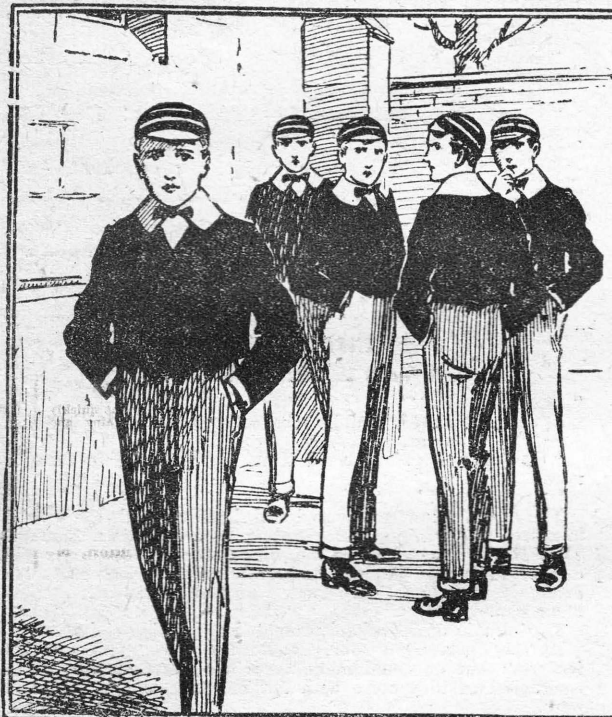
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Every

Thursday.



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# THE SPY OF THE SCHOOL!

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete  
Tale of TOM MERRY & CO. at  
St. Jim's.

BY  
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Quite a Surprise.

"INK, please," said Tom Merry.

"Here you are!"

"And some treacle."

"Here!"

"And a shovelful of soot!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Right-ho!"

Tom Merry stirred industriously.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were very busy. Tom Merry, in his shirt-sleeves, with the sleeves rolled up, and a large ladle in his hand, was stirring at a weird-looking compound in a big basin. There were many ingredients in that compound, and Manners and Lowther were adding more as Tom Merry stirred away.

Red ink, and black ink, and treacle and soot were being steadily mixed up into a fearsome liquid.

"Anything else?" asked Monty Lowther with a chuckle.

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"What about a little pyro?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!" said Manners, the amateur photographer of the School House. "It's a pity to waste it, as it costs money, but it's in a good cause. Here you are."

And he poured in the pyro.

Tom Merry stirred it up.

"Keep an eye on the window, Lowther," he remarked. "Don't show yourself, or Figgins will be on the alert. Tell me when you see him."

"Right-ho!" grinned Lowther.

And he stationed himself at the study window. It was getting dark in the quadrangle of St. Jim's, and the shadows of the old elms were very deep below. But there was light enough to see anybody who should come very close under the study windows.

Tom Merry stirred on.

There was a footstep in the passage, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, looked into the study. He was about to speak, when he caught sight of Tom Merry and his mixture. He remained with his mouth half open in his astonishment, and jammed his eyeglass into his eye to take a closer survey.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated. "What is that, Tom Merry?"

"Our special mixture."

"But what is it made of?" asked D'Arcy in amazement.

"Ink, soot, treacle, and pyro, with water ad lib."

"Bai Jove! What's it for?"

"Figgins."

"Eh?"

"Figgins, of the New House," said Tom Merry, stirring away. "I'm doing this specially for Figgins, out of sheer kindness."

Manners and Lowther chuckled.

"But what does Figgins want it for?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"That's the little joke. He doesn't want it."

"Oh!"

"You see," exclaimed Tom Merry, "Figgins doesn't want it, but he's going to get it. I'm doing this out of kindness."

Next Thursday:

"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!" AND "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

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I dare say you are aware that Figgins & Co. have a weird idea that the New House is cock-house of St. Jim's—"

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "They've got to be cured of this idea somehow, and we're going to try to do it with this mixture. I've just had a tip from Mellish of the Fourth that Figgins is coming over here—"

"Bai Jove!"  
 "He's going to chuck a cracker in at the window, and give us a jump," explained Tom Merry. "But as we happen to know he's coming, we're getting ready for him. I think he will jump more than we do when he gets this on his napper!"

Arthur Augustus chuckled.  
 "I should wathah think so! But how did Mellish know? Figgins wouldn't be likely to tell a School House chap."

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.  
 "Oh, I dare say Mellish heard them talking," he said. "Mellish often hears things other fellows don't hear. However, that's Mellish's bizny; I didn't ask him how he knew. I'm getting ready for Figgins."

"That stuff will spoil his clothes!" said Arthur Augustus.  
 "Well, it won't improve them," agreed Tom Merry.  
 "It's wathah wuff to spoil a fellow's clothes," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "Upon the whole, Tom Mewwy, I hardly approve of this jape."

"Go hon!"  
 "I am speakin' quite sewiously. I do not approve of it."  
 "Then, of course, we'll chuck it at once," said Tom Merry gravely.

D'Arcy nodded.  
 "Yaas, I should certainly wecommend that, Tom Mewwy."  
 "You recommend me to chuck it?"

"Yaas."  
 "Right-ho; here you are!"  
 Tom Merry picked up the basin in both hands, and swung it in the air. Arthur Augustus made a wild spring into the passage.

"Bai Jove! You uttah ass! Don't chuck that at me!" he shrieked.

"Why, you asked me to—"  
 "You feahful ass! When I said chuck it, I didn't mean chuck it—"

Tom Merry put the basin down, and recommenced stirring the contents with a chuckle. Arthur Augustus peered cautiously round the door.

"Don't you put that feahful stuff neah me, you awful ass!" he said. "If I got any of that on me I should give you a feahful thwashin'!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I came here to speak to you fellows," said D'Arcy, still keeping in the passage. "I'm vevy busy this evenin', and Langton has given me fifty lines. I want one of you fellows to do them for me. It will be all wight, you know—Langton nevah looks at the witin'—he's a decent chap, for a prefect. I—"

"Somebody's coming!" said Lowther in a low voice from the window.  
 "Good!"

Tom Merry laid down the ladle, and took the basin of mixture in both hands, and stepped cautiously towards the window.

"I was speakin' to you, Tom Mewwy."  
 "Aren't you finished?"  
 "Certainly not."  
 "Well, leave off for a bit. You can go on again presently," said Tom Merry.  
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"  
 "Talk to Manners instead. Take him out in the passage, and let him talk to you, Manners. I'm busy now. It doesn't matter whom he talks to, so long as he talks, I suppose."  
 "You uttah ass—"  
 "Quiet! Don't want to alarm Figgins!"  
 "Weally—"  
 "Shut the door on him!"

Monty Lowther closed the study door, shutting the swell of St. Jim's out into the passage. He put his foot against the door to keep it shut. Tom Merry rested the basin on the window-ledge, and looked out into the quad. It was very dusky in the quadrangle, especially where the shadows of the old elms fell. A dim figure appeared in view, coming along at a good stride under the study windows.

"There he is!" whispered Manners, who was peering out of one corner of the window. "That's Figgins—too tall for any other kid."

"Good!"  
 Tom Merry grasped the basin in readiness. The figure below came directly under the study window. Whether it was going to stop there or to pass on was not discovered, for Tom Merry did not wait to see. He tilted over the basin, and the contents shot out and downward in a swishing flood.

Swoop!  
 There was a wild, choking yell below, and the dim figure staggered against the School House wall. Tom Merry put the basin on the floor, and leaned out of the window and looked down with a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha! How do you like the special mixture? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo!" came in a gurgle from below. "Oh! Owl! Groocook!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.  
 "Groo! Oh! What—what— Tom Merry! How dare you?"

Tom Merry jumped.  
 For the gasping voice that came from below was not the voice of Figgins of the Fourth, the great chief of the New House juniors.

It was the well-known voice of Kildare of the Sixth, the head prefect of the School House, and captain of St. Jim's.  
 Tom Merry gasped.  
 "Kildare!"

CHAPTER 2.  
 A Very Unpleasant Position.

"KILDARE!"  
 Manners and Lowther echoed the name, in tones of horror.  
 "Oh! My hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "I've done it now! Oh, dear!"  
 "Great Scott!"

The figure below, smothered and drenched with the special mixture, was gasping and gurgling in a suffocated manner. Tom Merry leaned out of the window and looked anxiously down. His first impulse had been to bolt; but that was evidently useless; Kildare knew who had hurled the mixture upon him.

The captain of the school presented a shocking sight. In the dusk, Tom Merry could not have made out his features; but he could make them out less than ever now, smothered as they were with ink and treacle and soot and pyro.

Kildare's face and collar and tie and waistcoat were smothered, and the cap was a mass of wetness and stickiness.

He gouged the mixture out of his eyes and nose and mouth and ears, and glared up at the horrified junior at the window above.

"Groo! T-t-t-t-tom Merry!"  
 "I—I—"  
 "Did you throw this stuff over me?" roared the captain of St. Jim's.

"I—I—"  
 "You young villain! Did you?"  
 "I—I— Yes! No! Yes."

"You young sweep!"  
 "It—it was all a mistake!" stuttered Tom Merry. "You— you see, I—I didn't see you plainly, and I—I thought it was Figgins of the New House."

Kildare spluttered.  
 "So you were going to throw this muck over Figgins?"  
 "Well, you see—"

"And you've thrown it over me instead!" roared Kildare.  
 "I—I—"

"Go to my study!" shouted Kildare. "Go to my study and wait for me there! Do you hear?"  
 "Ye-e-es."

Kildare disappeared in the gloom. Probably he was going to clean himself, which was not likely to be an easy or rapid process. From the darkness under the elms there came the sound of a chuckle.

"You've done it now, Tom Merry!"  
 And Figgins of the Fourth looked up in the dark. Tom Merry glared at him.

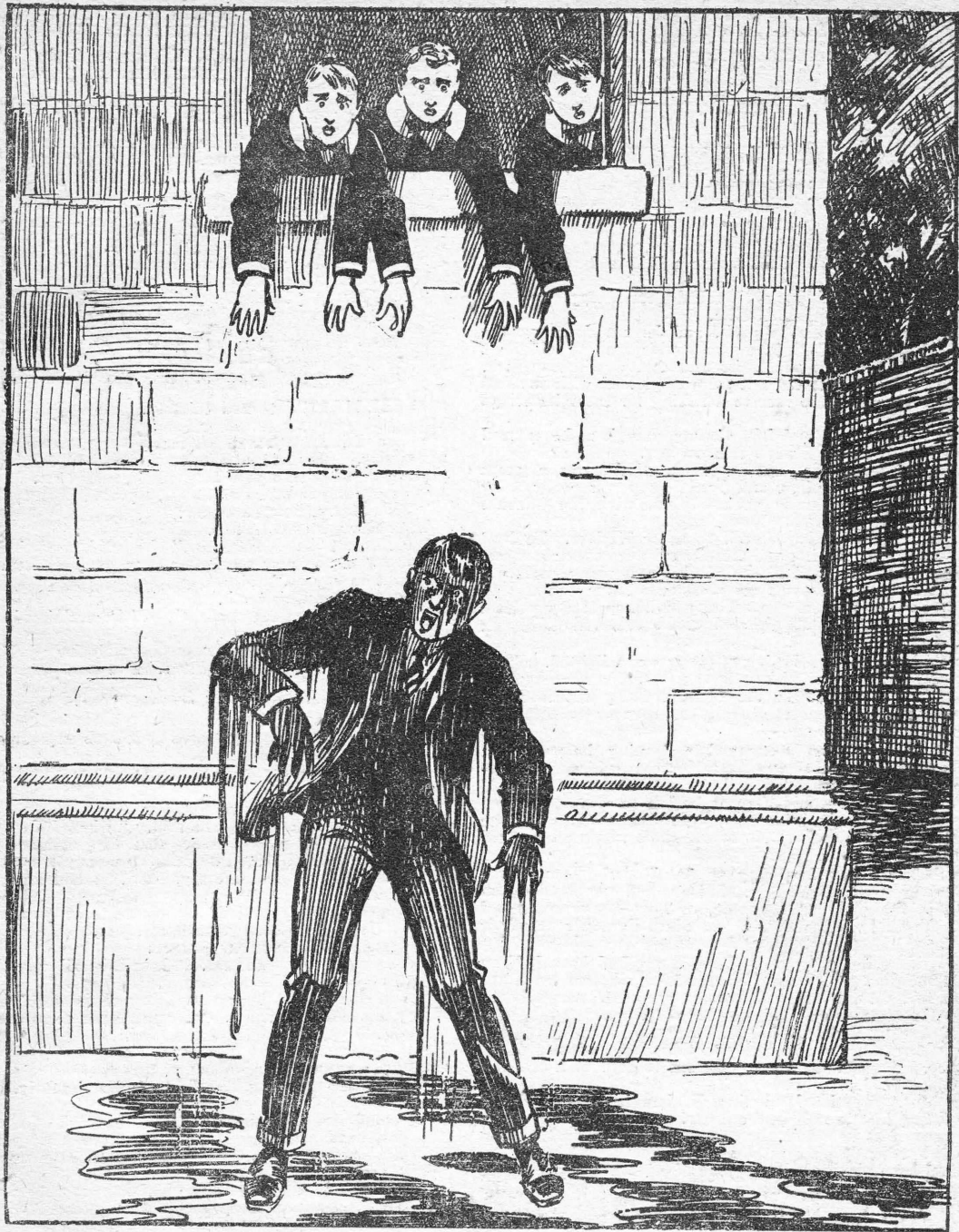
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(See column 2, page 27 of this issue.)



The figure, smothered and drenched by the special mixture, gasped and gurgled in a suffocated manner. "Groo! Oh! What-what—Tom Merry! How dare you!" Tom Merry & Co. gasped. "It—it's not Figgins—it's Kildare!" (See Chapter 1)

"You ass! What did you come too late for? If you'd come a little sooner you'd have got it instead of Kildare."

Figgins yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You New House bouncer!" roared Tom Merry, exasperated. "I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins, yelling with laughter, disappeared across the quadrangle. Tom Merry turned back into his study with a dissatisfied grunt. Monty Lowther and Manners looked at him in dismay.

"There'll be trouble now!" gasped Manners.

Tom Merry snorted.

"I suppose so. This means a licking. It's all Figgins's fault. Br-r-r-r!"

He opened the study door and strode out, and nearly strode into D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's backed away.

"What's the wow about, Tom Merry?" he asked. "Did you throw that stuff ovah Figgay?"

"No!" snorted Tom Merry. "Kildare got it by mistake."

"Kildare! Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Tom Merry wrathfully. "There's nothing to cackle at. I've got to go to his study and wait for him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You giddy ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled D'Arcy. "Fancy bashin' that stuff ovah Kildare. I must go and tell Blake about this! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You grinning ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, in a state of great exasperation, rushed at the well of St. Jim's, and Arthur Augustus sat down violently upon the linoleum.

"Bai Jove! Oh!"

Tom Merry strode on wrathfully, leaving the swell of the Fourth trying to recover his breath. As he went downstairs he met Mellish of the Fourth. Mellish paused, and stared at the captain of the Shell.

"Did it go all right?" he asked.

Tom Merry growled,

"No!"

"Didn't you chuck the stuff?"

"Yes; but Kildare got it."

"Kildare! My hat! That means a licking for you! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Mellish.

Tom Merry gave him a push, and he sat down on the stairs. Then the Shell fellow made his way to Kildare's study. Mellish sat on the stairs and roared with laughter. The cad of the Fourth did not seem displeased with the fact that Tom Merry was to receive a licking for the miscarriage of his little plot.

Tom Merry looked, and felt, gloomy enough as he entered Kildare's study in the Sixth Form passage.

Kildare, the popular captain of St. Jim's, was a great favourite with the juniors, and Tom Merry was really sorry that he had inadvertently anointed him with the mixture intended for Figgins of the New House.

But he felt sorrier for himself than for Kildare. To hurl a mixture of soot and ink and treacle and pyro over so august a personage as the head of the Sixth Form was a most unpardonable offence. It was not a case for lines; it was only to be met with a most severe caning; and Tom Merry rubbed his hands in painful anticipation as he entered Kildare's study.

The study of the St. Jim's captain was not lighted. Tom Merry did not feel entitled to light the gas in the captain's study; and he waited in the dusk, looking out into the shadowy quadrangle.

But Kildare did not come.

Doubtless he was busily engaged in cleaning the stuff from his face and hair, and it was likely to occupy him for a considerable time. It was doubtful, indeed, if the pyro would wash off at all. It would have to be left to wear off. Tom Merry could not help grinning a little as he thought of the piebald appearance the captain of St. Jim's would present for a day or two to come.

The darkness was deepening on St. Jim's. Tom Merry turned away from the window. Kildare had commanded him to wait in the study till he came, so Tom Merry could not leave. He threw himself into the Sixth-Former's armchair to wait.

Still Kildare did not come. Tom Merry had been half an hour in the dusky study, and he wondered whether he might venture to light the gas, and borrow one of Kildare's books to pass the time away. He was bound to wait, but he was tired of wasting time. But if Kildare came in and found the delinquent reading he was likely to take that as insult added to injury. It would be more judicious to assume a sad and repentant attitude.

Tom Merry wondered whether Kildare had forgotten all about telling him to wait in the study.

He yawned as he sat in the armchair waiting, in the deep dusk, and presently his eyes closed.

He had been playing a hard game of cricket that afternoon, and he was tired; and he nodded off to sleep as he sat in the easy-chair.

He did not quite realise that he was nodding off; and whether he quite slept or not he hardly knew; it seemed to him only a few seconds before the sound of voices fell upon his ears.

He started.

There was a light in the study; he blinked as it struck upon his opening eyes. For a moment he sat wondering where he was.

Voices were audible close to him; he recognised the tones of Kildare and of Langton of the Sixth, without following the sense of the words.

He sat upright in the chair.

He understood now.

He had fallen asleep; and Kildare and Langton had entered the study without seeing him. The armchair was drawn up facing the grate, and the high back of it prevented the two seniors from seeing Tom Merry. They were standing just inside the study, and the table was between them and the big chair.

Tom Merry had just realised it, and was about to rise to his feet, when Langton's voice came clearly and distinctly, with words that made him start.

"I must have five pounds, Kildare, or I shall be ruined. If you can't lend it to me, I don't know what to do."

Tom Merry bit his lip.

Langton would certainly never have uttered those words, if he had known that any ears besides Kildare's were there to hear them. Quite unintentionally, Tom Merry was playing the part of an eavesdropper. His cheeks burned red at the thought. Before Kildare could answer Langton, the junior sprang to his feet.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed "I—I—"

Kildare and Langton swung round towards him—the former frowning, and the latter turning white.

"I—I—" stammered Tom Merry.

Kildare gave him a furious look.

"Tom Merry, you have been listening!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Honour Bright!

TOM MERRY turned crimson. The angry accusation brought the red flush of shame and indignation to his face. For a moment he could not speak. Kildare strode towards him. Langton, the prefect, stood with a pale face, his lips hard set.

"You young cad," he muttered, "you've been spying!"

"Tom Merry, how dare you!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I haven't been listening!" he exclaimed indignantly. "You ought to know me better than that, Kildare. You've no right to say so."

Kildare gritted his teeth.

"What are you doing here, then?" he exclaimed angrily.

Tom Merry met his eyes steadily.

"You told me to come here and wait for you," he said. "I suppose you haven't forgotten. I've been waiting for you ever since."

"I did not see you when I came in!"

"I fell asleep," said Tom Merry. "I was in the chair here. You woke me up speaking. I've been here an hour or more."

Kildare looked at him hard.

"Then you haven't heard what Langton was saying to me?" he asked.

Tom Merry shifted uncomfortably.

"Only his last sentence," he said. "I heard that. I didn't hear what he was saying before that. I just heard voices as I woke up, that's all; but I don't know what you were saying."

"What did you hear me say, then?" asked Langton, in a low voice.

"You said you wanted five pounds, or you would be ruined!" said Tom Merry, flushing again.

Langton made a hopeless gesture.

"It's all up now," he said. "It will be all over the school in half an hour."

"You've no right to say anything of the sort," said Tom Merry, his cheeks burning. "Do you think I'm a sneak and a tell-tale?"

"You—you won't repeat—"

"Of course not."

Kildare was watching Tom Merry's face intently. He gave a nod, as if satisfied.

"I think it's all right, Langton," he said. "I'm sorry I said you were listening, Merry. I believe what you've told me."

"So you ought!"

"Will you give me your word of honour not to repeat to anybody what you've happened to hear in this study?" asked Kildare.

"Yes, of course."

"Not even to your own chums?"

"Not to anyone."

"Not a syllable, mind."

"Certainly not."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" said Tom Merry quietly.

Kildare turned to Langton.

"It's all right," he said. "You can trust him, Langton. He will keep his word."

Langton looked dubiously at Tom Merry. He knew that the leader of the Shell was one of the most decent fellows at St. Jim's, and a fellow of his word. But to have his secret at the discretion of a junior was terrible for the Sixth-Former. But it certainly could not be helped. Tom Merry had surprised his secret, and he had no choice but to trust to the word of the Shell fellow.

"Very well," he said. "I—I trust you, Merry."

"You can trust me all right," said Tom Merry. "Even if

Kildare hadn't asked me to promise, I shouldn't dream of repeating anything that I heard by accident—especially a serious matter that's no business of mine. I sha'n't say a word. And you ought to know that; you have always known me to be decent."

Langton nodded.

"It's all right," he said. "I know you're to be trusted. Look here, Tom Merry, as I've—I've no choice about trusting you, I'll explain a little—"

"No need. I'm not curious."

"I'm in a difficult position, through no fault of my own," said Langton, in an agitated voice. "That's why I've asked Kildare for help. That's all I need tell you. Now, I rely on you to keep the secret."

"I'm going to keep it."

"Good!" said Kildare. "Buzz off!"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" demanded the captain of St. Jim's.

"The licking!" said Tom Merry, with a grin. "That's why I came here, you know. I'd rather get it over at once, if you don't mind."

Kildare smiled.

"You jolly well deserve a licking," he said. "But under the circumstances I'll let you off. One good turn deserves another."

"Look here, Kildare, I shall keep the secret just the same, whether you lick me or not," said Tom Merry. "No need to let me off on that account."

"You young ass! Do you want to be licked?"

"No, I don't; but I don't want to be bought off," said Tom Merry sturdily.

"Well, that's all right. I'm going to let you off. Now, buzz out of my study, and don't go to sleep in my chair again, or you'll hear of it."

"Thank you, Kildare."

Tom Merry quitted the study.

He was glad enough to escape the licking; but his face was anxious and worried as he went down the passage. He would much rather have taken the licking than have surprised Langton's secret. It was a worry upon his mind, partly from the fact that he hated keeping secrets, and partly from his regard for Langton. Langton of the Sixth was the most popular prefect in the School House, next to Kildare, and Tom Merry was concerned to know that he was in trouble. It was known to some of the fellows—Tom Merry among the others—that Langton had once been mixed up with "rotten" associates, who had brought him into trouble, and very nearly into disgrace. Tom Merry wondered if the old associates whom he had thrown off were enforcing some old claim upon him, and trying to bring him back under their influence.

"Licked?"

The sudden question broke in upon Tom Merry's reflections, as he reached the end of the Sixth Form passage. Mellish was waiting there, apparently for the satisfaction of ascertaining the extent of Tom Merry's punishment. There was no love lost between Tom Merry and the sneak of the Fourth.

"No," said Tom Merry curtly.

Mellish looked astonished.

"Not licked!" he exclaimed.

"No!"

"You don't mean to say that Kildare let you off after slopping all that stuff over his napper?" exclaimed Mellish.

"Yes, I do."

"Blessed if I understand it, then," said Mellish, in amazement. "Did Langton get you off? I noticed that he went in with Kildare just now?"

"No, he didn't."

"Well, I don't understand it. Some more of Kildare's rotten favouritism, I suppose," said Mellish, with a sniff. "If I'd slopped that stuff over him, I should have been licked fast enough—or Levison, either."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Well, I think it's rotten!"

"Did you want me to be licked, you cad?" said Tom Merry. "Look here, if you say anything more against Kildare you'll get a thick ear."

"Well, I don't believe in favouritism—"

Biff!

"Yaroo!"

Tom Merry walked on, leaving Mellish leaning against the wall, holding his nose. The cad of the Fourth glared furiously after Tom Merry. Tom did not look back; he went on his way to his own study.

Manners and Lowther were at their preparation, and they stopped, and looked sympathetically at Tom Merry as he came in.

"Had it bad?" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Did it hurt?" asked Manners.

"No."

"Then you're in luck," said Lowther, in surprise. "I expected Kildare to lay it on pretty hard. Did he look piebald?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Yes, a little spotted. But I haven't been licked."

"Haven't been licked!" exclaimed his two chums together.

"No; let off."

"My only hat! Why?"

"Oh, never mind why," said Tom Merry. "Kildare's a brick. Make room for a fellow at the table, and let me get my work done."

"Jolly queer he should let you off," said Lowther, in astonishment.

"Yes, wasn't it?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in at the study door a few minutes later. He, too, was looking very sympathetic.

"I'm awfully sorry, Tom Mewwy!" he remarked.

"Hallo! What are you sorry about?"

"About the lickin', dear boy. But you will wemembah that I wemembah you not to thow that wotien stuff ova anybody."

"Well, it's all right," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I haven't been licked, so you can keep your sorrow till you get a licking yourself."

"Bai Jove; Kildare didn't let you off?"

"Yes, he did."

"Vewy glad to hear it, dear boy. But how did he come to let you off?"

"Because one rode a horse, and the other rhododendron!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"What?"

"Weren't you asking me a conundrum?" asked Tom Merry innocently.

"No, you ass! I was askin' you a question. Why did he let you off?" bawled D'Arcy.

"Because one trains for a race, and the other races for a train," said Tom Merry, still persisting in his assumption that D'Arcy was asking conundrums.

"You—you uttah ass—"

"Isn't that right?" asked Tom Merry.

"You uttah duffah—"

"Because one strikes a match, and the other matches a strike," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Is that the answer?"

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

And Arthur Augustus retired from the study, and slammed the door with a slam that rang the whole length of the Shell passage. And the Terrible Three chuckled.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Langton's Last Chance.

LANGTON of the Sixth stood silent in Kildare's study after Tom Merry had left. His face was very pale, and he breathed hard. Kildare fixed his eyes upon the prefect's face, with a mingling of compassion and impatience in his look.

"Buck up, Langton, old man!" he said. "You can trust Tom Merry. He won't repeat a word of what he has heard here; I feel sure of that."

Langton nodded.

"It would be rotten if it got about the school," he said.

"It won't get about."

"Well, it's no good worrying about it, I suppose," said Langton. "It depends on Tom Merry, whether he holds his tongue or not. Do you think he really heard only that one sentence, as he says?"

"I think he told the truth."

"I hope so. Well, it can't be helped. To come back to the subject. Can you let me have the five quid?"

Kildare hesitated.

"Look here, Langton," he said abruptly; "before I lend you any money, I want to have this matter settled up. It was understood that your connection with those rotters down in the town had ended for good. The Head understood that when he overlooked the matter, and pardoned you for having played the giddy goat as you did. Excuse my speaking plainly; it's the best thing in the long run."

"I know that; don't mind me."

"Well, if you broke off with that set, as you promised to do, what do you want five quid to settle an old debt for?"

Langton's lips quivered. The big, stalwart Sixth-Former, one of the strongest batsmen in the First Eleven, was looking downcast, nervous, uneasy under the steady gaze of the captain of St. Jim's.

"They say these things never really end," he said, with a sigh. "It's easier to get into a scrape than to get out again. It's true that I broke off with Joliffe and his set, and since

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"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"

my trouble with them I've never seen or spoken to any of them. I hope you can take my word on that subject."

"Yes. But now—"

"It's another man entirely, I owed those rotters money, and I've paid them up—every penny. But I borrowed money to do it."

"Oh!" said Kildare.

"I've managed pretty well," said Langton. "I've had some big tips from my uncle, and some from my pater. They've all gone the same way—to clear off my debt to Simons."

"Simons! The pawnbroker in Wayland?" exclaimed Kildare.

"Yes. He's a moneylender as well as a pawnbroker. I borrowed the money of him to finish settling with those cads, on reasonable terms, as I thought, but—but it turns out that there was a clause in the paper I signed that I didn't notice—I'm not much of a business man, anyway, and old Simons is as keen as a hawk—and—and I found that I owed him as much interest as principal."

"The rotter!" exclaimed Kildare wrathfully.

"I've paid him everything I had, but there's five quid more due to him," said Langton heavily. "He's offered to renew my paper—that means, to have the whole thing start over again, with interest piling up, to keep me under his thumb for good. I'm at the end of my resources now—everything's gone—and if I don't get five quid to finish with the cad to-day, I'm done in. I shall have to sign a fresh paper, and start the whole thing afresh, and—and I sha'n't be able to meet his claims. It means that he'll have me under his thumb all the time I'm at St. Jim's. I'd rather chuck the whole thing than submit to that—I'd rather clear out of the school."

Kildare nodded.

"But you are not bound to pay the old shark anything," he said. "You're a minor."

Langton smiled bitterly.

"He knows that as well as I do; but he knows, too, that if he told the Head, or my pater, that I had had dealings with a moneylender, I should be ruined."

Kildare looked keenly at the prefect.

"Look here, Langton, you've told me all. You borrowed the money only to pay off your old debts to Joliffe and his set?"

"Yes."

"And five quid would clear you of Simons?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll stand you the fiver," said Kildare. "You can let me have it back before the end of the term, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Langton. "In three weeks, I expect. But I want it to-day badly, so that I can tackle Simons before the date of my paper expires."

"Good, then," said Kildare. "I've got a fiver that I was setting aside for my holiday next vacation, and I'll let you have it."

Langton's eyes moistened.

"It's jolly good of you, Kildare," he said. "I sha'n't forget this. I know I've no right to bring my troubles to you in this way, but—but there's no other fellow at St. Jim's I should care to tell about it."

"That's all right," said Kildare. "I'm glad enough to lend you the money, if it will really get you quite clear of your difficulties."

"It's the last of them," said the prefect. "It's not my fault, either. Ever since that row over my going to Joliffe's, I've been keeping quite straight, and only trying to keep clear of the gang."

Kildare unlocked his desk, and took out a crisp, rustling five-pound note from an envelope. He laid it on the table.

The prefect picked up the banknote.

"Thank you, Kildare, old man," he said. "I sha'n't forget this, I promise you. I'll return you the money this term, and I sha'n't forget the obligation as long as I live. I shall feel a new man when I've got rid of that old scrape for good."

And he turned to the door.

There was a slight sound in the passage, and Langton stepped quickly towards the door, and opened it and glanced out.

The passage was empty.

"What's the row?" asked Kildare, looking at him in surprise.

"I thought I heard somebody," said Langton uneasily. "But there's nobody here. I suppose it was my fancy."

Kildare laughed slightly.

"Well, a listener couldn't have got to the end of the passage by the time you opened the door," he said. "You're all nerves to-day, Langton."

"I suppose I am," said Langton. "Thank you again, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 239.

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Kildare. I'll get off to Wayland at once, and get this matter off my mind."

"Good idea," said Kildare.

Langton left the study, and went down the passage.

His footsteps died away; and then, a few minutes later, the door of the study next to Kildare's opened, and a face looked cautiously out.

It was the face of Percy Mellish, of the Fourth, the sneak of the School House.

Mellish was breathing fast.

"My word!" he murmured. "That was a narrow shave! If I hadn't popped into Darrel's study, or if Darrel had happened to be there—"

He shivered a little.

The passage was deserted now, and Mellish stepped out of Darrel's study, and made his way as quickly as he could out of the Sixth-Form quarters. The junior's eyes were gleaming with excitement.

He went slowly up to the Fourth-Form passage, and into his own study. Levison, of the Fourth, was there. Levison was Mellish's study-mate, and his only friend—if the tie between them could be called friendship. Levison was in very bad odour in the School House just now. He had only recently returned to St. Jim's, after a long absence; and, in spite of his unpopular character, Tom Merry & Co. had been kind enough to him on his return, and he had repaid their kindness with his usual treachery. And the result was, that Levison was sent to Coventry by the whole House.

For some days, nobody but Mellish was seen to speak to him. The sentence had relaxed somewhat lately, and fellows answered Levison if he spoke to them, but the general distrust and dislike with which he was regarded showed little sign of abating.

Levison looked curiously at the sneak of the School House as he came into the study, with a flush of suppressed excitement on his face.

"Anything up?" he asked.

Mellish closed the door carefully.

"Yes. I've found something out."

"Oh! What is it?"

"How do you feel towards Tom Merry?" asked Mellish. Levison gritted his teeth.

"You know," he replied. "About the same as you do. I'd give a year's pocket-money to see him sacked from the school. Not that it's likely to happen. And if you've got some scheme on against him, you can leave me out. I've got to be jolly careful for a bit."

Mellish grinned.

"Suppose there was a chance of getting him into Kildare's black books, and showing him up to the House as a liar and a sneak?" he exclaimed triumphantly.

Levison started.

"Rot!" he said.

"Well, it's not rot—it's as easy as rolling off a form."

Levison looked incredulous.

"How are you going to do it?" he demanded.

"Listen!"

And Mellish began to speak in a low voice. Levison listened; and as he listened, his eyes glistened, and he smiled a smile that boded no good to the hero of the School House.

## CHAPTER 5.

### A Sudden Explosion.

FIGGINS of the Fourth gave Tom Merry a sweet smile, when they met in the Form-room passage on the following morning. Figgins was thinking of the mishap of the previous evening, when the School House senior had received the fearful mixture intended for the New House junior.

"Hallo!" said Figgins genially. "I notice that Kildare looks a little peebald this morning. Did you have a painful explanation with him about that mixture?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; it was all right," he said. "It was all your fault for being unpunctual. If you had come along in time with your giddy cracker, you would have got the dose."

"How did you know Figgy was coming?" asked Kerr curiously. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the famous Co. of the New House, were all together, as usual.

"Oh, I heard it!" said Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I see how!" exclaimed Figgins. "Kerr and Wynn and myself jawed it over, when I found that cracker left over from last Fifth of November, in my box. But we didn't say a word to anybody about japing you Shell fellows with it. You must have jolly long ears."

"I didn't hear you jawing it over," said Tom Merry. "I heard it from somebody else."

"You don't mean to say that a New House chap gave us away?" exclaimed Figgins wrathfully.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Nothing of the sort."

"Then some School House bouncer heard us."

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

Figgins grunted.

"Well, I wish I had seen him hanging round listening," he said, "I would have given him a prize thick ear. Hallo, time to get in!"

And the Fourth-Formers and the Shell fellows separated to go into their respective Form-rooms. Monty Lowther tapped Blake of the Fourth on the elbow as he passed, and Blake looked round inquiringly.

"I suppose you heard about the swamping of old Kildare last night?" murmured Lowther.

Jack Blake grinned.

"Yes," he said.

"It was through Figgins coming over to chuck a jumping cracker into our study window. Figgins's got that cracker in his pocket now."

"How do you know?"

"Because he's got the end of the fuse in sight."

"My hat!"

Lowther winked, and departed towards his Form-room. Blake looked round for Figgins as he went into the Fourth-Form room. Monty Lowther's information was quite correct. Figgins had put the jumping cracker—one of those deadly contrivances which explode six times in succession, jumping all the time—into his pocket, perhaps with the idea of finding an opportunity of bestowing it upon the School House fellows after lessons. The cracker had a very long fuse, and the end of it showed plainly outside Figgins's jacket pocket.

A word to the wise is said to be sufficient. Monty Lowther's hint was quite enough for Blake. As he went to his place in the Form, he stumbled, and threw his arms wildly round Figgins to save himself, and brought the New House junior with a bump to the floor.

"Yaroooh!" roared Figgins. "Ow! Ow!"

Blake sprawled over him, still clutching at him. When he scrambled to his feet, the jumping cracker was no longer in Figgins's pocket. It was in Blake's.

"Sorry!" gasped Blake.

"Yaroooop!"

"Hope you're not hurt, Figgy."

Figgins sat up.

"Ow! You ass!"

"Awfully sorry——"

"Yow! You fathead!"

Little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, blinked over the top of the desk, through his big spectacles.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "That was very clumsy of you, Blake!"

"Yes, sir. Sorry!"

"Groo! You fathead! You burbling ass!"

"Figgins!"

"Groo! Yes, sir!"

"I trust you are not hurt, Figgins?"

"Eh?"

"It—it's all right, sir. Never mind."

And Figgins limed to his place, where he sat rubbing several parts of himself, and grunting:

"The—the bouncer!" he murmured to Kerr. "He did that on purpose. It was a rotten School House jape! Blessed if I see any sense in it! Yow!"

"We'll bump him after third lesson," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather! Groo!"

Jack Blake chuckled softly as he sat down. Digby and Herries, his chums in the Fourth, looked at him inquiringly.

"What on earth did you bump Figgins over for, you ass?" asked Digby.

"Look!" said Blake.

He pulled his pocket open. Digby glanced at the cracker, and grinned.

"My word! I didn't see you bone it!"

"Neither did Figgins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom mildly. "Someone is laughing, I am sure. You must keep better order in class, my dear boys."

The chums of the Fourth ceased to chuckle. They were occupying the form behind Figgins & Co., who glared round at them once or twice. Figgins had not missed the cracker, it not having occurred to him to feel in his pocket.

The first and second lesson passed over, and then Blake gently withdrew the jumping cracker from his pocket, and planted it on the ledge under his desk. Then he produced a box of vestas.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked along the form at him.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

"Quiet, you ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

Blake gave him a terrific look, and the swell of St. Jim's subsided into silence. Digby chuckled softly.

"What are you going to do with that giddy cracker?" he murmured, under his breath.

"It's against the rules to bring fireworks into the Form-room," said Blake, in the same tone. "Figgy has done wrong! The only thing to do is to destroy the firework, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"That can only be done by letting it off——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And as a lesson to Figgy not to be reckless with fireworks, I'll just drop it under his desk when I've lighted the fuse——"

Digby almost exploded. Figgins & Co. looked round suspiciously, and so did Mr. Lathom. Mr. Lathom was conducting the Fourth Form on a tour through the ancient geography of Europe under the Romans; and he did not see anything whatever to laugh at in the boundaries of Dacia and Pannonia. He fixed his eyes upon Digby.

"Digby!"

The junior became grave at once.

"Yes, sir!" he said meekly.

"What were you laughing at?"

"I—I—I——"

"I fail to see anything in classical geography to excite risibility," said Mr. Lathom. "You will take fifty lines, Digby."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

And Digby did not laugh any more. He did not feel inclined to.

Blake sat as good as gold for five minutes, till Mr. Lathom's attention was no longer directed towards where he sat. Then he gently scratched the wax vesta on his trousers, and with hardly a sound it burst into flame.

He put the flame to the fuse of the cracker, and slid the latter to the floor, and, with a jerk of his foot, knocked it under Figgins's desk, unobserved.

Then he sat upright and looked very good.

Figgins sniffed.

"Queer!" he murmured. "Smells like something burning."

Kerr sniffed.

"Like gunpowder!" he said.

Fatty Wynn sniffed.

"It is gunpowder! You've let that cracker get alight in your pocket, Figgy."

Figgins started.

"I—I haven't! I hadn't any matches in the same pocket. I'm not an ass!" He slid his hand into the pocket where the cracker had been, to make sure. "My hat! It's gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes. I—— Oh!"

Fiz-z-z-z-z-z!

Bang!

## CHAPTER 6.

### The Wisdom of the Serpent.

F IGGINS jumped clear of the form.

Bang!

"My hat!"

"Oh!"

Bang!

"Great Scott!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, rushing towards the spot in alarm. "What ever is that? What is that—that explosion? Oh!"

Bang!

The jumping cracker had jumped out from under the desk

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with the force of the explosion, and it exploded for the fourth time fairly under the feet of the Form-master.

"Oh!" shrieked Mr. Lathom.

He jumped into the air in his amazement.

Bang!

"Oh! Yaroooh!"

The Fourth Form simply gasped.

Never had they seen such an extraordinary sight as their respected Form-master dancing wildly, with his gown fluttering wildly round him, and his arms sawing the air.

"Oh, dear! Good heavens! Help!"

Bang!

"Oh, help! Oh!"

The repeating-cracker was fortunately exhausted by this time. The last explosion had hurled it across the floor, and the empty case was hidden behind the Form-master's high desk. Nothing was left but a smell of gunpowder.

Mr. Lathom gasped, and looked tremulously round his feet, in anticipation of another fearful explosion beneath him.

But none came.

"Oh, oh, oh!" gasped the Form-master. "What—what—what was that?"

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins was staring with wide-open eyes, utterly astounded. How the cracker could have got out of his pocket, and lighted itself, was a deep mystery that Figgins could not possibly fathom. It dazed him.

Mr. Lathom calmed down a little. He realised that it was not an earthquake or the end of the world, and that it was simply a case of fireworks.

"I—I—I—" he gasped. "Someone has dared to explode a firework in the Form-room! I—I am amazed. I am outraged! Boys, who did this?"

There was no reply. Some of the juniors were grinning, but they ceased to grin as Mr. Lathom's eye was turned upon them. Mr. Lathom looked round for the expended firework, and found it behind his desk. He picked up the shattered case of the jumping cracker in a very gingerly manner, and held it up to the view of the Fourth.

"Look out, sir!" exclaimed Lumley-Lumley, in tones of great alarm. "Suppose it goes off again, sir!"

"Oh!"

Mr. Lathom dropped the cracker as if it had become suddenly red-hot, and jumped back.

But the cracker did not explode again.

"I—I think it's exhausted, sir," said Redfern.

"Yes, I—I think so," said Mr. Lathom gaspingly, and without touching the exploded cracker again. "I—I trust so! Who brought this wretched thing into the Form-room? Who had the audacity to let it off here?"

There was no reply.

"I demand an answer!" shouted Mr. Lathom.

Silence! Jack Blake began to repent a little of his peculiar effect of humour. The consequences had not occurred to him, until now. He began to realise that they might be painful.

"Do you hear me?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom angrily.

The Form-room door opened, and the Head came in. The explosions had reached the ears of Dr. Holmes in the Sixth Form-room.

He sniffed as he entered the room. The smell of gunpowder was very perceptible.

"Ah, it was in this room!" he exclaimed. "I heard a series of loud explosions, Mr. Lathom. Is it possible that your boys have been letting off fireworks in the Form-room?"

Mr. Lathom gasped.

"Someone has done so, sir!" he ejaculated. "I was suddenly interrupted, sir, by dreadful explosions. This firework, sir, exploded under my feet. I have demanded the name of the culprit, sir, but he has not replied. I leave the matter in your hands, sir."

Dr. Holmes turned to the Fourth.

"Boys! To whom did this firework belong? If no answer is given, I will detain the whole of the Fourth for six half-holidays."

The Fourth-Formers gasped. Figgins jumped up at once. He was not the fellow to allow the whole Form to suffer for him.

"It was mine, sir!" he exclaimed.

"What! You were guilty of this outrageous trick, Figgins?" thundered the Head.

"N-n-n-no, sir!" gasped Figgins. "I said it was my cracker, sir, I—I had it in my pocket; but it must have fallen out, sir, and got alight somehow, and—"

"Nonsense, Figgins!"

"Oh, sir!"

"The cracker may have fallen out of your pocket, but it could not have been lighted without a match being applied to it, Figgins."

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"N-n-no, sir; I—I don't see how it could," agreed Figgins. "But—but I didn't light it, sir. I—I thought it was in my pocket right up to the minute it went off, sir."

The Head looked at him very sharply.

"You declare that you did not light it, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir. Honour bright—I mean certainly, sir!"

"Then someone else must have done so. Someone else must have picked it up when you dropped it, Figgins, and lighted it."

"I—I didn't see anybody, sir."

"I take your word, Figgins. You should not carry fireworks about your clothes; it is a very foolish thing, and might lead to dangerous accidents. If it occurs again, I shall cane you. At present, however, I wish to know who fired that cracker in the Form-room. It was done deliberately; for a joke, I presume. I call upon the boy who did it to give me his name at once. I shall cane him severely."

"Not good enough!" murmured Lumley-Lumley, under his breath. And some of the Fourth-Formers smiled behind their hands. As a matter of fact, the Head's offer was not a tempting one.

There was silence in the Fourth.

"If the culprit's name is not given to me, I shall detain the whole Form, as I have said!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

"M-m-may I speak, sir?" said Blake diffidently.

The Head glanced at him sharply.

"Do you know who it was, Blake?"

"I—I can give you his name, if you like, sir," said Blake hesitatingly.

The doctor's lip curled. He despised sneaking; yet after what he had said, and his threat to detain the whole Form if the culprit's name was not given, he could not refuse to listen to Blake.

"Very well, Blake," he said. "Give me the name."

"I—I hardly like to, sir. I—I—I'm afraid."

"Nonsense! If you are afraid of the boy who has done this, I will protect you," said the Head contemptuously.

"You—you won't punish me, sir?" faltered Blake.

"I! Certainly not."

"Then I'll tell you the name, sir."

There was a loud hiss from the Fourth Form. A voice from the back of the class called out "Sneak!"

The Head frowned.

"Silence!" he exclaimed. "Now, Blake, the name? It is only right that the culprit should be punished, to save the whole Form from punishment."

"That's why I'm going to tell you, sir," said Blake meekly.

"I—I commend you," said the Head shortly. "Well?"

"It was I, sir!"

"Eh?"

"It was I, sir—myself."

"What!"

"I let the cracker off, sir," said Blake simply.

The Fourth Form simply gasped. That Blake, after entrapping the Head into promising that he would not punish him, should own up that he himself was the fellow, was such a colossal piece of nerve that it took the whole Form's breath away.

Dr. Holmes looked fixedly at Blake. He seemed unable to believe his ears for some moments. Blake stood with meekly downcast eyes.

"Blake," gasped the Head at last, "am I to understand that it was you—you who let this cracker off in the Form-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you have dared, sir!" thundered the Head. "You have dared to trick me into promising not to punish you?"

"If you please, sir—"

"I shall keep my word, Blake."

"Thank you, sir," said Blake, with a breath of relief.

"I shall not punish you, Blake," said the Head sternly. "You have extorted that promise from me by a stratagem. But I shall keep my word. I shall not punish you. I shall leave you in the hands of Mr. Lathom. I trust that Mr. Lathom will punish you as you deserve, both for this outrageous trick, and for venturing to bandy words with your headmaster. That is all."

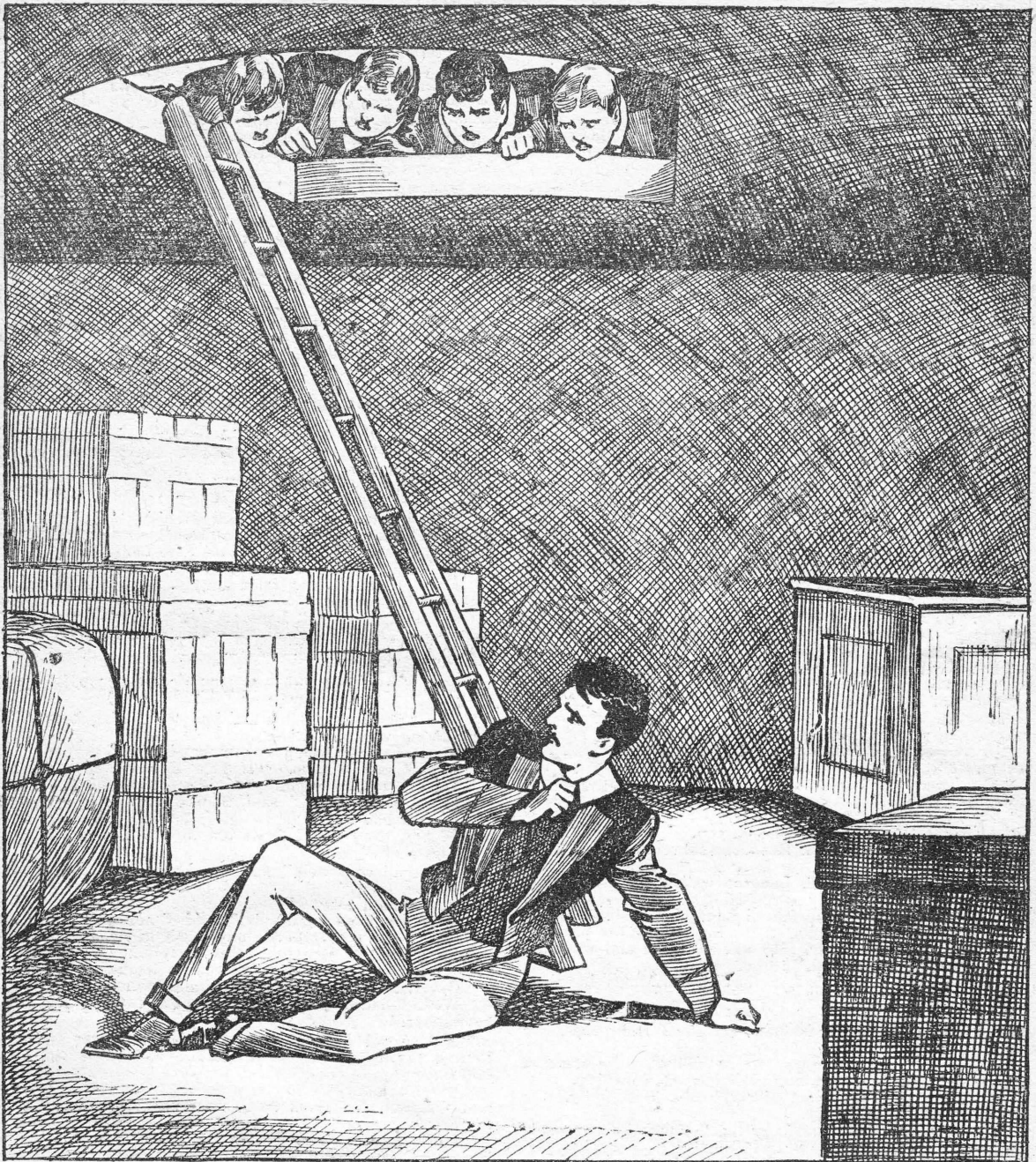
And the Head rustled out of the Form-room. Blake stood with drooping jaw. He had displayed more of the wisdom of the serpent than of the innocence of the dove in his little trick on the Head. But it seemed that a stratagem on one side might be met by a stratagem on the other. The Head kept his word, he did not punish Blake; but Blake was left to be punished by his own Form-master! It was a Roland for an Oliver!

"My hat!" murmured Kerr. "What a deep old card!"

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Blake disconsolately.

Mr. Lathom quietly selected a cane from his desk. Then he looked at Blake grimly, with a gleam behind his spectacles.





"Come up!" shouted Harry Wharton. "If we have to come down and fetch you, we'll give you a jolly good bumping!" Fisher T. Fish did not reply. A sudden and fearful change had come over his face as he stared into the darkness of the hold! (See Chapter 15.)

(For the above incident see the grand, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "THE HIDDEN HORROR!" by Frank Richards, which is contained in this week's splendid issue of our popular companion paper "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

"Kindly step out before the class, Blake," he said ominously.

And Blake marched out with a very despondent look. Mr. Lathom did not generally lay it on very hard when he used the cane. But he departed from his usual custom this time. He gave Blake three on each hand—and the way he brought the cane down made the unfortunate junior surmise that his Form-master must have been practising with Indian clubs lately.

"Now go back to your place, Blake," said Mr. Lathom.

"Perhaps on other occasions you will be able to keep your peculiar sense of humour under proper control."

"Ow!"

Blake seemed to be trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife, as he went back to his place. His chums looked at him sympathetically.

"Does it hurt, deah boy?" murmured D'Arcy.

"No!" groaned Blake. "I'm enjoying it! I never had such a time in my life! Ow!"

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**"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"**

## CHAPTER 7.

## Beginning of the Trouble.

TOM MERRY came out of the Shell-room after morning lessons, and came down the Form-room passage arm-in-arm with Manners and Lowther. It was a favourite trick of the Terrible Three to walk down the Form-room passage with linked arms, and push over all the fellows who got in their way. The Fourth Form had just come out; and Jack Blake was rubbing his hands disconsolately. The Terrible Three refrained from pushing him over, most magnanimously, and halted. They could see that there had been trouble.

"Been in the wars?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

Blake groaned.

"Ow! Yes. Ow!"

"I heard that cracker go off," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "Did it surprise Figgy?"

"Ow! Yes. And Lathom! You ass! Ow! It brought the Head in. Yow! And Lathom's given me three on each paw! Yaw! I never knew the little beast could lay it on like that. He must have been doing gymnastics to get his muscle up! Yoaw!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you silly ass, what are you cackling at?" demanded Blake, greatly incensed. "Here, you fellows, come and help me kick these Shell-fish out."

But the Terrible Three marched on grinning. They met Skimpole of the Shell on their way, and Skimpole disappeared under their feet, and sat up after they had passed, looking very surprised indeed. The Terrible Three chuckled and walked out into the quadrangle.

Langton of the Sixth met them there, and he paused as he saw Tom Merry. He seemed about to speak, but the presence of Manners and Lowther stopped him. Tom Merry detached himself from his two chums, and ran over towards the prefect.

"Did you want to speak to me, Langton?" he asked.

Langton looked at him moodily.

"Not particularly," he said.

"I—I thought you did," said Tom Merry, surprised by the senior's manner.

"Did you keep your word, Tom Merry?" asked Langton abruptly.

Tom Merry turned red.

"Of course I did!" he exclaimed hotly. "Do you think I've broken it?"

"You haven't said anything?"

"Certainly not!"

Langton looked at him searchingly.

"All right," he said. "I believe you. I suppose it's just a coincidence, that's all; but Rushden said something to me—never mind."

And with an abrupt nod, Langton walked away. He left Tom Merry standing very surprised and very disconcerted. Tom Merry, in fact, had dismissed Langton's affairs from his mind, and had almost forgotten the incident of the previous evening in Kildare's study. He was surprised and wounded by Langton's want of faith in him.

"What's the matter with Langton?" asked Monty Lowther, as Tom Merry rejoined his chums.

Tom Merry looked worried, but did not reply; and Lowther, giving him a very curious look, refrained from repeating the question.

Kildare stopped Tom Merry in the hall when he came in later to dinner. The captain of St. Jim's was frowning.

"I want a word with you, Merry," he said abruptly.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"I suppose you have not forgotten the promise you made me yesterday?"

"No!"

"You have kept it?"

"You've no right to ask me that," said Tom Merry indignantly. "Langton's just asked me something of the same sort. What right have you to suppose that I haven't kept my word?"

"You are sure you have said nothing?" asked Kildare, taking no notice of Tom Merry's question.

"Quite sure."

"Well, it is very queer, then!"

"What do you mean?"

"It seems to have got out, that's all. Nobody but you knew what Langton came to my study for last evening; and you promised not to say a word about it."

"I haven't said a word about it."

"We shall see!" said Kildare grimly. "There is some rumour going about the House, that looks as if the secret is out."

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"Well, I can't help it," he said. "I know I haven't said a word, and that's all I know about it."

"I hope that's so!" said Kildare doubtfully. "I don't

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want to doubt your word, Merry; but if the story is out, it can only have got out through your talking about it."

And he turned away.

Tom Merry looked, and felt, very worried as he went into the dining-room. Some of the Shell fellows were looking excited, and there was whispering going on up and down the table. Gore leaned over towards Tom Merry as he sat down.

"Have you heard?" he asked.

"Heard what?" demanded Tom Merry sharply.

"About Langton."

"What about Langton?"

"Of course Tom Merry's heard," said Crooke of the Shell. "Why, it came from Tom Merry in the first place."

Tom Merry looked fiercely at the speaker.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed hotly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Mr. Linton looked sharply along the table.

"Silence there!" he exclaimed.

And the talk died away.

But there was a good deal more whispering before dinner was over. When the fellows left the dining-room, the discussion broke out in louder tones. Other fellows, besides those in the Shell, appeared to know all about the latest topic of interest—and that topic was Langton of the Sixth, and his proceedings.

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was saying emphatically to a group of Fourth-Formers, as Tom Merry came out. "I don't believe a word of it."

"It's true enough," said Mellish.

"How do you know, you wottah?"

"It's all over the house," said Mellish. "I don't know how it got started—I've heard that somebody was in Kildare's study, and heard him talking about it to Langton."

Tom Merry strode towards the group.

"What's that?" he exclaimed sharply.

Mellish looked round at him.

"We're talking about Langton," he said. "You ought to know more about it than anybody else, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"I?—And why?"

"Wasn't it you who were in Kildare's study last evening?"

"I was there, certainly."

"Didn't you hear Kildare and Langton talking it over?"

"Talking what over?"

"About Langton going to a money-lender."

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "If Tom Mewwy had heard anythin' of the sort, he certainly would not repeat it."

"Thank you, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "You're quite right. If I had heard anything, I certainly shouldn't repeat it. If any story has got started in the House, it doesn't come from me."

"That's all very well," said Crooke. "But whom does it come from, then?"

"How should I know?"

"It comes from somebody," said Crooke; "that's jolly certain. I don't say there's any truth in it; I don't know anything against Langton. But somebody has started a yarn that he's in the hands of a moneylender in Wayland."

"Old Simons, the moneylender," said Bishop of the Fourth.

"Well, I hadn't heard the name, but I suppose it would be Simons."

"The way I heard it was that Langton was trying to borrow twenty pounds from Kildare to settle with him," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "It's only a rotten yarn."

"I don't know," said Macdonald. "It's an open secret that Langton was mixed up in some very queer business not so very long ago."

"Faith, and that's no reason for believing a yarn against him now," said Reilly of the Fourth. "A chap who'd listen and repeat a yarn would make one up. I wouldn't trust the word of an eavesdropper."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!" said Jack Blake. "If I were Langton, I'd find out the chap who started this, and give him an awful walloping."

"Hear, hear!"

"I heard that Tom Merry was in Kildare's study when they were talking it over," said Levison.

Tom Merry turned upon Levison. Every eye was on the captain of the Shell.

"Where did you hear that, Levison?" asked Tom Merry between his teeth.

"I heard a fellow say so."

"What fellow?"

"I think it was Crooke."

Tom Merry fixed his eyes on Crooke.

The cad of the Shell receded a little from him. But there was a very unpleasant look on his face.

"Did you say so, Crooke?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I only said what I'd heard," said Crooke sullenly. "But

I didn't say I believed it. I don't know whether you were there or not."

"If you heard it, whom did you hear it from?"

"I heard a fellow say so."

"What fellow?" persisted Tom Merry. "I want to find out the chap who started it."

"Blessed if I remember," said Crooke. "Might have been Mellish."

"Was it you, Mellish?"

"I may have mentioned meeting you in the Sixth-Form passage, after you had been a jolly long time in Kildare's study," said Mellish. "I certainly never said you had been there eavesdropping."

"I expect it comes part from one chap and part from another," said Crooke. "Hang it all, Tom Merry, it's no good picking on me. I've only said what I've heard, and I've said it before your face. Nobody knows how the thing started—it's all over the House, I know that. If you didn't hear anything in Kildare's study last night, you've only got to say so, I suppose, and we shall take your word."

"Yaas, wathah! Nobody would dweam of doubtin' your word, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Rather not!" said Jack Blake.

"Speak up, Tommy, my son," chimed in Kangaroo. "Just say out plain that you didn't hear anything about Langton in Kildare's study, and that will settle the matter."

Tom Merry stood silent, his face flushed. He could not give the denial, for he had been in Kildare's study, and he had heard the talk about Langton's difficulties. It was impossible to deny what was true. At the same time, he could not state the facts, because he had promised Kildare to say nothing.

It was an awkward position for the Shell fellow, and all the more awkward because the eyes of the crowd of juniors were upon him, and they were all waiting for his reply. His silence caused the fellows to exchange very peculiar looks.

Monty Lowther touched his chum on the arm.

"Speak up, for goodness' sake, Tom!" he exclaimed. "Can't you see the impression you're giving by keeping mum?"

"Yaas, wathah! Speak up, deah boy. We shall all believe you."

"Hear, hear!"

"I've got nothing to say," said Tom Merry haltingly, his face very red. "I can only say that I haven't said a word about Langton, that's all. I expect the fellows to believe my word about that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course," said Monty Lowther, looking very uneasy, however. "But why can't you say out plain that you never overheard anything in Kildare's study?"

"Yaas, pway be more explicit, deah boy."

"Pile in, kid," said Blake in amazement. "Blessed if I can see anything to be so jolly mysterious about. We all know that you wouldn't listen to a private conversation, and wouldn't repeat anything you heard by accident. Why can't you give a plain answer?"

"I've got nothing more to say," said Tom Merry, flushing. "I've never said a word about Langton, that's all."

"But do you know anything about him?" demanded Mellish.

"Mind your own business."

And Tom Merry strode away.

"M-my hat!" ejaculated Blake, in surprise and dismay.

"Bai Jove, deah boys!"

Mellish sniggered unpleasantly.

"He doesn't deny it," he remarked.

"Hold your tongue, you cad!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Jolly queer bizney!" said Gore of the Shell. "I shouldn't have suspected Tom Merry of listening to fellows jawing and then starting a scandal."

"Do you mean to say he has?" demanded Monty Lowther, advancing upon George Gore with his fists clenched and his eyes blazing.

Gore backed away.

"N-no! But it looks—"

"Oh, shut up!"

The group broke up, but there was a great deal of muttering and whispering among the juniors. Tom Merry's peculiar conduct seemed to admit of only one possible explanation—that he had played the spy, and started the gossip, and did not dare to deny it. His own friends did not believe that, but there was every prospect that most of the fellows would.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Secret Out!

"W! Leggo! Ow!"

Langton of the Sixth started out of a gloomy reverie as the sudden exclamations fell upon his ears. Langton was pacing under the trees near the old chapel of St. Jim's, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his brows wrinkled in a dark frown.

Matters were looking very gloomy for the prefect. The help of Eric Kildare had enabled him to get rid of the claims of the moneylender. He had rid himself of Mr. Simons and his claims, and he had breathed more freely when that last vestige of his old recklessness was removed. But although the moneylender could trouble him no longer, it seemed that the matter was never to end. For his chief anxiety in settling the exorbitant claims of the usurer had been to keep the secret, and to avoid the danger of any information of it reaching the ears of Dr. Holmes. And now, to his dismay, he had discovered that the affair was the talk of the School House.

Fellows had said nothing plainly to him—so far, at all events. But a whisper here and a whisper there had been sufficient to warn him that the secret was out.

The House knew; soon the whole school would know, and it could not be long before the Head knew. And then—

Langton's thoughts were very bitter as he tramped to and fro in the shade of the trees, trying to think what he should do. The cry that came to his ears from beyond the trees interrupted his thoughts, and he frowned darkly. He recognised the voice of Joe Frayne of the Third Form—the little waif who had been brought to St. Jim's by Tom Merry, and who was Langton's fag, and had once, at great risk to himself, saved Langton from the consequences of his own recklessness.

"Ow! Don't, Master Mellish! Yow!"

Langton snapped his teeth, and strode through the trees. He caught sight of Joe Frayne, struggling in the grasp of Mellish of the Fourth and Crooke of the Shell. The prefect's footsteps made no sound upon the grass, and the two cads of the School House evidently had no idea that he was near.

They were bullying Frayne; that was only too evident. There was more than one snob in the Lower School who was "down" on Frayne by reason of his humble origin, though he had good friends in the best set at St. Jim's. D'Arcy minor of the Third Form was his special chum, and was always willing to punch anybody's head on Joe's account. Mellish and Crooke had evidently caught the little waif by himself, and were bullying him, quite unaware of the approach of the prefect. Crooke held him in an iron grip, and Mellish was twisting his wrist.

Frayne struggled and yelled.

"Leggo! Yow!"

"You young cad!" growled Crooke. "Give him another twist, Mellish."

"What-ho!" said Mellish savagely. "I'll teach him to cheek me! Now, you young cad, what was it you said?"

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll say it again, you bullyin' rotter!" howled Frayne. "It's all lies about Langton, and I don't believe Tom Merry said anything of the sort. If anybody has been spyin', it's you! Ow!"

"Give him another, Mellish."

"Yow!" roared Frayne. "Yaroo! Oh!"

"Stop that!"

Langton's voice rang out sharply as he ran up. Mellish and Crooke gasped, and let go Joe Frayne as suddenly as if he had become red-hot in their grasp.

The waif of St. Jim's squirmed away from them, and stood chafing his wrist, his little face contorted with pain.

"Groo!" he murmured. "Oh, you cads! Yow!"

"Mellish! Crooke! You bullying young blackguards!" said Langton sternly. "This isn't the first time I've caught you bullying Frayne."

"He checked us!" growled Crooke.

"I didn't!" yelled Joe Frayne. "I said that if anybody had been spyin' and eavesdroppin' it was Mellish and Crooke, and so it was."

"You young rotter—"

"I know it wasn't Tom Merry, anyway. He wouldn't go for to do such a thing," said Joe, almost weeping. "Ow! They've 'urt me, the cads."

Langton, with a gleam of anger in his eyes, started towards the cads of the School House.

He grasped them by their collars. They did not dare to resist the prefect. Langton fastened an iron grip upon each of them.

"You young blackguards!" he said. "I'm going to give you a lesson. Frayne!"

"Yes, Master Langton."

# ANSWERS

## "ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"

"You are going to lick these two cads."

"Oh!"

Langton, exerting his strength, jerked Mellish and Crooke over, twisting them face downwards in the grass. The two juniors struggled.

But their struggling was useless in the grasp of the athletic senior. Langton held them down with perfect ease.

"Spank them, Joe!" he said.

Frayne grinned.

"Cert'nly, Master Langton," he said.

Spank, spank, spank!

Joe Frayne chuckled gleefully.

"Is that enough, Master Langton?" he asked.

"Yes, I think that will do. Let me know if they bully you again, and I'll give them a hiding myself."

And he flung the two juniors squirming in the grass. Mellish lay gasping. Crooke sat up in the grass, his sallow face aflame with rage.

"You—you—you rotter!" he stuttered.

"What!" exclaimed Langton.

"Rotter!" yelled the infuriated Crooke, careless of what he said, in his rage. The humiliation of being spanked by a fag of the Third Form overcame even his fear of a Sixth Form prefect. "Yah! We all know what you are—pub-haunter, that's what you are! Going to moneylenders to raise the wind."

"Shut up, you cad!" growled Joe Frayne.

"We all know about the moneylender!" howled Crooke. "Ripping fellow you are to be a prefect, and stand up for slum brats against decent fellows."

"Yes!" panted Mellish, taking his cue from Crooke. "How much money do you owe Simons? Disgraceful, I call it."

Langton made a movement towards them. The two cads of the School House leaped up and ran, and Langton paused.

"Yah! How much money do you owe Simons?" yelled Crooke.

And then they fled.

Langton stood quite still. That a Fourth-Former and a Shell fellow, both juniors, should venture to speak to him, a prefect, in such a manner, was a shock to him. He realised what it meant—that if he exerted his prefect's authority, and punished them for their impertinence, they would use their knowledge against him in the quarter where it would do most harm.

Joe Frayne looked timidly at Langton's harassed face.

"I—I say, Master Langton," he ventured. "It—it ain't true, is it?"

Langton did not reply.

"They says as Master Merry 'eard you talkin' about it to Kildare," said Frayne. "I said it was a lie, and so it is."

Langton smiled bitterly.

"It isn't a lie; it's the truth, kid," he said, "and I dare say it will be the finish of me here. Tom Merry played the spy, and he's spread the story over the school."

Joe Frayne looked utterly dismayed.

"It can't be true," he said, panting. "Master Tom ain't that sort. I know wot he's done for me. He's one of the best."

"But it is true. Nobody else knew, and he promised not to tell," said Langton bitterly. "I had no choice about trusting him, as he had listened, and found it out. It will be bad for me; but I hope the fellows will show him what they think of sneaking and spying."

Langton strode away, leaving Joe overwhelmed with dismay. The waf of the Third shook his head resolutely.

"It ain't true!" he muttered. "It can't be true! It's some plot of Mellish and Levison—I know that. Master Tom wouldn't do sich a thing! I'll see wot Wally thinks about it."

And Joe Frayne, with a very clouded brow, set out to seek his chum, D'Arcy minor of the Third, to consult that experienced youth upon the subject.

## CHAPTER 9. Under a Cloud.

TOM MERRY passed a very unpleasant evening in the School House that day.

The story of Langton's dealings with the moneylender in Wayland was all over St. Jim's.

Such a story was not likely to lose in the telling, and it was a topic that was full of interest, especially to fellows who did not like Langton.

The story was variously reported. Langton owed Simons ten pounds, fifty pounds, a hundred pounds. Simons had been to see the Head, and Langton was to be expelled. Simons had threatened to ronne and see the Head, and Langton had borrowed money of every fellow in the Sixth to pay him to keep away. Langton had been seen by a master—master's name not specified—chumming up with Simons in Wayland.

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There were many other variations of the story; but improbable as some of the variations were, the main facts were agreed upon—that Langton was in the clutches of the moneylender, and that someone had heard him say so to Kildare, eavesdropping in the captain's study to find out what Langton's secret was. And that somebody was Tom Merry.

Tom Merry's chums could not believe it. Over in the New House, Figgins had punched several heads on Tom Merry's account. In the School House, both Manners and Lowther bore the signs of conflict. But Manners and Lowther, loyal as they were to their chum, were confounded by the fact of his silence.

Why did he not answer the charge?

Even to his own close chums he offered no explanation. He would not say whether he had been in Kildare's study, and heard anything there; he would not say whether he knew the story to be true about Langton; he would say nothing. He simply declined to discuss the subject in any shape or form.

And his friends, who wanted nothing better than to stand up for him, were sorely troubled. Tom Merry was most troubled of all.

But he was in a helpless position. He could not even mention his pledge to Kildare without admitting that there was a secret to keep, which would have amounted to betraying what he had promised to conceal.

How the secret had got out Tom Merry could not guess. Perhaps Kildare and Langton had spoken on the subject again incautiously, and an eavesdropper had heard them. Perhaps Langton had been seen at Simons' place in Wayland. Whatever the explanation, the secret was certainly out, and the fellows attributed the discovery to Tom Merry.

Kildare and Langton both believed that he had betrayed the secret. They were certain that they had said nothing in the hearing of anyone else, so they could hardly believe that Tom Merry had kept his word.

And the matter did not seem likely to die away. Mellish, Levison, Crooke, and other fellows of the same kidney, were delighted with a chance of scoring off Tom Merry at last. The captain of the Shell had always been against them, and it was their turn at last. And they were not sorry to have a chance of scoring off Langton, too. Langton was very popular as a prefect, but not with Mellish & Co. The young rascals whom he had caned for bullying the fags, and given lines to for secret cigarette smoking, had long scores to pay off against him, and they did not neglect the opportunity.

When Tom Merry came into the junior common-room that night, he was greeted with very peculiar glances.

He flushed as he noticed it. A gleam of anger came into his eyes.

Kangaroo of the Shell came over to him, and Tom Merry met him with a somewhat grim look. He knew what was coming.

"Look here, Tom, it's time for you to speak out!" Harry Noble exclaimed abruptly. "You know what the fellows are saying about you, don't you?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"We don't believe it, of course," said Kangaroo. "We know you wouldn't play the rotten listener. But why can't you set fellows' doubts at rest? You've only got to say plainly that you never overheard anything in Kildare's study."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Why can't you deny the whole wotten stow, Tom Mewwy, and have done with it?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry turned a flushed face towards the crowd of juniors who were looking curiously at him.

"I've got nothing to say!" he exclaimed. "I've told you before that I don't know how this story got started about Langton, and I never had a hand in it. Fellows who can't take my word needn't trouble to speak to me again."

"Weally, you know—"

"We can take your word all right," said Kangaroo; "but you could stop the whole story by saying plainly that you heard nothing in Kildare's study. We know you didn't—that you wouldn't. But why can't you say so?"

"I've got nothing more to say."

"Bai Jove!"

"That amounts to a confession," said Mellish.

Smack!

Tom Merry's open hand came with a ringing concussion upon Mellish's face, and the cad of the Fourth staggered away.

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs.

"Now, if you want any more, say so!" he exclaimed.

Mellish apparently didn't want any more. He backed away, with his hand to his face.

"Keep your fists for a fellow your own size," growled Gore.

Tom Merry turned upon him.

"Well, you're bigger than I am," he said. "Take that, and come on!"

Smack!

Gore gave a yell. He had more courage than Mellish, and he came on. In a moment the two Shell fellows were fighting, hammer and tongs, and a crowd of excited juniors gathered round. But George Gore was no match for Tom Merry, big as he was, especially in the temper that the captain of the Shell was in now. Gore went sprawling upon the floor, with the red streaming from his nose, and Tom Merry stood over him panting.

There was a sharp voice at the door, as Kildare of the Sixth strode in.

"Tom Merry! Stop that at once! What are you fighting about?"

Tom Merry dropped his hands.

"It was Mellish," said Monty Lowther. "Gore only backed Mellish up. Mellish is making out that Tom Merry is an eavesdropper and a tell-tale, and he wants a jolly good hiding."

Kildare frowned.

"Well, if Mellish said that, Mellish told only the truth," he said.

There was a buzz in the room.

Kildare's word was as the word of an oracle; if the captain of St. Jim's condemned Tom Merry, there was no appeal. Manners and Lowther looked bewildered. Tom Merry uttered a cry.

"Kildare! What did you say?"

"You know it's the truth, Merry," said Kildare grimly.

"You know what you've done. And if there is any more fighting, you'll hear from me."

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

"Then you call me a spy and a tell-tale?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I do."

"It's a lie!"

The juniors stood petrified. Nobody had ever given Kildare the lie before. The captain of St. Jim's seemed unable to believe his ears.

"What? What?" he exclaimed.

"It's a lie!" shouted Tom Merry.

Kildare strode towards him.

"You dare to say that to me?" he cried.

"Yes; to you or to anybody else," said Tom Merry fearlessly. "Nobody is going to slander me without getting a straight answer."

"Chuck it, Tommy!" murmured Lowther, pulling Tom Merry back. "Chuck it; don't be an ass. You can't slang the head of the Sixth!"

"Pwaw be calm, Tom Mewwy, deah boy."

Tom Merry shook himself free from Lowther.

"I'll make the same answer to anybody who says what Kildare said—head of the Sixth or head of the school!" he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove!"

Kildare looked at him grimly.

"This isn't a matter I can cane you for, Merry," he said.

"You gave me your word of honour, and you broke it."

"I did not!"

Kildare shrugged his shoulders.

"The proof is pretty clear that you did," he exclaimed.

"But I won't bandy words with you. Go to your dormitory, and remain there."

Tom Merry hesitated a moment, but his chums forced him away, and he went to the Shell dormitory. It was near bedtime for the juniors, and a little later all the Shell came up. They found Tom Merry sitting on his bed.

Hardly one of the fellows spoke to him. Kildare's word carried great weight with all of them, and they believed the captain of the school in preference to Tom Merry. Gore and Crooke gave him sneering looks, but did not speak.

Manners and Lowther and Kangaroo looked very uncomfortable. The whole affair mystified them, and, in spite of themselves, doubts were creeping into their minds. Tom Merry undressed himself. As he pulled down the bedclothes a card on his pillow caught his eye. It bore one single word, in large letters:

"SPY!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed. He swung round towards Crooke, catching up the card in his hand.

"That's your work!" he exclaimed.

"It's the opinion the whole House has of you," said Crooke with a sneer.

Tom Merry did not speak again. He rushed straight at Crooke. The cad of the Shell put up his hands, but his defence was knocked aside in a second, and Tom Merry's right crashed into his face. Crooke went sprawling back across his bed.

Langton of the Sixth came into the dormitory. His eyes

gleamed as they turned upon Tom Merry. He was there to see lights out for the Shell.

"Fighting again, Merry!" he said.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "And I shall fight every time any fellow calls me a spy."

"That's the right name for you."

"Liar!"

"What!" yelled Langton.

"That's the right name for you!" said Tom Merry grimly.

Langton rushed towards him. Tom Merry put up his hands, amid a buzz of amazement and consternation. It was evident that the captain of the Shell meant to defend himself, even against a prefect. But Langton paused, with a bitter smile.

"I won't touch you," he said. "I had no right to ask you for that promise last evening. I can't complain because you've broken it. Go to bed."

"I haven't broken it."

Langton sneered.

"I won't argue that out with you," he said. "Get into bed, or I shall cane you."

Tom Merry turned in.

Langton put out the lights, and retired. There was a buzz of voices in the Shell dormitory after lights out. But no one spoke to Tom Merry.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Accused!

THE Sixth Form were in their places in their Form-room on the following morning when Dr. Holmes came in. The Head crossed to his desk, and gave a sudden start as he caught sight of a paper placed upon it, evidently intended for his eye.

He stood for some moments gazing at the paper, and then picked it up.

He turned towards the Sixth with a clouded brow.

"Langton!" he said quietly.

Langton shivered a little. He knew from the Head's tone that something was coming. He rose in his place, his lips set.

"Yes, sir?"

"Please come here."

Langton crossed over to the Head. Dr. Holmes held out the paper.

"Read that," he said.

Langton looked at the paper. A sentence was written upon it in a large, backward hand, evidently disguised. It ran:

"How much money does Langton owe Simons the money-lender?"

That was all!

Langton's face went pale as he read it. It was out now, with a vengeance! It did not matter whether Mellish or Crooke or Tom Merry had written that message and placed it there for the Head to read. The secret was out!

Dr. Holmes scanned the pale, troubled face of the prefect. "I suppose that is simply a foolish prank of some junior, Langton?" he said, tearing the paper into halves and tossing them under his desk.

Langton was silent.

"I do not believe the charge that is contained in that wretched note, Langton," said the Head gently. "I only ask you in order that you may say that there is nothing in it."

"I can't say so, sir."

"Langton!"

The prefect stood silent and miserable.

"Do you mean to say that you owe this man Simons money?" asked the Head, with a sterner ring in his voice.

"No, sir; not now."

"Then you have had dealings with him?"

Langton bowed his head.

"Yes, sir."

"I am astonished, Langton. You are a prefect, and you—" The Head paused. "But this is no place to speak of it. Come into my study after lessons."

"Yes, sir," said Langton dully.

He went back to his place.

Kildare gave him an inquiring look.

"He knows!" muttered Langton.

"The Head! How?"

"Someone wrote it on a slip of paper and left it on his desk."

"Oh!" muttered Kildare.

"It's all up!"

Langton relapsed into miserable silence.

He was absent-minded enough during the lessons that morning, but the Head, and Mr. Bailton after him, did not appear to notice it. When lessons were over, and the Sixth went

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out, Langton made his way with slow and heavy steps towards the Head's study.

The Shell were just out, and Langton paused as he passed the crowd of Shell fellows in the Form-room passage. He gave Tom Merry a bitter look.

"You have done your worst now, Merry," he said, in a low voice.

Tom Merry started.

"What do you mean, Langton?"

"The Head has been told."

"I did not tell him!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

"No; I think you would stop short of that," said Langton bitterly. "But someone has told him—I think I can guess whom; but it does not matter. It is all up with me now. I hope it will be a satisfaction to you to know that you have ruined me by breaking your word."

Tom Merry was about to make a fierce retort; but the misery in Langton's white, drawn face disarmed him.

"Langton," he said earnestly, "can't you believe me? I swear that I never said a word—not a syllable has passed my lips about what I heard in Kildare's study on Wednesday!"

"How did it get out, then?"

"I don't know! But I never said a word. Don't you believe me?"

"No, I don't!"

And Langton passed on. Tom Merry remained standing where he was, very white. Kildare stopped as he passed. Langton had gone to the Head's study; and Kildare, full of concern for his friend, was pale with anger.

As the captain of St. Jim's stood before Tom Merry, the juniors gathered round; they could see that it meant trouble. The Shell and the Fourth and the Third, fellows of both Houses, were nearly all there. Kildare looked over the swarm of juniors in the Form-room passage; he could not have wanted a bigger audience.

"I've got a few words to say, you fellows!" said Kildare, in a low, angry voice. "I want to tell you what Tom Merry has done. It isn't a thing I can punish him for, as captain of the school; but I hope there are decent fellows enough at St. Jim's to show him what they think of him for it."

"Kildare—"

"Hold your tongue, Tom Merry!" said the St. Jim's captain fiercely. "The fellows are going to know. They've a right to know the kind of fellow you are; the Shell ought to know whom they've selected as their Form-captain."

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Dash it all!" exclaimed Figgins of the Fourth. "There's some mistake, Kildare. It's no good telling us that Tom Merry's done anything rotten."

"Wathah not!"

"We sha'n't believe it," said Manners.

"No fear!" said Lowther.

"Suppose you let Kildare speak?" suggested Crooke sarcastically.

"I'm going to speak," said Kildare. "The whole school ought to know, so that they can treat Tom Merry as he deserves. On Wednesday evening Langton came to my study to speak about a private matter; and Tom Merry was there, hidden out of sight in my easy-chair, and he heard what Langton said."

"Oh!"

"He said he had fallen asleep there, while waiting for me—"

"I said what was true!" said Tom Merry.

"Don't interrupt me. I believed what he said then, and I asked him to promise not to repeat what he had heard Langton say to me. He promised—honour bright."

"I kept my word."

"The day after," said Kildare, "the story was all over the school. Langton and I had never spoken on the subject before—we have never spoken on it since. Nobody but Tom Merry knew a word about it. Langton, by no fault of his own, got mixed up with that rotten moneylender in Wayland—you fellows can all take my word for it that in this matter Langton was not to blame. But he knew, and I knew, how it would tell against him if it were made public property, and THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 239.

we asked Tom Merry to keep the secret, and he promised. He gave his word—honour bright. You all know how he kept it. Nobody but Tom Merry could have told the story—and it was told!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Either he couldn't hold his tongue, or he had some score to pay off against a prefect, I suppose," said Kildare. "Anyway, he broke his word. And that's a pretty clear proof that he was speaking falsely when he said that he was asleep in the chair—I believe now that he was deliberately hiding there and listening. He is a spy and a tell-tale. Spying and telling tales don't come under the head of things juniors are caned for, and I'm not going to punish him. But I hope all the fellows of St. Jim's will show him what they think of his action."

Kildare strode away.

Tom Merry stood almost stunned.

He had never expected this—and from Kildare, the fellow he liked and respected more than any other senior at St. Jim's.

He looked round almost wildly.

Dark glances were cast upon him from every side. Even his own friends drew a little further away from him. This, then, was the explanation—and they had the word of the captain of St. Jim's for it. They did not need any more proof.

"So that's the story, is it?" said Crooke, with a sneering smile.

"Spy!"

"Tell-tale!"

"Cad!"

"Langton's a pretty rotter, from what Kildare says," said Levison; "but I think Tom Merry beats him hollow. And he founded the Tom Merry Legion of Honour, with the motto 'Honour Bright!' And he's broken his word!"

"Shame!"

"Shut up!" said Monty Lowther fiercely. "Let's hear what Tom Merry's got to say! Tom, old man, speak up! We know it isn't true."

Tom Merry tried to speak, but it seemed that the words would not come. And from the crowd of juniors in the passage came a torrent of hissing.

"Cad!"

"Spy!"

"Shame!"

## CHAPTER 11.

### Through Thick and Thin!

TOM MERRY panted for breath.

"It—it's not true!" he gasped.

"Of course it isn't!" said Figgins of the Fourth; but he did not speak so heartily as of old. "We—we know there's some mistake."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why can't he explain, then?" howled Mellish.

"Hold your tongue, you cad!"

"Yaas, wathah! Shut up, you wottah!"

Tom Merry gazed almost wildly at the crowd. There was condemnation in almost every face. As several of the fellows said, Kildare's word was good enough for them.

"It's not true," said Tom Merry huskily.

"So, Kildare is lying, is he?" said Mellish.

"I didn't say that. It's all a mistake."

"I'd like to know where the mistake comes in," said Levison, with a sneer.

"It's a mistake! I will tell all you fellows what happened, now—"

"Why couldn't you tell us before?" demanded Gore jeeringly.

"Hold your row, Gore! Give him a chance to speak!" growled Kangaroo.

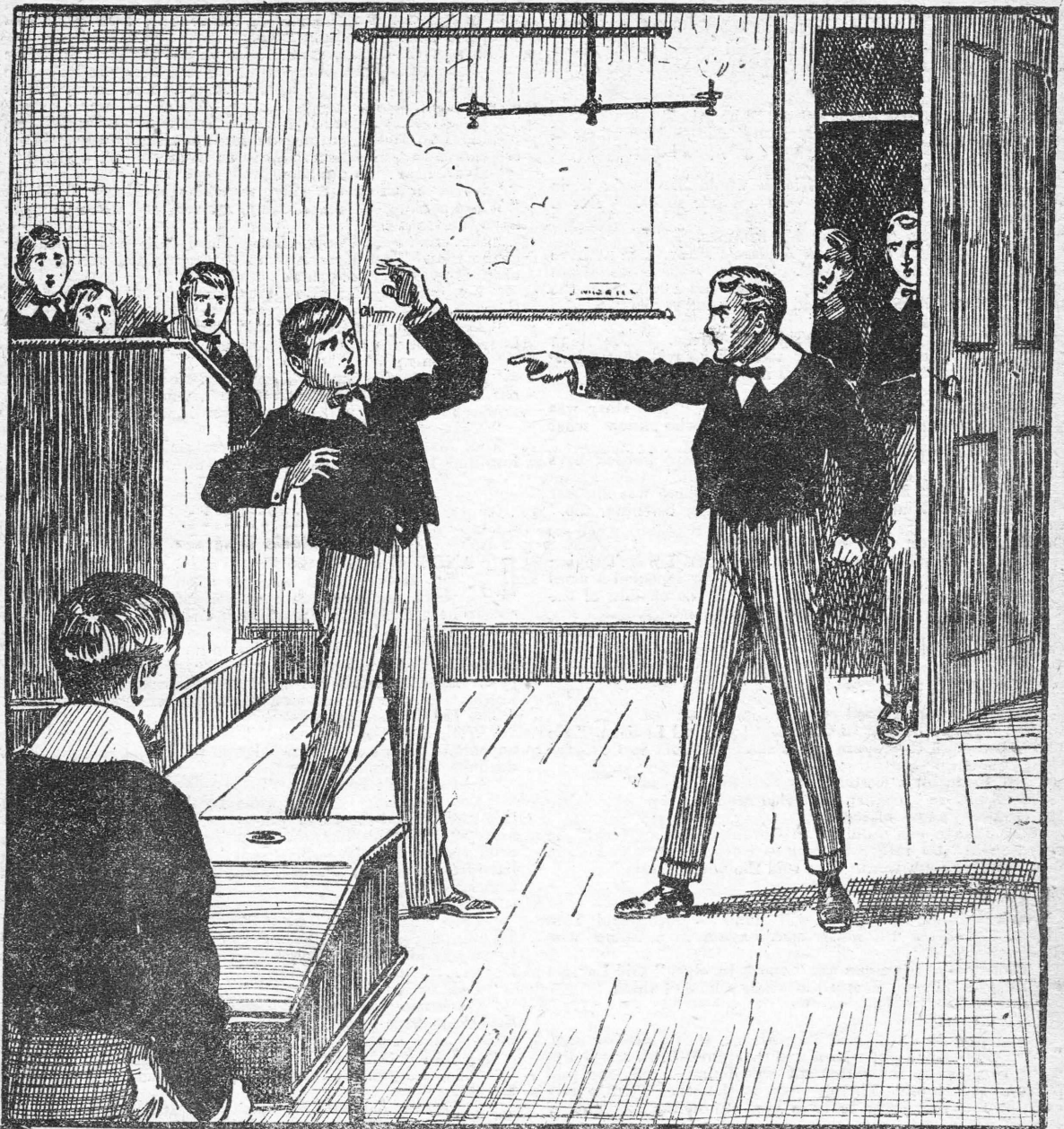
"I couldn't explain before," said Tom Merry haltingly, "I had promised Kildare to say nothing about hearing what I heard in his study. If I'd explained, it was as good as admitting that I'd heard this about Langton, and—and that would have given Langton away. That's why I said nothing. I couldn't! But now it's all out, I'll explain."

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# ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!

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"Gentlemen," called out Wally, grimly, "kindly step into view, and behold our respected friend Mellish trying to bribe and corrupt a respectable youth!" Mellish gave a yell of terror, for, at Wally's words, the door of the wall-cupboard was flung open, and the concealed juniors rushed out; and Tom Merry & Co. rose into view from behind the Form-master's desk. (See Chapter 15.)

"Better late than never!" sneered Mellish.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Spy!"

"Listener!"

"Shut up!" roared Manners, glaring round him. "Give him a chance, you rotters!"

"Yes, give him a chance," said Lefevre of the Fifth. "That's what I say. Go ahead, Merry."

"Kildare told me to go to his study on Wednesday evening," said Tom Merry. "You fellows know I sopped that stuff over him instead of Figgins, under my study window. He kept me waiting a long time—more than an hour, and I sat in the armchair waiting for him to come in, and fell asleep. They woke me up talking. I couldn't help hearing what Langton was saying, as I woke up. Nobody who knows will believe that I was there to hear what they were saying."

"Wathah not, deah boy."

"Langton was talking about the moneylender. I jumped

up at once to let them know I was there. I heard Langton speak only one sentence before I showed myself. I couldn't do more than that."

"Quite wight!" said D'Arcy. "It was a most awkward posish!"

"Rats!" said Mellish.

"Silence!" roared Lowther.

"Pile in, Tommy!"

"Kildare believed my explanation, then," said Tom Merry. "He asked me to promise not to say a word outside the study about what I had heard. I promised, honour bright; and I kept my word."

"The story got out, all the same!" sneered Gore.

"I know it did; but I don't know how. Did I say a word to you about it, Monty—or you, Manners?"

"Not a word!" said Manners and Lowther together.

"And you, D'Arcy—you asked me why Kildare had let me off the licking!"

"Yaas, I was vewy much surprised," said Arthur Augustus, with a nod. "But you certainly did not explain why he had let you off, deah boy."

"Can any fellow here say that I've said a word to him about Langton?" demanded Tom Merry, looking round at the crowd of faces.

Mellish laughed.

"If you didn't, how did it get out?" he asked.

"Perhaps you were spying, Mellish," said D'Arcy minor of the Third. "It's a little way you've got, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I dare say Tom Merry's friends would like to fix it on somebody else," said Mellish, with a bitter sneer. "But it won't work."

Tom Merry was recovering his firmness.

"If I told what I'd heard in Kildare's study, I must have told some fellow first," he said. "If the story spread from me, I must have told somebody. Whom did I tell? Let the chap who heard it from me stand forward and say so."

There was no reply.

"That's a fair challenge," said Jack Blake. "The thing was started by somebody being told. Who was that somebody? Who can say that he heard it from Tom Merry?"

Silence!

"Nobody can say so!" said Tom Merry. "The story was started from somebody else—somebody who knew what Langton said to Kildare."

"That's too thin," said Mellish. "Kildare himself says that nobody else could possibly have known."

"Perhaps Tom Merry will suggest that there was another chap hidden in Kildare's study all the time, listening, too," sneered Gore.

"Do you suggest that, Tom Merry?"

"I don't suggest anything. I only say that I wasn't spying in Kildare's study, as he thinks, and I never repeated a word of what I heard outside his study," said the captain of the Shell.

"Too thin!"

"It won't wash!"

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"Nobody else knew!"

"Kildare's word's good enough for us!"

"He ought to be sent to Coventry," grinned Levison. "He was fast enough to propose that I should be sent to Coventry for a jape once."

"You mean for a wotten dirty swindle, Levison!"

"Send him to Coventry!" howled Mellish.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

"The fellows can send me to Coventry, if they like!" he exclaimed. "I'd rather be sent to Coventry by the fellows who can't take my word. I've told the whole truth."

"Rats!"

"Yah!"

"And I think my chums will stand by me," said Tom Merry. "I know I'll never speak again to a fellow who doubts my word."

"There's a lot of us you won't speak to, then," said Levison sneeringly. "Pretty nearly the whole school, I think."

"Yes, rather."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that isn't all," said Tom Merry, with gleaming eyes. "I'm going to find out who it was that started this story. I'm going to show up the rotten spy who found it out, and told it round the House. There's a spy in the school, that's jolly certain, and I'm going to have him out in the daylight, if I can."

"Rats!"

"Quite wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'll jollay well help you, you know. I'll bwing my bwains to beah on the subject."

"Who's going to stand by me?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Manners and Lowther stepped to his side at once. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy followed them, and then Figgins & Co. of the New House, and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence. After a moment's hesitation, Kangaroo joined them, and then Reilly. It was evident that Tom Merry was not without friends, after all.

"Oh, those fellows always stick together," said Crooke, biting his lip. "I don't believe they take his word any more than we do."

"You uttah wottah—"

Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn of the Shell, and Brooke of the Fourth, joined the group round Tom Merry, and two or three more fellows followed. It looked as if there would be as many for the captain of the Shell as there were against him.

But with the fellows who were on less intimate terms with Tom Merry, Kildare's words weighed, and outweighed everything else. Kildare believed that Tom Merry had acted dis-

honourably, and he had given his reasons for his belief. That was enough for the majority of the fellows, even those who were not Tom Merry's enemies.

Many of the fellows passed him with scornful looks. The crowd surged out into the quadrangle, and Tom was left alone with the faithful few who were sticking to him through thick and thin.

"It's all wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, patting Tom Merry on the shoulder in a fatherly way. "We'll see you through, old son. Wely on us to see you wighted."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"Never mind those silly asses!" said Monty Lowther. "We're sticking to you, Tommy, my son, and we're going to have the truth out."

"We are," said Wally of the Third, who had joined the group round Tom Merry, with Joe Frayne and two or three other fags. "We is! Buck up, old man!"

"Yes, buck up," said Figgins, cheerily. "We'll see you through."

"Thank you, you fellows," said Tom Merry gratefully. "I knew you fellows wouldn't desert me, at least."

"Wathah not!"

"And those silly asses will come round, when the truth gets out," said Monty Lowther. "That's what we've got to do now—show up the real spy, whoever it was."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry nodded. That was certainly the first task before him, but it did not appear to be an easy one.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Langton's Disgrace.

LANGTON entered the Head's study with downcast eyes. Dr. Holmes fixed his eyes upon the prefect. There was a sombre shade upon the doctor's brow. The discovery he had made that morning in the Sixth-Form room had been a shock to him. He had forgiven Langton for his reckless escapades once. But it had been upon the solemn promise of the Sixth-Former that he would turn his back upon the past. Langton could not meet the accusing glance of the doctor. He stood before him, silent, his gaze upon the carpet.

The Head broke the silence.

"Well, Langton," he said. "What have you to say? It appears to be common knowledge in the school that you have dealings with moneylenders."

"I—I couldn't help it, sir."

"You remember the last time I called you before me in this study," said the Head quietly. "You remember the promise you made me, Langton. You had been guilty of reckless conduct, and I forgave you. Is it possible, Langton, that you have forgotten your promise, and plunged into those wretched associations again?"

"No, sir, no!"

"Then what does this mean?"

Langton cleared his throat. He did not expect the Head to forgive him. He hardly expected to be believed. But he had to explain.

"I—I needed the money, sir."

"I suppose you did. But you know very well that you should not have gone to a moneylender, especially a man who bears such a reputation as this man Simons."

"I—I know that, sir; but—but there was no other way."

"What did you need the money for?" demanded the Head sternly.

"To pay my debts. I—I wasn't clear at the time I told you about the matter, sir," faltered Langton. "I—I was ashamed to tell you how much money I owed. And—and I was pressed for it, and I was afraid that it would come up before you again, and I couldn't stand that. I—I borrowed the money of Simons to settle."

"Is that all?"

"Only—only he piled on the interest, and there was a trick in the paper I signed, and I found I owed him more than I could clear," said Langton. "It was out of the frying-pan into the fire. Then I asked Kildare to lend me some to get clear."

"And he did?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you have no connection with this man Simons now?" asked the Head, his brow relaxing a little.

"No, sir."

"He has no claim upon you?"

"None, sir."

"And you declare to me that you obtained this loan from him simply to clear off an old debt, contracted before the time you made your confession to me?"

"On my honour, sir."

The Head was silent.

"I—I hope you'll believe me, sir," faltered Langton.



"Kildare does. He will speak in my favour, if you care to ask him."

"That makes a difference," said the Head. "I do not like to doubt your assurance, Langton, but you know very well what a serious matter it is to get mixed up with this kind of thing, whatever the reason or the temptation. It would have been better for you to ask me for assistance, or to confide in your father, than to have recourse to a moneylender."

"I know it, sir—now!" muttered Langton. "But I was ashamed, and—"

"I can understand that, too. But the fact remains that you have had dealings with this disreputable man, and I have simply your bare word that it was for the purpose of settling an old debt. Under ordinary circumstances, I should take your word without question, but the circumstances have not been such that I can trust you implicitly. You must be aware of that yourself."

"I am aware of it, sir."

"You, from your position as a prefect, are supposed to set an example to the juniors. Instead of that, you have acted in a way that has caused nothing short of a scandal in the school," said the Head. "Even if I exonerate you, so far as to admit that you have acted only foolishly, that fact remains. It is clear that the matter is the talk of the school."

"I am afraid so, sir."

"That gives the matter a different aspect. If your connection with this moneylender was so slight, and came to an end, how is it that everybody at St. Jim's seems to know all about it?"

Langton gritted his teeth.

"It was the work of a spy in the school, sir—a junior who listened to what I was saying to Kildare the other evening, and then spread it over the school."

"You were very reckless to speak in the hearing of a junior," said the Head drily.

"I did not know he was there; he was hidden in Kildare's study, listening."

"Indeed! Which junior was it?"

"Merry of the Shell!"

The Head started.

"Tom Merry!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir."

"I cannot believe this, Langton."

The prefect flushed crimson.

"It is true, sir."

Dr. Hohnes shook his head.

"I cannot credit such an accusation against Tom Merry. I know the boy's character too well. You are doing him an injustice, Langton."

"Kildare will tell you the same."

"Then Kildare is mistaken, too," said the Head sharply.

"What proof have you to offer of such an accusation against one of the finest lads in the school?"

"He was in the study, and nobody else could hear us speaking, sir."

"Probably the matter leaked out in some other way. You cannot expect to make these disreputable acquaintances, Langton, without the fact becoming known," said the Head. "When you are older and more experienced you will know that secrets are never kept for long—they always leak out, sooner or later. But whether the betrayal was due to Tom Merry or some other person, it does not alter the fact—the whole school, apparently, knows of your dealings with this man Simons?"

"I suppose so."

"I shall accept your assurance that you borrowed the money to clear off an old debt, Langton. I believe that you have not resumed the reckless proceedings you promised should never recur. But you will see for yourself that, under the circumstances, I cannot possibly allow you to remain a prefect."

"I—I suppose not, sir."

"I shall relieve you of your post as prefect," said the Head. "I shall consider in the future whether I can restore it to you. Nothing further need be said upon the matter, Langton. You may go."

"Very well, sir."

Langton left the study.

Avoiding the sight of the other fellows, he made his way to his own room. He was joined there by Kildare.

"What does the Head say?" asked Kildare, with a look of concern at his friend's white and strained face.

Langton smiled bitterly.

"I'm not a prefect any longer," he said.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all."

"Well, you've got off lightly," said Kildare, with a breath of relief. "There was no telling how the Head would take it. It's bad enough, I know, but it might have been a jolly lot worse, Langton."

"I suppose it might. But it's bad enough—to be sacked

from the prefectship, and to be talked about by the whole school."

"Yes it's rotten."

Kildare did not say that it was all Langton's own fault at the start, as he might have done. It was of no use rubbing it in. He was silent.

"And I owe all this to Tom Merry!" said Langton savagely. "If he had kept his word there would have been none of this rotten trouble. I'm disgraced before the whole school, because he couldn't keep his promise, after spying on us."

Kildare nodded.

"I think he will be pretty well punished," he said. "I've told the whole crowd, and they're down on him. I shouldn't wonder if he's sent to Coventry. He deserves it."

"The cad—he does! And I'll see that he's punished too!" said Langton savagely.

It was some time before the Sixth-Former left his study. He was unwilling to face the eyes of the St. Jim's fellows. The humiliation of being sacked, as he expressed it, from the prefectship was keen and bitter, and the news, of course, would soon spread over the whole school. He had been condemned by the Head, and he knew that for days or weeks he would have to face continual allusions to his fall.

His face burned red as he went out of the School House into the quad. Crooke and Mellish were standing on the steps, and they burst into a laugh as he came by. Langton turned upon them fiercely.

"Come into my study!" he rapped out.

"What for?" asked Crooke coolly.

"I am going to cane you both."

"Rats!" said Crooke. "You're not a prefect now. You're jolly well not going to cane me!"

Langton started; he had forgotten that important fact for the moment. He was a simple member of the Sixth now, and his authority was gone.

Mellish chuckled.

"Better remember that you're nobody in particular now," he said. "The whole school knows it. You're not a prefect."

"Quite so," said Langton coolly. "I am not a prefect, and I shall not cane you. But you cannot check a member of the Sixth, prefect or not."

And he grasped the two juniors by the collars, and knocked their heads together with a sounding crack. Then he pitched them from him, and they sat violently upon the steps.

Langton strode away.

"Ow!" gasped Mellish. "The beast!"

"Yow!" groaned Crooke. "The rotter!"

And they rubbed their heads disconsolately.

## CHAPTER 13

### Wally Looks into the Matter.

TOM MERRY'S usually sunny face was very clouded that afternoon.

Although his own personal friends were rallying round him in the most loyal way, the rest of the fellows were decidedly unpleasant. It was very seldom that Crooke or Mellish or Levison had any following in their Forms, but they seemed to be taking the lead now. It was the weight of Kildare's condemnation that told against Tom Merry. The captain's word was law, and if he declared that Tom Merry was a spy, and had broken his word, the whole School House was prepared to believe it.

There were whisperings and mutterings in the Shell Form-room that afternoon, directed against the captain of the Form, which Tom Merry pretended not to hear.

After lessons were over the Terrible Three left the Form-room together. Monty Lowther and Manners linked arms with Tom Merry, as an outward and visible sign to the whole school that they were standing by their chum when he was down on his luck.

"Come down to the cricket," said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I—I'd rather not," he said in a strained voice. "I don't want to mix with the fellows just now. It would only lead to unpleasantness."

"Oh, blow the fellows!" said Lowther.

"Yes, blow 'em!" said Manners.

There was a yell along the passage.

"Spy!"

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"You hear that?" he said bitterly. "That's what I'm going to get now, pretty thick. You fellows go out; I'll go into the study for a bit."

"Oh, I don't know that I want to go out," said Manners. "I've got some films to develop, too. I'll come up to the study."

"So will I," said Lowther. "I'll help you with the giddy films."

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"Don't let me keep you in," said Tom Merry in distress. "Oh, rats!"

And the Terrible Three went up to their study in the Shell passage.

"Spy!" yelled a voice after them on the stairs. It came from Mellish of the Fourth. The Shell fellows turned round furiously, and Mellish fled downstairs three at a time. Unfortunately for him, he met Wally of the Third and Joe Frayne, who were coming up.

The two fags grasped him, and bumped him over on the stairs.

"Ow!" roared Mellish. "Lemme go!"

"Not just yet," said D'Arcy minor coolly. "I think you called out something just now to my respected friend Tommy."

"I heard him," said Frayne.

"I—I didn't! I mean—let go!" yelled Mellish, in terror lest the fags should detain him until the Terrible Three reached the spot.

Wally glanced up the stairs to the Shell fellows on the landing.

"It's all serene," he called out. "You can leave him to us."

"Wotto!" chuckled Frayne.

The Terrible Three went on to their study. Wally sat on the chest of the Fourth-Former, pinning him down by sheer weight. Mellish struggled violently.

"Lemme go, you young cads!" he shouted.

"Not till you've begged pardon for being a cheeky kid," said Wally placidly. "Are you going to say you're sorry?"

"No! Oh!"

"Jump on his head, Frayne."

"Cert'nly!" grinned Frayne.

"Oh! Keep off! Ow! I'm sorry!" shrieked Mellish.

"Awfully sorry?"

"Ow! Yes!"

"Awfully, fearfully sorry?" demanded Wally.

"Yow! Yes!" gasped Mellish. "Anything you like! Lemme go!"

"Good!" said Wally. "Always own up when you're in the wrong, you know. Roll him down the stairs, Joe, my son!"

"Wotto!"

And the two fags rolled Mellish down the stairs, and he reached the bottom in a decidedly dusty and dishevelled state.

Wally and his chum chuckled, and continued on their way upstairs. They followed the Terrible Three into Tom Merry's study. Manners was already at work upon his films.

"Cheer up, Tommy, my infant!" said Wally cheerfully. "Not dead yet, you know. We're going to look into this matter."

Tom Merry smiled faintly. He had not very great hopes that Wally's looking into the matter would lead to any surprising results.

"Thank you!" he said.

"The chaps are all silly asses," said Wally. "We're taking this matter up, ain't we, Joe?"

"We is!" grinned Frayne.

"Langton's an ass, and Kildare's an ass, and they're all asses," said Wally. "When you want real solid hoss-sense, you have to come to the Third. Eh?"

"Wotto!" said Frayne. "Me and Wally knows you are all right, Master Tom. We know you wouldn't do anything rotten, whatever they say. We know that, Master Tom."

"Not so much of your Master Tom!" said Wally severely. "You'll make these Shell bounders swelled-headed, kid. Look here, Tom Merry, we're looking into the matter. You didn't repeat what you heard in Kildare's study, did you?"

"No!"

"Then somebody else must have heard those two giddy goats jawing, and told the fearful tale?" suggested Wally.

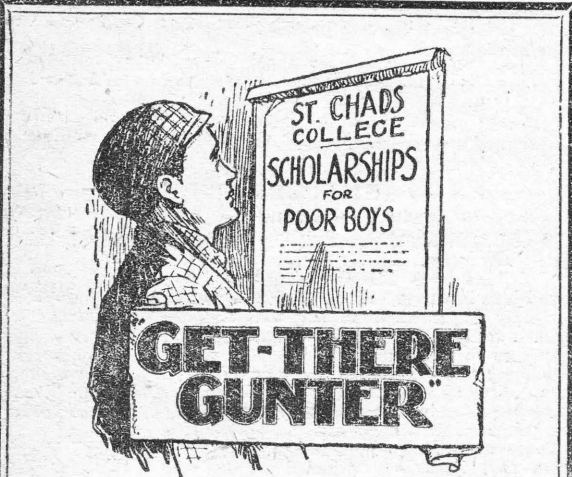
"Don't cackle, young Frayne. This is a serious matter."

"Ohrright, Master Wally."

"I suppose so," said Tom Merry. "Unless Kildare or Langton let it out, somebody else must have heard them."

"Kildare or Langton didn't let it out, you can bet your

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boots on that," said Wally. "It was somebody played the spy; somebody who was very anxious to put it down to you, too. Was there anybody else in the study when you had that little nap on Wednesday evening?"

"Nobody."

"After you left, did they go on jawing?"

"I dare say they did."

"Then somebody might have heard them—suppose there was somebody with a special gift for investigating at keyholes—Levison or Mellish, for instance."

"I suppose it was something like that," said Tom Merry.

"Well, Kildare has said that they didn't talk of the matter again—so if they were overheard, it must have been on that occasion," said Wally. "Therefore, if another fellow played the spy on them, it must have been jolly soon after you left the study—before they left off jawing on the subject."

"Yes."

"When you left Kildare's quarters, then, did you see any other chap hanging about—any chap who'd be likely to listen?"

Tom Merry started.

"By Jove! Yes. Mellish was there!"

Wally gave a chuckle of triumph.

"Mellish! He's our bird, then."

"Wot to!" said Joe Frayne.

"You are sure you saw Mellish on the spot?" asked Wally, in a cross-examining manner, wagging his forefinger at the captain of the Shell.

"Quite sure. He knew I was going to Kildare's study for a licking, and he was waiting there to see me come out, licked. He was disappointed to find that I hadn't been licked, and I biffed him!"

"Aha! Now we're getting to it," said Wally shrewdly. "He was inquisitive, of course; he knew that Kildare must have had some awfully special reason for letting you off a licking, after you had slopped that fearful stuff over his napper. He's an inquisitive beast; and we know he ain't above listening at keyholes; he's been caught at it. Did he know Langton was in the study?"

"Yes; he mentioned that he'd seen him go in," said Tom Merry, recollecting.

"Good—better and better!" said D'Arcy minor. "Didn't I tell you we were the proper persons to take up this giddy investigation, Master?"

"You did, Master Wally," said Frayne gravely.

"Now, that's how I work it out," said Wally, tapping his finger on the study table. "Mellish was curious; he always is. He knew Langton and Kildare were jawing in the study. He wanted to know what awfully special reason Kildare had for letting you off. You hadn't told him, and he sniffed a mystery. So he buzzed along, and listened at the keyhole."

"Ear, 'ear!" said Frayne admiringly.

"Then of course he saw his chance; one up against you, and one up against Langton, by repeating the yarn up and down the school," said Wally. "What do you think of that, Tom Merry? Haven't I worked it out beautifully?"

"Rippingly!" said Tom Merry. "There's only one weak point; Mellish would deny having done anything of the sort, and you've got no proof."

"Ye-e-es, that's so," admitted Wally. "But it's something to know the facts. We can look for the proofs afterwards. Sherlock Holmes always got at the facts first. We're going to find the proofs, ain't we, young Frayne?"

"Wot to!" said Joe Frayne. "Certainly, Master Wally."

"Now, if Manners had only been along there with his camera," said Wally regretfully. "A snapshot of Mellish listening at Kildare's keyhole would have been a splendid proof. That's where Sherlock Holmes has the advantage; his proofs are made up to suit his theories. I suppose you didn't happen to be taking photographs in the Sixth Form passage about that time, Manners?"

"No," grinned Manners. "I didn't."

"That's unfortunate. You might have been taking an interior, you know. You always were a careless ass," said Wally peevishly.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Never mind," said D'Arcy minor, more cheerfully. "We've got to find some proofs, or to make some up. I'm going to clear this matter up. Come along, Watson—I mean young Frayne."

And the two fags quitted the study, Wally with his brows very much wrinkled, in a deep effort of thought.

"Looks to me as if that young beggar is on the track, though," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "I shouldn't wonder if he's worked it out all right."

"Very likely. But it can't be proved."

"No; I suppose not."

But that remained to be seen!

## CHAPTER 14.

## Many Witnesses.

THE chums of Study No. 6 were in that famous apartment, working away at their preparation, when Wally came in, kicking open the door in the free-and-easy manner which he cultivated in spite of the admonitions of his major. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fixed a severe glance upon him, which did not seem to abash him in the least.

"Weally, Wally——" said D'Arcy major.

"Don't you begin, Gus," said Wally appealingly. "I didn't come here for a sermon. I'm here on business."

"Do you see the door?" asked Jack Blake politely.

"Eh? Yes."

"Well, shut it after you."

Wally grinned.

"I'm not going yet," he said. "I've come here on business, not simply to enjoy your good manners."

There was a chuckle from the passage, betraying the fact that Joe Frayne was waiting outside for his chum.

"I'm looking into this affair of Tom Merry," Wally explained, in an airy way. "I'm going to make the facts known. A thing of this kind is rather above the weight of the Shell."

Another chuckle from the passage.

"I want you fellows to help me," said Wally.

"Do you mean to say that you've found anything out?" demanded Blake.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "Vevy good! What have you discovahed, deah boy?"

"The giddy culprit."

The Fourth-Formers stared.

"I don't quite catch on," said Blake.

"I don't expect you to," said Wally cheerfully. "They forgot the Fourth Form when brains were handed out. Well, it wasn't Tom Merry who yarned about Langton and his little games; it was another chap who listened at the door."

"My hat!"

"I've spotted the giddy criminal; but I've got to prove it."

"Yes," said Blake sarcastically. "I dare say there will be a little bit of proof required. The Third Form isn't exactly an oracle."

"I'm going to get the proof," said Wally. "And you fellows have got to help me. I want you as witnesses."

"Witnesses! How?"

"You see, I've got a scheme on to make the culprit confess," Wally explained. "But it's no good his confessing to me. He'd deny it afterwards."

"Yaas, vevy likely."

"But if you fellows, and half a dozen more, are hanging round, and you hear him—of course, without the rotter seeing you—he can't deny it afterwards, can he?" demanded Wally triumphantly.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Do you mean that you want us to be there without the fellow knowin' it, Wally?"

"Just so."

"To listen to him confessin'?"

"Exactly!"

"Then I'm afwaid it can't be done," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You would be puttin' us into the position of listeners, deah boy. Imposs."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally impatiently. "It's not eaves-dropping in this case; it's getting evidence. Detectives do it."

"I wegahd it as vevy wotten of them, if they do."

Wally snorted.

"Is it more rotten than leaving Tom Merry to be sniffed at, and called names, because of something he hasn't done?" he demanded.

"Well, no, that is wotten, too."

"It's the only way to get the facts out," said Wally. "I don't say that it's a specially ripping kind of scheme; but there's no proof against the villain unless he owns up, and his owning up won't be any good unless it's done in the presence of witnesses. So there you are!"

"Yaas, that puts a wathah different complexion on the mattah," assented Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully. "How-eh-ah, I don't like the ideah!"

"Well, you can stay here, and polish your silk hat!" growled Wally. "I suppose you other fellows will come."

"Yes," said Blake. "If there's anything in it. I suppose this isn't one of your giddy Third-Form japes, is it?"

"No, ass. It's honest Injun," said Wally. "I tell you, I've spotted the criminal, and it's up to us to nail him down. I'm going to interview him, with a dozen fellows within hearing. If he owns up, he's done in; if he doesn't, there's no harm done, and you fellows needn't show yourselves. If

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any of you can suggest a better way of clearing Tom Merry, I'm willing to follow your lead."

"I can't, for one," said Digby.

"Sure you're not on the wrong track, Wally?" asked Blake, doubtfully.

"I know I'm not."

"Who's the fellow you suspect?"

"That's my secret, till it comes out," said Wally, coolly.

"I'm not giving it away. You fellows might jaw, and put the rotter on his guard."

"Weally, Wally—"

"No time for talk," said Wally, briskly. "I want you all to get into one of the Form-rooms, the Fourth Form-room will do, as there won't be anybody there. Get out of sight—in the cupboard, or behind old Lathom's desk, anything you like—so that the fellow won't see you when he comes in with me."

Blake hesitated.

"Well, I don't mind doing it, if it's a chance of setting Tom Merry right with the fellows," he said.

"It's the only chance," growled Wally.

"We'll do it, then. When?"

"Better get down there at once. I'm going round to tell some more of the fellows, so they'll join you there. If I keep you waiting a bit it can't be helped; you'll know when I'm coming, I'll whistle in the passage."

"Good!"

And Wally, looking very important indeed, retired. The chums of Study No. 6 looked at one another, and grinned.

"Think there's anything in it?" asked Herries.

Jack Blake nodded.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said. "Wally is a deep young beggar. But if he gets the rotter to own up in the presence of witnesses, I shall be pleased—and surprised. Still, we'll give him the chance. I'd do more than that to help get Tom Merry set right with the House."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The four chums left their study, and made their way to the Fourth Form-room on the ground floor. As they entered it, they found Kangaroo of the Shell, and Reilly of the Fourth, there. Kangaroo greeted them with a grin.

"Hallo—more giddy witnesses?" he asked.

"Yes; did Wally send you here?"

"Yes; he's got some scheme for clearing Tom Merry, he says; and he's asked us to help," said Kangaroo. "I don't know whether there's anything in it, but we're giving the cheeky young beggar a show."

"Faith, and it's worth the trouble, if anything comes of it," remarked Reilly. "We've got to get out of sight when we're all here."

"How many are coming?" asked Blake.

"Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther yet, I think."

A few minutes later, the Terrible Three came in. They were followed by Figgins and Redfern of the New House.

"That's the lot!" said Tom Merry, with a nod to the assembled juniors. "I suppose all you fellows know what you're here for?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If you don't like the bizney, you can clear off," said Tom Merry. "I don't want to drag any chap into it."

"That's all right," said Kangaroo. "Let's give Wally a chance. There may be something in the scheme."

"Yaas, wathah! I don't exactly approve of the ideah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "but undah the circs, I don't see that there's anythin' else to be done. But I weally can't say that I wholly like the ideah, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Monty Lowther, cheerfully.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his monocle upon Lowther.

"Did you say wats to me, Lowthah?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I shall have no wresource but to—"

"Order!" said Blake. "We haven't come here to see a dog-fight. Shut up."

"Weally, Blake—"

"If Gussy's going to make a row, it won't do Wally's scheme any good," remarked Manners. "Better chuck him out!"

"I should uttably wefuse to be chucked out."

"Then be quiet!" said Blake. "Can't you get out of the limelight for once? You're dead in this act!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Time we got into cover," said Monty Lowther. "Some of you squeeze into the cupboard, and some behind the big desk. That will be all right."

"Undah the circs, Lowthah—"

"No; under the desk," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass! Undah the circs, I shall let you off—"

"My hat! I'm not a gun," said Lowther, in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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**"THE HIDDEN HORROR!"**

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"You fearful ass! I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean," said Tom Merry, laughing, "let's get into cover."

Arthur Augustus, after bestowing an indignant glare upon Monty Lowther, stalked away behind the Form-master's desk. It was very dusky in the Form-room, only a glimmer of evening light coming in at the high windows. Blake and D'Arcy and Tom Merry found cover behind the high desk, and the other fellows crowded into the wall-cupboard where easels, blackboards, and other paraphernalia were kept. They drew the door almost shut behind them, leaving it an inch or two ajar for air—and to hear!

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I don't like this—"

"You've said that before," said Blake. "Can't you put on a new record?"

"I'm not alludin' to the bizney, deah boy. I'm thinkin' of the knees of my twousahs."

"Blow your silly trousers."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shurrup!"

"I'm awfraid I'm making my bags dustay. Pewwaps, I had bettah get into the cupboard aftah all."

"Hist! Shush!"

From the Form-room passage without came the sound of a tune whistled—very shrilly. It was the musical effort of Wally of the Third.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Hush!" whispered Tom Merry.

"Yaas, but—"

Blake put his hand firmly over the mouth of his elegant chum, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy relapsed into silence. The Form-room door opened.

## CHAPTER 15.

### The Wiles of Wally.

"JUST step in here, Mellish!"

Mellish of the Fourth, hesitated. There was a tone of authority in D'Arcy minor's voice, which made Mellish inclined to box his ears—only it was not a safe proceeding to box the ears of the scamp of the Third.

"Look here, what do you want, young D'Arcy?" he demanded. "You said that you had something to say to me."

Wally nodded.

"Something important, I said," he replied. "So I have."

"Well, you can say it here, I suppose," growled Mellish.

"Yes, I can—if you want fellows to come along the passage and hear," said Wally, cheerfully. "But you'd better step into the Form-room."

"Look here, what have you got to talk to me about?"

"About what happened on Wednesday evening."

Mellish started.

"About Tom Merry in Kildare's study, do you mean?" he asked.

"No; about you outside Kildare's study," said Wally, coolly.

Mellish looked at him uneasily. He no longer demurred, but stepped into the Form-room, which was usually deserted at that hour, and seemed deserted now. Wally followed him in and closed the door. They stood looking at one another in the deepening dusk, and the signs of inward uneasiness were very easily visible in Percy Mellish's face.

"I suppose you know what I'm going to say, now?" said Wally. "The question is, whether I give you away or not. That depends."

"Look here," broke out the cad of the Fourth, savagely, "don't beat about the bush. What have you got to say?"

"I'll tell you." Wally groped under his jacket, and took out a little pocket camera. "You know what this is, I suppose?"

"Yes; a rotten cheap camera," said Mellish.

"It may be a cheap one, but it takes good photos," said Wally. "I've taken a lot of good snapshots with that camera."

"Blow your camera and your silly snapshots! I don't care about them. I didn't come here to hear you jaw photography," said Mellish irritably.

"I'm open to sell that camera," said Wally.

"I don't want to buy one."

"With the plates in it, too," said Wally. "Not unused plates, either—one of them has been used."

Mellish stared at him blankly.

"I begin to think you're going off your dot," he said, with a glance towards the door. "I suppose I don't want to buy up used plates, do I? What's the good of them?"

"To destroy."

"Eh?"

"I thought you might like to smash up the plate," explained Wally.

"Oh, you're dotty!" said Mellish impatiently. "If this is a joke, I'm blessed if I see where it comes in. I'm off." He turned towards the door.

"Right-ho!" said Wally. "If you prefer me to sell the plate to Tom Merry, I dare say he will take it off my hands. He would be interested to see a snapshot of the Sixth Form passage, with a fellow about your size kneeling outside Kildare's door, with his ear to the keyhole."

It was a bold stroke on Wally's part; but it hit the mark. Mellish stopped dead, and then he turned round from the door, trembling in every limb.

"Wh-wh-what's that?" he gasped.

"Getting deaf?" asked Wally.

"Wh-what did you say?"

"You heard what I said."

"You—you've got a snap of the Sixth Form passage in that camera?" asked Mellish, who seemed to be breathing with difficulty.

"What-ho!"

"Taken when?"

"You can work that out for yourself. Try to remember the exact minute you were listening at Kildare's door," said Wally calmly.

"I—I wasn't—I—I didn't—"

"I can tell you the time, if you like, that you were there. It was just after Tom Merry came out of Kildare's study."

"You—you spying young hound—"

"Well, I like that!" said Wally indignantly. "What were you doing yourself?"

"You—you're a blackmailing young villain!" hissed Mellish. "You took that photograph to get money out of me!"

"Business is business, you know!" said Wally. "I'm open to sell you this camera."

"With—the negative in it?"

"Certainly!"

"Three-and-six?" said Mellish, with a glance at the camera.

"Three-and-six!" exclaimed Wally, in astonishment. "Why, it cost me that!"

"You can get them for that anywhere, that kind," said Mellish, fumbling in his pocket. "I'm willing to give you the price of a new one."

"The price has gone up," said Wally calmly. "The price of that camera, containing my snapshot, is ten shillings."

"What?"

"Getting deaf again?" smiled Wally. "I should recommend an ear trumpet, if you find it coming on you like this. Or you might see a doctor."

"You extortionate young villain!"

"Ten bob is cheap. I can't afford to take snaps for nothing. And a really good interior is worth money. You can keep the picture as a souvenir—you can keep it by you all your life, to remind you in your old age how you started in life as a criminal," said Wally.

Mellish snapped his teeth.

"Look here, you young cad!" he hissed. "If this gets out, it means trouble for me; but I shall let all the fellows know about your trying to get money out of me to keep it dark. That's blackmail."

"You ought to like me better for that, old son. It's in your own line, you know. Are you going to buy this camera for ten shillings, or are you not?"

"I—I'll give you five."

"Ten bob is the price. A really effective picture of Mellish of the Fourth, in his favourite attitude, with his ear at a keyhole—"

grinned Wally.

"Shut up!" said Mellish anxiously, breathing hard. "Anybody might pass the door and hear you, you young fool!"

"Everybody in the School House will hear me, soon, if you don't come to terms," said the fag. "Now then!"

Mellish's eyes glittered. He made a sudden spring towards Wally, and snatched the camera from his hand.

Crash!

The camera descended upon the floor, with all the force of the Fourth-Former's arm behind it. There was a smashing sound.

"My only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally.

Mellish regarded him with a sneering grin.

"There, you young cad! Now I'll give you nothing. What's become of your proofs now?" he exclaimed. "You should have taken the three-and-six while you had a chance."

Wally laughed.

"Well, the camera isn't much good," he remarked. "But I'll take the ten bob for what is left of it. Also the other negative."

Mellish started in dismay.

"The—the other negative!" he stammered.

"Custom of, mine to take two snaps at any picture I'm very particular about," said Wally cheerfully. "You see, I guessed that you might do something of that sort. There was only one used plate in that camera, and it's gone to pot.

The other is in my locker in the Third Form-room. Price ten bob, net."

"You—you awful young thief!" gasped Mellish. "Suppose I pay you for the negative, how do I know that you haven't got others?"

"You'll have to take my word for that," said Wally coolly. "Still, if you'd prefer to see the finished print hung up on the wall in the common-room, for all the fellows to see—"

"Hold on! I—I haven't ten bob now—I'll give you five now and the rest to-morrow!" panted Mellish.

"Shell out!"

Mellish, with trembling fingers, extracted the shillings from his pocket. Wally struck a match, and lighted the Form-room gas.

"Gentlemen," he called out, "kindly step into view, and behold our respected friend Mellish trying to bribe and corrupt a respectable youth!"

Mellish gave a yell of terror. For, at Wally's words, the door of the wall-cupboard was flung open, and the concealed juniors rushed out; and Tom Merry and Blake and D'Arcy rose into view from behind the Form-master's desk. They advanced upon the cad of the Fourth with grim looks.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Brought to Book.

TOM MERRY & CO. surrounded the exposed plotter. Mellish did not make an effort to escape.

He knew that the game was up, and the chums of the School House were too many for him. He gazed at the accusing faces round him, and his jaw dropped with fear.

"So it was you!" said Tom Merry grimly.

The coins fell from Mellish's nerveless hand, and rattled upon the Form-room floor. He gasped painfully for breath.

"Bai Jove!"

"It was Mellish, then!" said Blake. "Listened outside Kildare's door! The awful cad! And then told the story and put it on Tom Merry!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I—I—!" stammered Mellish. His voice died away. He could not deny what he had admitted in words in the hearing of all the juniors. He realised that he had been caught in a trap; and his brain was reeling with it.

"It's cost me a camera!" said Wally regretfully. "But it was worth it."

"I'll buy you a new camera," said Tom Merry gratefully—"and a jolly good one. You were a deep little beggar, Wally."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as havin' twapped this awful wascal in a weally clevah way, Wally, deah boy."

"Well, I had to look into the matter," said Wally modestly. "You Shell fellows were hardly up to it, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You can gas as much as you like, after this, kid," he said.

"What are we going to do with Mellish?" asked Kangaroo, with a menacing glance at the cad of the Fourth.

"Bump him!"

"Frogs-march him!"

"Rag him baldheaded!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Collar him!"

Mellish staggered back against the door.

"I—I say—hands off!" he gasped. "It was only a—a joke! I was going to own up, all the time, you know. And—and Levison and Crooke knew the facts, too. They—they helped me fix this on Tom Merry, and—and—"

"Beautiful set of rotters!" said Monty Lowther. "We might have suspected something of the sort. Pah!"

"Bump him!"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry quietly. "He's got to go to Kildare and Langton, and own up before them. Then we can let the cad off. He's not worth soling our hands on."

"Vewy twue, deah boy."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Blake. "March him along!"

The juniors closed round Mellish. They took him by the arms, and marched him out of the Form-room. In the midst of the crowd he was marched along to the Sixth-Form passage, and up to the door of Kildare's study. Tom Merry knocked at the door, and opened it, and the crowd poured in.

Kildare jumped up in surprise.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed.

There were two other seniors in the study, Langton and Darrel. They stared at the juniors in surprise, and Langton's brow darkened at the sight of Tom Merry. Tom Merry met his glance fearlessly.

"We've got the giddy criminal!" explained Wally.

"What?"

"It's true!" said Blake. "Mellish has owned up that he

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"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"

listened outside your door on Wednesday evening, and heard you and Langton talking. Then he fixed it up with Crooke and Levison to give the story away, and pretend that it came from Tom Merry!"

"My hat!"

"He's owned up!" said Figgins. "The awful cad!"

"I-I remember thinking there was somebody at the door!" exclaimed Langton. "You remember, Kildare. But when I opened the door there was nobody there."

Kildare fixed a stern glance upon the trembling cad of the Fourth.

"Is this true, Mellish?" he demanded.

The question was hardly necessary. Mellish's looks were enough. The cad of the Fourth cast a wild glance round him.

"I-I—" he stammered.

"He admitted it, and all of us heard him," said Tom Merry.

"I-I only did it for fun!" groaned Mellish, "and—and it was really Levison's idea, not mine. And—and Crooke backed me up. I-I only meant to give Tom Merry a bit of a whack, you know, because—because— But I was going to own up."

"You wouldn't have owned up, if I hadn't made you," said Wally.

Mellish licked his dry lips. He was shrinking from the eyes of the St. Jim's captain, but there was no escape from him.

"So you listened at my door?" said Kildare.

"I-I—I—"

"Yes or no!" rapped out the captain of St. Jim's.

"Ye-e-es!"

"You heard Langton telling me about Simons."

"Ye-e-es."

"And you told the other fellows?"

"I—I let it out."

"With the intention of allowing us, and all the fellows, to suppose that Tom Merry had broken his word of honour, and betrayed the secret?" said Kildare grimly.

"It—it was only a lark!" groaned Mellish.

"Yes, or no?"

"Ye-es."

Kildare turned to Tom Merry.

"I beg your pardon, Merry!" he said. "I'm sorry I doubted you. My excuse is that I couldn't be expected to suspect anybody of being so base as this. Mellish is a bit outside my experience."

"Same here!" said Langton. "I'm sorry, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry's face was very bright now.

"It's all right," he said. "I never broke my word, and I only wanted it to be established that I hadn't. I don't want to hurt that squirming cad. But I think you ought to tell all the fellows, Kildare, and set me right with them."

"I shall, certainly," said Kildare. "But why has Mellish admitted this? Is there any proof outside his own confession?"

"It was Wally's work, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"I had to look into the matter," explained Wally. "It was up to the Third to see it set right, you know. I worked out that it was Mellish, and I made him own up in the presence of witnesses."

"The young cad was spying himself," said Mellish spitefully. "He took a snap with a camera—"

"A snap of Mellish kneeling outside your door, and listening at the keyhole," said Herries. "Blessed if I know what you wanted to get up that scene in the Form-room for, young D'Arcy. The negative would have been enough, without Mellish confessing?"

Wally grinned.

"Only, you see, there isn't any negative!" he explained.

"Eh!"

"That was a little bit of spoof," said Wally coolly. "I didn't tell Mellish I had snapped him listening at Kildare's door. As I hadn't done it, I couldn't say so. But I dare say he concluded I had, from what I said to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish ground his teeth. He realised, a little too late, how completely he had been tricked.

"I was very careful to keep inside the facts," said Wally. "But Mellish certainly got the impression that I had that photograph. He agreed to buy it of me, and that was what I wanted. He owned up the whole bizney, with these chaps hidden in the room. It was the only way I could think of to make him own up."

"You lying young villain!" shrieked Mellish. "You told me you had two snapshots of the Sixth Form passage—"

"So I had. I took them this afternoon, so as to have facts on my side," said Wally coolly. "If you hadn't had a guilty conscience, you'd have spotted the wheeze at once. I had to get you to own up. It was the only way, and now you've owned up!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally don't quite approve—"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "It was up to me to clear Tom Merry, and I've done it. And somebody's got to get me a new camera!"

"I'm going to do that—a first-class one, too," said Tom Merry.

"You have done vewy well indeed, Wally. But weally—"

"I'm glad this has been cleared up," said Kildare. "I'm sorry I doubted you, Tom Merry, and I'll take back what I said to you about it in public, too. You can leave Mellish here. I've got something to say to him."

And Tom Merry & Co. trooped out of the captain's study. Mellish would very gladly have followed them; but he had a painful interview to go through first. As Tom Merry & Co. went down the passage, the swishing of a cane was heard, and wild howls of anguish rang from Kildare's study.

Wally was the hero of the hour, and Tom Merry & Co. could not make enough of him. Wally was the guest of honour at a tremendous feed in Tom Merry's study, and the study was crammed with guests, who came from far and near to testify their repentance of having thought badly of the captain of the Shell, and to share in the feed. Tom Merry was re-instated in the good opinion of the school, and was more popular than ever. And while the celebration was going on in Tom Merry's study, Mellish was alone in his room, aching from the terrific thrashing he had received from the captain of St. Jim's, and bitterly reflecting upon the truth of the old saying, that the way of the transgressor is hard. And more bitter and lasting than the licking, was the scorn of all the St. Jim's fellows towards the exposed and disgraced Spy of the School.

THE END.

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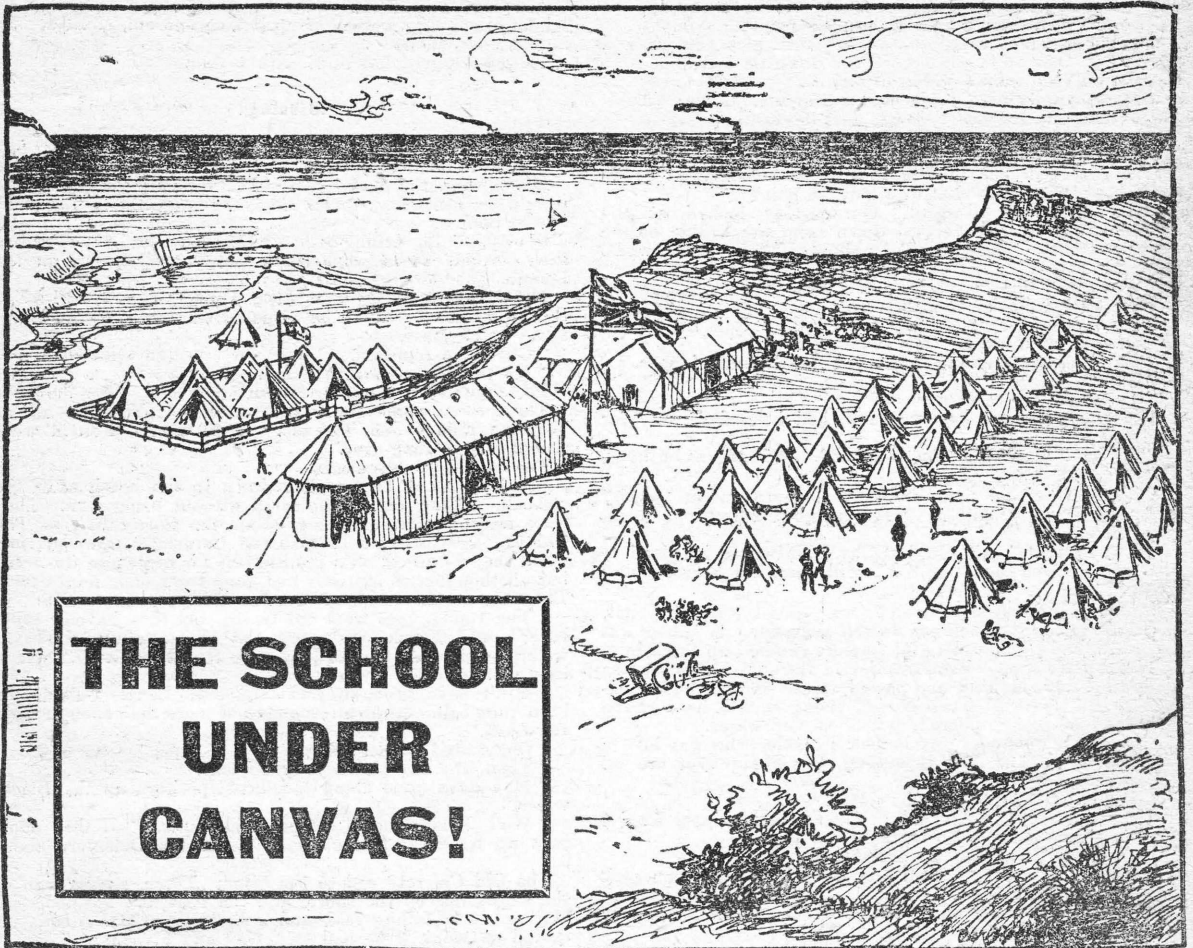
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**THE MOST EXCITING SCHOOL SERIAL EVER WRITTEN.**



## THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!

**A Rousing, New and Original School Story of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk and Co.  
By PROSPER HOWARD.**

### WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

"The School will assemble in Big Hall at half-past six o'clock. An important announcement will be made.

"(Signed), E. MONK, Headmaster."

The appearance of the above brief notice on the school board is the first hint that the Rylcombe Grammar School receives of the great change in its circumstances that is pending—nothing less than the removal of the whole school into temporary quarters under canvas by the sea, on the Essex coast. Just at this time the ranks of the Fourth Form are reinforced by Gustave Blanc—immediately christened Mont Blong—a new boy from across the Channel. Mont Blong, who attaches himself to Gordon Gay & Co., is a slim and elegant youth with a peculiar flow of English, but he quickly shows his worth by holding his own with Carker, the bully of the Fourth. Amidst great excitement the Grammarians travel down to their new abode. During the first few days Gordon

Gay discovers that there is more in Mont Blong than at first meets the eye, and that the French junior can speak English fluently. Gordon Gay and Frank Monk & Co. one day see Herr Hentzel in secret conversation with two German military officers in a cave on the seashore. They are surprised to hear from Mont Blong that the three are spies.

While the Cornstalk Co., with Tadpole and Mont Blong, are out rowing one day they notice an interchange of signals by heliograph between the cliff and a tramp steamer. The steamer soon afterwards changes its course so as to pass between the boat and the beach, and so cut the juniors off. Gordon Gay & Co. row for the shore, but the steamer nears them rapidly. They can distinguish the faces of the seamen—evidently foreign—watching them over the side with intense interest.

(Now go on with the story).

### In the Hands of the Enemy.

Tadpole uttered a sudden cry of alarm.

"My dear fellows," he exclaimed, apparently seeing the steamer for the first time, "you are running right into that ship!"

"Go hon!" growled Gordon Gay, tugging at his oar.

"But you will be run down—"

"Cheese it!"

Tadpole stared blankly at his companions and then at the ship. There was no doubt that the boat would be run down if both the boat and the tramp-steamer kept on their courses unchanged.

And the steamer evidently did not mean to budge. She

was so much faster than the boat that it was easy for her to interpose her bulk between the juniors and the beach.

The Grammarians rested upon their oars at last.

"No good running right on and getting smashed up," said Gay grimly. "She's after us, and we can't help ourselves now."

The boat rocked on the wash of the steamer. The vessel rounded to close to the oscillating boat, and the captain shouted from the bridge.

"Boat ahoy!"

He shouted in English, but with a guttural German accent. Gordon Gay stood up in the boat to reply.

"Hallo! What do you want? Can't you keep on your own side? Do you want all the blessed sea?"

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Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete School Tale  
of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

**"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"**

"We pick you up."

"We don't want to be picked up."

"You will come alongside," shouted the German skipper.

"I tell you we don't want to be picked up."

"Tat will make no difference. We shall pick you up, and if you not come on board we will run down tat boat."

"Phew!" murmured Wootton major.

"My—my goodness!" ejaculated Tadpole, in amazement.

"The man must be mad! What does he mean, Gay?"

"He means mischief," said Gordon Gay grimly.

"But—but this is a—unlawful proceeding," stammered Tadpole. "Call out to him that he is not allowed to do anything of the kind. Let us argue the point—"

"Oh, cheese it, Taddy!" Gordon Gay looked at the German skipper as he glared down from the bridge of the tramp-steamer. "Keep off!" he shouted back. "We won't come on board!"

"No fear!" murmured Jack Wootton.

Mont Blong shook his head.

"He vill not let us go," he muttered. "It is zat ve are in ze hands of ze enemy, my shums."

"Will you come aboard?" shouted the German skipper.

"No!"

"Then take the consequences!"

The tramp-steamer swung round, and headed directly for the boat.

"My hat!" Jack Wootton exclaimed. "He means business, Gay."

"I say, Gay, old man, we shall have to go on board," muttered Harry Wootton. "It's no good being run down, you know."

"I know that," said Gordon Gay. He waved his hand to the steamer and shouted, "We will come on board, under protest."

It was high time—the steamer was almost upon the boat. But it stopped, and the boat floated alongside. A ladder was let down, and the Grammarian juniors climbed up the side.

The skipper rapped out an order in German. Two seamen descended into the boat, and passed up the side all the belongings of the juniors. Then one of them stove a hole in the boat, and as they clambered up it filled with water.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Tadpole, who was lost in amazement. "The boat is sinking, Gay! However are we to get ashore?"

The boat settled down in the water.

The steamer held on its way. The German skipper fixed a frowning glance upon the Grammarian juniors.

"You have a packet?" he exclaimed.

"We've got several," said Gordon Gay. "Did you pick us up to steal our lunch?"

Wootton major and minor chuckled. The German skipper scowled.

"You have a packet of letters," he said.

Gay shook his head.

"We haven't," he said. "Why should we take a packet of letters out on a cruise in the bay, sir? You're dreaming!"

"The letters tat you have stolen from mein friend, Herr Hentzel," said the German skipper, between his teeth. "Letters und papers und maps."

"Nothing of the sort!"

"Give them to me at once!" said the German harshly.

"Can't be did!"

The German skipper gave an order. The lunch-basket was opened and searched, and then the seamen searched the juniors themselves.

The skipper seemed a little nonplussed when the search was finished and the papers had not come to light.

"Den you did not have de papers with you?" he exclaimed.

Gordon Gay yawned.

"I told you so," he replied. "As a matter of fact, we're getting fed up with Herr Hentzel's papers. Ever since he lost them he's been like a hen that's lost its chicks."

"Where are de papers?"

"Blessed-if I know!"

The captain muttered something in his beard.

"You'll have to take us ashore now," said Gordon Gay, "and you'll have to pay for that boat."

"We shall certainly inform the police," said Tadpole. "You have acted illegally, my good man, and put us to great inconvenience."

The German captain smiled grimly.

"You vill not find it so easy to inform der police," he said. "Unless I have dem papers, you do not go ashore again. Tell me where dey are, and I send to seek dem."

"I don't know where they are," said Gordon Gay.

"Den you stay aboard dis ship until you do know!"

"Do you mean that you are going to kidnap us?" demanded Gordon Gay, in amazement.

"You are prisoners here till I have dem papers."

"But, you rotten bound—"

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Gordon Gay was interrupted. At a sign from the German captain three or four seamen threw themselves upon the Grammarians, and the juniors were dragged below. In a minute more they were shut up in a state-room, and the door locked upon them.

They were prisoners now, with a vengeance!

### Missing!

"Blanc!"

No reply.

"Gustave Blanc!"

Mr. Adams, the master of the Fourth, who was taking the roll-call in the school under canvas, glanced along the ranks of the Fourth.

It was evening calling-over, and the boys had assembled in their various Forms, but there were empty places in the Fourth.

Mr. Adams marked down Mont Blong as absent, and called the next names. When he came to Gordon Gay there was again no response.

"Gay!" he repeated.

"Not here, sir," said Frank Monk.

The Fourth-Form master frowned.

Three more names were not replied to; Wootton major, Wootton minor, and Tadpole. Five of the Fourth were absent from calling-over.

The boys were dismissed.

Frank Monk & Co. strolled down to the beach after the roll-call, slipping out of the camp without being seen. They were feeling a little anxious about the Cornstalk Co. The Old Co. had intended to give the Cornstalks a warm time when they returned, as a punishment for capturing the boat, but all thoughts of reprisals had gone from their minds now. They were anxious about Gordon Gay.

"The young asses went out to sea, but they haven't come back," said Frank, surveying the wide, rolling waste of waters, over which the shadows were creeping thickly. "Have they gone too far, or—"

"Can't have been an accident," said Lane. "The sea's been quite calm all the afternoon—not more than enough wind for a sail."

"Oh, quite," said Carboy.

"Then why haven't they come back?"

"May have gone along the coast, perhaps up the Black-water."

"Well, I wish they'd come," said Monk. "If they don't turn up by dark, I think we'd better tell Delamere about it."

The Old Co. returned to the camp. There was no sign of the Cornstalks on the shore, and the boat had not come in. Darkness was falling fast, and a little later Mr. Adams inquired of Monk if he had seen Gay and his companions.

"No, sir," said Monk.

"Do you know where they are gone?" the Form-master asked.

Frank hesitated for a moment, but he was growing very anxious himself, and he decided to speak.

"They had a boat out this afternoon, sir," he said. "They haven't come in. But I don't see how anything could have happened in this calm weather."

Mr. Adams looked worried.

"It is very singular that they have not returned," he said. "If they do not come in soon they must be searched for."

But the evening passed away, and there was no sign of Gordon Gay & Co. Bedtime for the juniors came, and by that time the camp was in a state of great alarm. The prefects went along the shore in both directions, and Mr. Adams visited Netherby village, but nothing was to be heard of Gordon Gay & Co.

The juniors went to bed at the usual time, but they were not much inclined to sleep. Even Carker was looking subdued. It was only too clear by this time that something must have happened to the Cornstalks.

It was a night of anxiety and unrest in the school under canvas.

When morning dawned, Frank Monk and Lane and Carboy turned out without waiting for the call of Corporal Cutts' bugle, and dressed themselves and hurried down to the shore.

They found the old fisherman to whom the boat belonged, but he had seen nothing of it; the boat and its crew had vanished seaward, and gone from human ken. The Fourth-Formers looked at one another with pale faces.

"It must have been an accident," said Monk. "Changing places out at sea, perhaps—or they may have been run down."

"Let's have a look along the shore," said Lane. "If any accident happened to the boat, it ought to have drifted in."

The chums of the Fourth started along the beach. They made their way round the headland, where fragments of

**"THE HIDDEN HORROR!"**

is the Title of the Grand Complete School Tale contained in our companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.





"Buck up, kids!" shouted Gordon Gay, and with a spring like a tiger he was upon the German. The skipper staggered back, taken completely by surprise, and the juniors piled on him in a moment. (See page 26.)

drifting wreckage were frequently found upon the sand. The tide was out, leaving long stretches of mud exposed to the rays of the sun.

Frank Monk uttered a sudden exclamation, and pointed to a dark object embedded in the mud at some distance out.

It was an overturned boat.

In a moment more the three Grammarians were rushing towards the water, splashing in the pools left by the receding tide, careless of stumblings and wettings.

They reached the boat, which lay upon its side, jammed in the mud and sand.

Monk's face went white.

"It's their boat!" he said in a low voice.

The juniors knew it again at once. It was the boat in which Gordon Gay, Wootton major, and Harry Wootton, and Tadpole and Mont Blong had gone out the previous afternoon. There was a great, jagged hole in the timbers, showing that the boat had been stove in at sea, but the hole did not appear to have been made by a collision. From its situation in the timbers, that was impossible. Frank Monk gazed at it with wide eyes.

"The boat's been sunk on purpose!" he said. "Look here—the timbers have been stove in. It was scuttled!"

"But—but how—why—"

"Goodness knows!"

The juniors gazed at the boat, and then turned their eyes seaward. The sea was rolling and shining in the summer sun, calm and glimmering, breaking gently upon the sands with a low, musical murmur. What terrible secret was hidden now by those calm and shining waters?

"We'd better get back and tell the Head," muttered Car-boy.

Frank Monk nodded, and the three juniors retraced their steps towards the school camp. Herr Hentzel came round

the headland, and stopped them with a gesture. He had evidently seen them at the boat.

There was a very peculiar expression upon the German master's face.

"Is tat te boat tat was lost?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Monk shortly.

"And te poys—"

"There's no sign of them about the boat. It's been scuttled, and the tide brought it in afterwards."

"Tat is ferry serious. It looks as if Gordon Gay and te rest have been trowned, ain't it?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"You had petter tell te Head."

"We're going to do that now, sir."

The juniors hurried on towards the camp. There was a peculiar smile upon the face of Otto Hentzel. He walked down to where the boat lay, picking his way carefully among the pools and pebbles.

Frank Monk paused as the juniors reached the camp.

"I wonder—" he muttered.

"What?" asked Lane.

"Does Hentzel know anything about it?" said Frank, in a low voice. "You remember the affair in the cave on the headland? You know what Hentzel is? Is it possible—"

He broke off. Dark and fearful suspicions were rising in his mind, but they could be nothing more than suspicions. The juniors hurried into the camp in silence. A few minutes later Dr. Monk, the Head of the Grammar School, knew of the discovery of the boat, and as soon as the news spread there was excited comment upon it among the Grammarians. In the Fourth Form there were very gloomy looks. For the discovery of the empty boat thrown ashore by the tide seemed to them all to point to only one conclusion—that in life they would never again see Gordon Gay or his companions.

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Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"

## Kidnapped.

The early rays of the sun glimmered in at the porthole, and Gordon Gay awoke from an uneasy slumber.

Gordon Gay & Co. had slept uncomfortably enough upon the floor, and twice during the night they had been visited by the German skipper of the steamer.

He had only come to repeat what he had said on deck, and Gordon Gay had made the same reply—that he had not taken the papers, did not know where they were, and so could not give them up.

Then the Grammarian juniors had been left alone till the morning.

Gordon Gay was the first to awaken.

The Germans had left the juniors unbound for the night, but they had locked them in, and Gay trying the door as soon as he rose, found it still locked on the outside.

He crossed over to the porthole, and looked out.

The sun was shining upon the gleaming waters, and he could see the sea and the sky, but no trace of land.

Where were they?

Had the steamer turned her stern upon the English shore during the night, and taken them away to sea?

It looked like it. Gordon Gay thought of the anxiety his friends would be feeling in the school under canvas, and he compressed his lips. Jack Wootton sat up on the hard floor and yawned.

"Hallo! What's the time?"

"Not rising bell yet," said Gordon Gay, grinning. "But I'm hungry. They forgot to send us any supper last night."

"My hat! I'm peckish, too," said Jack Wootton. "I suppose the brutes don't mean to starve us. I say, it's pretty thick, kidnapping us like this."

Harry Wootton rose and shook himself.

"Nothing to eat, I suppose?" he remarked.

"Nix!"

"I say, you know," murmured Tadpole, "I'm hungry. I am astounded by this unaccountable behaviour of these people, Gay. I have pointed out to the German captain three times that his conduct is utterly illegal."

"Go hon."

"He does not seem to care," said Tadpole. "It is very remarkable. However, I hope we shall get some brekker soon."

"Mon Dieu!" said Mont Blong. "J'ai faim, moi—I am hungry, too, viz myself. But I zink zat ve get nozzing."

Gordon Gay started.

"You don't think they mean to starve us?" he exclaimed.

"Oui, oui, my shum."

"My hat! But—"

"Why?" demanded Wootton major.

"Zey want ze papers."

"But we haven't got them," said Gordon Gay.

"I zink perhaps zey give us nozzing till zey are satisfy," said Mont Blong. "I hope not, my shum, but I zink zat."

"Phew!"

"But we can't give up the papers when we've not got them," said Jack Wootton. "I suppose you could tell them something about those papers if you liked, Mont Blong."

The French junior smiled.

"Perhaps," he said, "zat is so. But even if I wish, I not able to tell zem how to get ze papers."

"Why not?" asked Gay.

"Because zey are sent to London."

"Oh!"

"Then you took them?" exclaimed Wootton major.

The French junior nodded.

"But—but you—"

"You see, zey are not what Herr Hentzel have say," explained Mont Blong. "Ze papers zat he lose he have said are private papers of his—zat he write. It is not so. Zey are maps and plans for ze German Admiralty."

"Oh!"

"And zey are quite safe," said Mont Blong cheerfully. "Zey are on ze way to London by zis time, and vatever happen to us, zey are safe."

"That's all very well," remarked Harry Wootton. "But I'd like to be safe myself, too. I'm getting frightfully hungry."

"Same here," said his major. "You seem to have got us into a pretty fix, Mont Blong."

"I am sorry, my shum. But I do vat is my duty to my country, and you also shall be willing to suffer in ze cause of England."

"Yes, that's all right. But I'd like my breakfast all the same."

"I don't understand what you fellows are talking about," said Tadpole. "I think it is very hard that I should be treated like this. I am exceedingly hungry."

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## "THE HIDDEN HORROR!"

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"Well, let's see what the rotters are going to do, anyway," said Gordon Gay. "We'll fetch 'em down."

He thumped and kicked on the door of the state-room. His chums joined him, and the noise they made rang through the steamer.

Footsteps were heard outside in a few minutes, and the door was unlocked.

The door was pushed open, and the German skipper appeared. He frowned darkly at the Grammarian juniors.

"Vat is it tat you vant?" he asked.

"Brekker!" said the juniors, in one voice.

That was evidently a new word to the German, and he looked puzzled.

"Breakfast!" explained Gordon Gay. "Grub, you know."

"Tommy!" said Wootton major.

"Food!" said Harry Wootton.

"I am exceedingly hungry, sir," said Tadpole. "You have no right to detain us here against our will, and—"

"Oh, cheese it, Taddy," said Gordon Gay.

"My dear Gay—"

The German skipper smiled grimly.

"You get no food on my ship," he said.

"Do you mean to starve us?" exclaimed Gordon Gay indignantly.

"I give you noting."

"But we—"

"I give you noting, unless first I have dem papers."

"We haven't got the papers," growled Gordon Gay.

The German smiled.

"I know that you have them not," he said; "but you know where dey are, and you tell me how to find dem."

"I can't!" said Gay.

"Den you have noting to eat."

"Look here, we're not going to stand that," Gordon Gay exclaimed desperately. "We're going to have grub if we stay on this ship."

The German skipper shrugged his shoulders.

"You refuse, then?" asked Gay.

"Ja, ja!"

"Then there'll be trouble."

The German laughed.

Gordon Gay's eyes gleamed.

"Back up, kids!" he shouted.

And with a spring like a tiger he was upon the German.

## The Upper Hand.

Gordon Gay's sudden attack took the German skipper completely by surprise. He staggered back in the alley-way, and went with a crash to the floor, with the Cornstalk on top of him. He struggled furiously, and tried to get his hand into his pocket—but the other juniors were upon him in a moment. He was dragged into the state-room, and the juniors piled on him. There was a hoarse shout in German, and a rush of feet outside; but Mont Blong, in a twinkling, changed the key to the inside of the door, closed it, and locked it. The next moment there was a heavy blow outside, and an angry voice in German called out for the door to be opened.

The German skipper was struggling fiercely in the grasp of the four Grammarians. If he could have succeeded in drawing his revolver, he would certainly have used it. But he had no chance.

Wootton major had a tight grip on his right wrist, and Jack Wootton hung on to his left arm. Gordon Gay had him by the throat, and Mont Blong had hold of his hair from behind. He rolled and struggled on the floor, dragging the juniors to and fro, till he was exhausted. Tadpole did not take part in the tussle. He stood looking on in a dazed condition, evidently hardly knowing whether he was upon his head or his heels.

"Dear mo!" he gasped, a dozen times. "My dear fellows! Oh, dear!"

The German skipper's struggles subsided at last.

He lay upon his back, helpless, with the juniors piling on him; and Gordon Gay felt for his revolver and jerked it away.

The German made another effort, and Gay calmly placed the muzzle of the revolver to his neck.

A wave of pallor swept over the skipper's face.

"Take tat away!" he panted. "It is loaded."

"Better keep still, then."

"Take it away! It might—might—"

"Yes, if you jolt my arm, it might go off," assented Gordon Gay agreeably. "Quite likely. Better take it calmly, hadn't you?"

The German ceased to move.

His eyes glittered with rage as they were turned upon

the cool Cornstalk, who held the revolver with a steady hand.

Crash!

It was a fierce attack upon the door from without.

"Call out to your men to leave the door alone," said Gay.

"I will not."

"Do you want this pistol to go off?"

"You—you dare not—"

"Stand clear, you fellows, while I blow his brains out, if he has any," said Gordon Gay, handling the trigger of the revolver.

The German gave a gasp of terror. He did not believe that Gordon Gay would shoot him, but he thought it very likely that the revolver might go off, thus carelessly handled by a schoolboy. Which was exactly the impression Gordon Gay wished to give him.

"Stop!" gasped the skipper. "Turn tat pistol anoder way."

"Tell them to clear, then."

"Ja, ja, ja!"

The German skipper shouted to the men outside, in German, and the heavy blows upon the door ceased. A deep buzz of guttural voices could still be heard.

The skipper glared at Gordon Gay, his eyes scintillating with rage.

"Vat is it tat you would do?" he hissed.

"We want some brekker," said Gordon Gay, "and we want to get off this ship. Mind, so long as we stay in this cabin, you stay with us. You've put yourself in our hands, and we're going to keep you. You're our prisoner, now, as much as we're yours."

"Hear, hear!" said Wootton major.

"Ach, mein Gott!"

"I suppose you didn't imagine that mere English school-boys could handle you in this way," said Gordon Gay cheerfully. "Bless your little Dutch heart, there are enough schoolboys like us in England to wallop all your crowd when you come over. We shan't leave more than a few grease-spots to show where you've been."

The German ground his teeth.

"Just now, you've got us, and we've got you," said Gordon Gay. "We shall have to have an exchange of prisoners, you know."

"Good egg!" said Wootton major.

"Zat is a good idea, my shum," said Mont Blong. "But I do not see how it is zat ve sall do zat."

"Where there's a will there's a way, you know. We've got to get off this ship. I suppose the Deutchers up there will not be able to get on without their skipper, and they can't get him out of this cabin unless we let them. Make sure of this rotter first—tie up his hands and feet."

The German skipper began to struggle again.

Gordon Gay jammed the barrel of the revolver into his mouth, looking down upon the German with a very grim expression.

"My finger's on the trigger," he said. "You know what will happen if you struggle. Better keep still!"

The German spluttered.

But, furious as he was, he took that good advice. He did not want the revolver to go off, and send a bullet crashing through his head.

Wootton major and Mont Blong bound the German hand and foot, using their handkerchiefs and his own belt for the purpose.

Then Gordon Gay rose to his feet.

The skipper of the tramp steamer lay helpless on the floor, writhing in his bonds, and foaming with rage.

"Ach! But you shall suffer for all dis!" he ground out between his teeth.

Gordon Gay nodded.

"You'll do the suffering for the present," he said. "Mind, when your men come along again, you're to order them to keep off. If there's any danger of their breaking in and collaring us, you'll get what's in this pistol. We're not going to be kidnapped, my Deutcher friend. Before you manage that, somebody will get hurt. We're going to be taken back to Essex."

He stepped to the porthole, and scanned the horizon.

So far as he could see, there was nothing but water round the steamer now, and he saw a passing steamer in the distance. But his view from the porthole was limited, and the tramp might have been near land for all he knew.

He put the hand holding the revolver out of the porthole, and pulled the trigger.

Bang!

The bullet flashed away into the water, and a little curl of smoke rose.

(Another long instalment of this exciting school-serial story in next Thursday's issue of "The Gem" Library. Price one penny.)

**"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"**

## A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

*The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from those readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.*

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons. One taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

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All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, 23, Bouverie Street, London, E.C., England."

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Will Ronald and Percy Yates, of St. Helen's, England, kindly communicate with their old chum, Cyril Jones, 6, Basque Road, Eden Terrace, Auckland, New Zealand.

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*The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.*

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## OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE

For Next Thursday.**"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"**

by Martin Clifford. From the above title, which is that of next Thursday's splendid complete tale of St. Jim's, my readers will gather that Mr. Ratcliff, the sour New House master, has "broken out" again, as the juniors would term it. As has happened before, Mr. Ratcliff rouses a storm he is unable to quell, with results that are certainly

**"ROUGH ON RATCLIFF!"**"Once a Gemite Always a Gemite!"

The idea of having the early Tom Merry and Harry Wharton stories reprinted, as was suggested by a reader in these columns some time back, is one that my chums seem determined not to let me forget, and every week I receive numerous letters urging me to give the matter my special attention. I can assure my readers, however, I require absolutely no urging on this particular subject, which, as I have said before, constantly occupies my thoughts. I am, of course, only too pleased to hear my readers' opinions on this, as on all other matters, and provided I can be assured of my chums' support, I am confident that the difficulties attending the taking of such an important and unusual step can be smoothed away, and that the reprinting of the magnificent school tales published in the early days in "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries can become an accomplished fact. Here is a letter from a "Manchester Reader" which is typical of those I am receiving every day.

"Dear sir,—I should like to mention I have been a reader of 'The Magnet' and 'The Gem' Libraries for over three years, and have always enjoyed the school tale and serial in both.

"I have noticed this week in the Editor's Notes, that one of the readers of the above would like you to publish the back numbers of 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet.' It would be a treat to the readers of the Libraries old and new, and I might say, although I have read them once, I should like to read them again. I do not throw my paper away when I have read it, but pass it on to another person who has never taken any interest in 'The Magnet' or 'The Gem' before, owing to not seeing a copy of same. Thanking you for providing such interesting papers, I am, dear sir, yours truly.

"A Manchester Reader."

Thanks, "Manchester Reader." I have no doubt the publication of your letter will encourage still more readers to write to me expressing their views upon the most important question you have touched upon.

Replies in Brief.

G. & M., St. Helens.—I can only say in reply to your letter that I will bear your remarks in mind.

F. Jackson (Preston).—Thank you for your letter. I am sorry that I cannot publish your request, for reasons that were explained some weeks back in the two companion papers.

E. R. G. (Lee).—Thank you for your letter. You will find any of the leading London daily papers are suitable for the kind of advertisement you wish to insert.

H. Carr (Leeds).—You can obtain silkworms' eggs from Messrs. A. W. Gamage, of High Holborn, London, W.C.

"C. of C."—Thank you for your note. I will bear your suggestion in mind.

E. Higgins (W. Australia).—Thank you for your letter, and the appreciative way in which you speak of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries. "The Brotherhood of Iron" cannot yet be obtained in book form, but as soon as it is about to be published, notice to that effect will be given.

"Australian."—Many thanks for your letter and suggestions, which I will bear in mind. Your request for a correspondent will be inserted in due course.

E. C. T. (Bradford).—I do not know of any book such as you describe, but if one is published, I should think it quite probable that you might be able to obtain it from Messrs. Barr & Co., 23a, Barr Lane, London, E.C. At all events, they will be able to tell you if such a book is published.

Miss M. Weatherstone.—Thank you for your letter. Write again as soon as you like, as I am always pleased to hear my readers' opinions of the two companion papers.

C. Baird (London, N.E.).—Thanks for your very interesting and appreciative letter. You can obtain a book, entitled "Practical Ventriloquism," from L. Upcott Gill, Drury Lane, E.C., for 1s. 2d., post free.

F. Cummings (Manchester).—Many thanks for the help you have given me in increasing the popularity of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries. Why not pass your old copies on to non-readers belonging to your anti-smoking league.

F. Cahill (Dublin).—Thanks for letter. If your friend has tried without avail all the various tooth powders sold at the chemists, I should advise him to visit a dentist and have his teeth thoroughly examined.

V. B. H. F. (Plumstead), and C. Matthews (Egham).—I must thank you both for bringing to my notice the printer's error which occurred on page three of the cover of a "Gem" published some few weeks back.

Hints on Rope-Climbing.

The rope offers exercise as valuable and useful to the young athlete as that which can be obtained from any other piece of apparatus in the gymnasium, but for some reason, the art of rope-climbing has never attained all the popularity it deserves. There are two "standard" ways of rope-climbing, in one of which the arms and legs are both used, while the other calls for the use of the arms only. The first method is the easier to commence with, and should be carried out as follows:

Grasp the rope with both hands, allowing the lower end to pass between the thighs, under the knee, and over the instep of one foot; the other foot is placed upon the rope where it crosses the instep, to prevent the rope from slipping. By this method, most of the work of climbing falls upon the legs; these are brought with an upward movement from the waist, gripping the rope as described above while the arms are moved up to a higher position. When this way of climbing the rope has been practised sufficiently, the next step is to try the hand-over-hand method. Though the method can be slightly varied, the following directions are highly recommended.

Start by sitting on the floor beneath the rope, grasping it with both hands as far up as possible, the legs being extended flat along the floor. This relative position of the body and legs is maintained all the time you are climbing the rope. Keeping the knees stiff and the back as hollow as possible, you raise yourself up the rope with powerful, regular pulls, keeping time with your legs, still held out stiff in front of you. That is to say, each time you give an upward pull with one arm, you also kick downwards with one leg, with a movement as in walking. This gives you a sort of leverage each time you grasp at the rope.

The rope should be pulled towards you, in the direction of the abdomen.

The result of this exercise is, as may be imagined, strong and muscular arms and a powerful back; and besides the splendid muscular development that results from it, the knowledge of how to climb a rope smartly may prove very useful to any boy or girl at some time or other. It is one of the principal advantages of this particular form of gymnastics, that it is a very simple thing to fit up the necessary appliance. A manilla rope, about an inch and a quarter in diameter, can be fixed in any barn, garden, or even in a bedroom, for practice. It is a good tip to use a little powdered resin when rope-climbing, especially if the rope be new.

THE EDITOR.