"PULLING GAN WAGA'S LEG!" Grand New Adventure Story by SIDNEY DREW.

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WALLY D'ARCY & CO. TAKE THEIR MEDICINE!

The heroes of the Third at St. Jim's come up for cough mixture because they like the taste of it! But the cough mixture is changed to White Mixture—and it's not half so tasty! (See the grand school yarn inside.)

A SPLIT! There's nothing more painful, while it lasts, than a quarrel between two pals. Reginald Talbot realises this, and makes attempts to heal the breach between Marie Rivers and himself. But the breach widens, and Talbot is left floundering in a sea of despair!

FRIENDS DIVIDED!

A New Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, with Reginald Talbot and Miss Marie Rivers well to the fore.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 1.
Just Like Gussy!

"READY, Marie?"

Talbot of the Shell tapped on the door of Miss Marie's room in the school sanatorium, and called to his girl chum.

Talbot's query was answered at once.

The door was opened, and Marie Rivers appeared. The naturally pleasant face of the young school nurse looked particularly amiable now as she stood smiling at Talbot.

"Quite ready!" she said. "I am bringing my fur coat, Toff, as you see; but if you think it will not be necessary——"

"You'll want it," said Talbot. "It's warm enough now, but it will be jolly chilly this evening coming home from Abbotsford. Let me carry it for you, Marie."

Talbot took the coat, and accompanied his girl chum down into the sunny quadrangle.

It was a glorious afternoon in early spring—the sort of afternoon when it felt good to be alive.

The St. Jim's junior eleven had an away fixture with Abbotsford, and Miss Marie, released from her duties in the sanatorium, was travelling over with the team.

Miss Marie took a keen, almost boyish, interest in the welfare and progress of Tom Merry's eleven. She was, in fact, one of their most ardent supporters. Monty Lowther declared that Miss Marie was the team's lucky mascot. Certainly this appeared to be the case, for the team had won all the "out" matches at which Marie had been present, and on the few occasions when she had not been able to accompany them they had been beaten.

When Marie and Talbot appeared in the sunny quadrangle they found nine of the junior footballers, carrying bags, waiting on the School House steps.

There was a worried look on Tom Merry's face—almost a wrathy look. And the others were also looking impatient and annoyed.

The nine faces brightened up, however, as Miss Marie approached with Talbot, and the footballers lifted their caps in cheery salutation.

"Here's our lady mascot!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Miss Marie hasn't deserted us, anyway," said Manners. "That's something to be thankful for."

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "We can't do without our lucky mascot! But that burbling ass, Gussy——"

"Hallo! Man missing?" said Talbot.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, with a snort. "Our train goes in twenty minutes, and that howling duffer, D'Arcy, hasn't turned up! Seen anything of him, Talbot?"

"Not so much as his shadow," was the reply. "You're Gussy's keeper, Blake. Don't you know where he is?"

"He's not in the study," growled Blake. "Goodness knows where the silly ass has got to!"

"Have you looked for him?" asked Miss Marie, with a smile.

"Fact is, there's hardly time to go Gussy-hunting," said Tom Merry. "We shall have to hustle if we want to catch our train. You'd better go on ahead with Miss Marie, Talbot, while we search for the fathead."

"No, no," said Marie. "I'll wait here till you've found the truant."

"It will mean a sprint to the station."

"I rather fancy a brisk run," said Marie cheerfully.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake promptly rushed into the building in quest of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Where that noble youth had got to was a matter for speculation. He seemed to have spirited himself away.

Arthur Augustus was one of the shining lights of the junior eleven, and he had been specially counselled to be in readiness at one-thirty in the quad. It was now twenty minutes to two, and the swell of St. Jim's had not shown up.

Tom Merry and Blake, snorting with exasperation, carried out a lightning search. They rushed through the various corridors, calling their absent chum by name, in tones which a town-crier might have envied.

"Gussy!"

"D'Arcy!"

Study doors were opened, and grinning faces looked out.

"Man lost?" asked Cardew of the Fourth.

"Yes—and train lost into the bargain if we have to hunt for that ass Gussy much longer!" grunted Jack Blake.

"Try the dorm," suggested Cardew. "I expect that's where Vere de Vere will be—plumin' an' preenin' himself."

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "If Gussy's been fooling about up in the dorm all this time we'll bump him!"

The two searchers headed for the stairs. They bounded up them four at a time, feeling that Cardew had given them the correct clue to Gussy's whereabouts. It was more than likely that Arthur Augustus, absorbed in trying on a new silk "topper," or something novel in fancy waistcoats, had lost all count of time.

Tom Merry threw open the door of the Fourth Form dormitory, and rushed breathlessly in, with Blake at his heels.

"Here he is!"

"Run to earth at last, by Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was there. He had evidently been very busy, for his bed was simply strewn with fancy waistcoats, and neckties, and socks. Choosing the various articles of attire had doubtless entailed a good deal of time and thought; but Arthur Augustus was dressed at last, and the articles lying on the bed were those he had discarded.

Like Robert of Sicily, brother of Pope Urban, Arthur Augustus was "apparelled in magnificent attire." He was surveying himself in the glass, evidently still wondering if there was any possible room for improvement in his immaculate appearance. He twisted himself this way and that way, rather like a cat chasing its own tail, in order to regard himself from every possible angle; and he was thus engaged when Tom Merry and Jack Blake burst into the dormitory.

Their entry was cyclonic. They paused, pumping in breath, and bestowing two separate and distinct glares upon their elegant chum.

"Gussy, you ass——"

"Gussy, you silly cuckoo——"

Arthur Augustus glanced round.

"Weally, deah boys! You quite startled me! It is not one-thirty yet, I twust?"

"It's a quarter to two!" howled Tom Merry. "You've hung up the whole team, and Miss Marie into the bargain!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Our only hope is that the Abbotsford train will be a few minutes late," said Blake. "If we miss it, there isn't another till four, and that's hopeless. We can't play footer in the dark!"

Arthur Augustus did not look as if he were going to play footer, at all. He looked, rather, as if he was going to a wedding. From top to toe he was as resplendent as the celebrated Beau Brummel.

"We've not even time to give you the bumping you deserve, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "We must fly! Come on!"

"One minute, deah boys! I am not quite satisfied that I have chosen the most appwopwiate necktie——"

"Come on!" hooted Tom Merry and Blake in unison.

"I am anxious to cweate a favouwable impwession with Miss Mawie," went on Arthur Augustus. "I should not like her to think there was anythin' unbecomin' about my attiah. What is your opinion of this necktie, Blake?"

"You—you——"

"Do you considah, Tom Mewwy——"

"Collar him!" roared Tom.

Arthur Augustus was promptly seized by each arm, and fairly whirled out of the dormitory. Fortunately, his football-bag had been packed, and Jack Blake snatched it up as they went.

"Ow!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, as he was hustled willy-nilly down the stairs. "Welease me, you wuff wottahs!"

"Save your breath, Gussy!" panted Tom Merry. "We've got to do a giddy Marathon down to the station."

Still protesting, Arthur Augustus was rushed out into the quadrangle.

"Hurrah! They've found him at last!" said Figgins of the New House.

"Now we shall have to sprint," said Fatty Wynn. "And I don't feel much like sprinting. Wish I hadn't eaten that third apple-dumpling at dinner!"

The footballers set off at a brisk trot.

Arthur Augustus was released from the grasp of his captors, but they ran behind him ready to urge him on in no ungentle manner if he showed any sign of slackening.

Miss Marie sped along at Talbot's side. She was a very fit, athletic type of girl, and in a straightforward sprint she could have outrun a good many fellows.

"Think we shall do it, Toff?" she asked, when the station came into sight.

"The Toff" was the name by which Talbot had been known in his pre-school days, and Marie still called him by it.

Talbot nodded.

"Train's signalled," he panted; "but there's no sign of it yet! Must be a few minutes late!"

"Good!"

Breathless and gasping, the footballers swarmed on to the little platform. Tom Merry halted in the booking-office to take tickets for twelve. A moment later the train came steaming in.

"You can thank your lucky stars, Gussy," said Jack Blake, "that we've caught it! If we had missed the train through your dashed idiocy——"

"Pway be silent, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, with freezing dignity. "I am vewy angwy with you! I considah that you an' Tom Mewwy have acted in a wuffianly mannah towards me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors clambered cheerily aboard the train. Arthur Augustus entered the same compartment as Talbot and Miss Marie. He seated himself directly opposite the school nurse very gingerly, fearful lest he should disturb the immaculate crease of his trousers. Talbot grinned at him, and Miss Marie found it difficult to repress a smile.

The train—which the footballers had caught not a moment too soon—rumbled on its way.

CHAPTER 2.

A Face from the Past!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS adjusted his celebrated monocle and beamed at his fellow-passengers.

"I am glad you are comin' ovah, Miss Mawie," he remarked. "I twust it will be a good match. Abbotsford usually give us a hard tussle on their own gwound. I am feelin' in capital form, an' I wathah think you will have the pleasuah of seein' us beat the Abbotsford fellows."

"That would be delightful!" said Marie, with a smile.

"Talbot will partner me on the wing, as usual," went on the swell of St. Jim's. "There is quite a good undahstandin' between us—except that Talbot sometimes twies to do too much on his own, you know. If you would only give me a little more of the ball, Talbot——"

"Dry up, Gussy!" said Talbot, laughing. "I always give you the ball when you're favourably placed for a pass, but if I see a chance of cutting through on my own, I naturally take it."

"Yaas; but you should learn to wely a little more on the tact an' judgment of your partnah," said Arthur Augustus, eyeing Talbot rather reprovingly through his monocle.

The trio continued to discuss the forthcoming match as the train sped on its way.

Arthur Augustus did the lion's share of the talking, and Talbot and Marie were content to listen to his inconsequent prattling. They found it amusing.

Talbot and his girl chum were feeling particularly happy on this bright and sunny afternoon. They felt that the world was a very pleasant place to live in. The ghosts of the past, which had so often risen to haunt them during their life at St. Jim's, seemed to be slumbering now.

Those dark old days, when they had lived and moved and had their being with a gang of cracksmen and criminals, had now receded almost into oblivion.

Neither Talbot nor Marie ever spoke of those times now. There was no need to speak of them. The past, with all its sinister associations, was a closed chapter.

John Rivers, Marie's father, once the leader of that dangerous gang of lawbreakers, had long since reformed, and was now in honourable employment—in the service of the law which he had formerly violated and resisted. He was a detective, attached to Scotland Yard.

Jim Dawlish, who had stepped into the shoes of John Rivers as leader of the gang, and who had made many cunning but unsuccessful efforts to get Marie and Talbot into his power, was now where he deserved to be—languishing in prison. His chief accomplices—Pat Donovan and Peters—were also undergoing sentences for burglary.

The gang of cracksmen, once a great power in the land, had been sadly disorganised, if not actually disbanded.

Marie and Talbot had nothing to fear from them now. Freed from the shackles of the past, life stretched out very pleasantly before them.

Warm and loyal friends they had ever been. In the old Angel Alley days, when they had followed a life of crime—not of their own choosing, but by reason of their evil environment—they had been inseparable. And they were inseparable still. Talbot believed there was no girl in the world quite like Marie; and Marie, for her part, considered Reginald Talbot to be the embodiment of all the sterling qualities of British boyhood.

There was nothing foolish or namby-pamby about their friendship. They had been in many tight corners together, and had faced many perils and vicissitudes; and each grim adventure had only served to strengthen the bonds of mutual esteem and regard.

They were happy and care-free now, as the train—making up for lost time—fairly thundered along the iron way. Their troubles seemed to be really ended at last; and they had no presentiment of fresh calamities to come.

"Abbotsford!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suddenly. "What a quick wun, bai Jove! I am afwaid I shall have to explain my views on the off-side wule anothah time."

"Oh, carry on, Gussy!" said Talbot, good-humouredly. "You can jaw as we walk along to the ground."

And Arthur Augustus, delighted to find an appreciative audience, continued to chatter as the footballers made their way down the old-fashioned High Street of Abbotsford.

Talbot and Marie, with Arthur Augustus walking between them, brought up the rear of the procession.

They were just passing the local cinema, when suddenly Marie gave a violent start.

A young girl had just come out of the cinema, and was standing on the steps. Marie caught sight of her, and stared at her fixedly, as if mesmerised.

She was a girl of about Marie's own age and build, and was remarkably like her. Her face was less frank and pleasant, perhaps; and certainly her clothes were shabbier. There was also this difference—that Marie's hair was bobbed, in conformity with modern fashion; whereas that of the other girl was neither bobbed nor shingled, but was worn in coiled plaits, which were visible under her hat.

In all other respects, however, the girl standing on the cinema steps was Miss Marie's "double."

Marie continued to stare at her, and the girl returned the stare, smiling slightly. It seemed like a smile of recognition.

Neither Talbot nor Arthur Augustus had noticed the girl

They were engaged in animated discussion, and the swell of St. Jim's was laying down the law volubly and vehemently.

Marie Rivers looked considerably startled. Her face had suddenly paled, and she made as if to stop; but she quickly pulled herself together.

Yet the face of that girl haunted her. It brought back to Marie's mind the past in all its vividness—the old Angel Alley days, with all their hateful associations.

There had been other girl members of the gang besides Marie; and it was one of these girls whom Marie Rivers had been suddenly reminded of, at the sight of that face.

It was a delusion, probably—a foolish fancy. The girl in question was out of the country—had been away from England for some years. Certainly she would not be in Abbotsford, a slow and sleepy town which had no allurements for a modern girl.

And yet——

Marie felt strangely disquieted. She wished she had not seen that girl on the cinema steps. It was like a ghost of the past, risen to haunt her—to shake her out of her complacent tranquillity, and to switch her mind back to those dark days which she had believed to be dead and done with.

Try as she would, Marie could not banish the incident from her mind. Her face was troubled; and Arthur Augustus, turning suddenly to ask her opinion on a knotty problem, saw at once that something was amiss.

"Miss Mawie!" he exclaimed. "What is the mattah, deah gal?"

"Nothing," said Marie quickly.

"Are you sure, Marie?" chimed in Talbot anxiously. "Why, you are looking rather pale!"

Marie laughed; but it was rather a forced effort.

"I'm quite all right, Toff," she said.

"You look as if you had just weceived a shock of some kind, or been weminded of somethin' unpleasant, Miss Mawie," said Arthur Augustus.

And Talbot, not satisfied with his girl chum's assurance that she was quite all right, regarded her with considerable anxiety.

"Look here, Marie, I'm sure there is something wrong with——"

Marie laughed again. Her laugh was more convincing this time.

"I assure you, Toff, that I am perfectly all right. I say, we had better hurry! The others are out of sight. If you should be late for the kick-off——"

At the mention of that dire possibility, Talbot and Arthur Augustus quickened their stride, and Marie stepped out, also.

The colour came back into Marie's cheeks; she had recovered, in some measure, from the shock of a few moments previously.

But, although Marie had assured her companions that nothing was amiss, she was still far from easy in her mind—still wishing she had not seen that face, which had seemed to be a face from the past.

CHAPTER 3.
The Cracksman's Daughter!

"PLAY up, School!"

"On the ball!"

The football duel between Abbotsford and St. Jim's was in progress; and the home spectators were finding plenty of exercise for their lungs.

Right from the kick-off, the Abbotsford forwards went down, led in dashing style by Yorke, their skipper.

The St. Jim's goal was being hotly bombarded.

In the first minute, Fatty Wynn had to throw himself full length to effect a splendid save.

Abbotsford seemed to be out for blood, for they came again and again, swarming round Fatty's charge like flies round a honeypot.

It was well for the Saints that the plump Welsh junior was at the top of his form. Evidently Fatty Wynn had shaken off, by this time, the effects of the three apple dumplings he had eaten at dinner.

There was a big gathering of spectators. Mingled with the Abbotsford fellows was a good sprinkling of "outsiders." The college playing-fields were skirted by the main road; and visitors from outside the school were permitted free access.

Marie Rivers was standing behind the St. Jim's goal, watching a little breathlessly, as Fatty Wynn performed prodigies of valour between the posts.

In the excitement of the game, Marie had forgotten—for a time, at all events—the face which had startled her, and disturbed her serenity of mind.

Marie's gaze was fixed anxiously upon Fatty Wynn, and she clapped her gloved hands when Fatty, darting out from his goal, snatched the ball from the very toes of Yorke, the Abbotsford skipper, thus saving his charge when a goal seemed certain.

The St. Jim's defence was in a rare tangle for a few moments. Figgins and Kerr, at back, were nonplussed by the skill and pace of the home forwards, who converged again and again on Fatty Wynn's charge.

But Figgins presently brought relief with a mighty punt up the field; and now it was the turn of the Saints to give a taste of their quality.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made rapid ground on the wing, and when tackled he flashed the ball across to Talbot, who took it in his stride and fired in a terrific shot. The ball crashed against the crossbar, and rebounded to the feet of one of the Abbotsford backs, who managed to scramble it away.

A spell of midfield play followed, in which the St. Jim's halves tackled like terriers, to prevent the Abbotsford forwards from breaking through.

"A splendid game!" murmured Marie Rivers.

And then she felt a hand on her arm, and heard herself addressed, in a low, feminine voice.

"Marie!"

She turned quickly to find herself confronted by the face which she had almost succeeded in forgetting—the face of the girl who had been standing on the cinema steps.

"Marie!" The girl was holding out her hand in greeting. "Don't look so startled—I'm not a ghost! Surely you know who I am? Surely you are pleased to see me again, after all this time?"

Marie's face did not express pleasure. Rather, it expressed dismay and alarm.

Her fears were confirmed. This was the girl she had seen in Abbotsford High Street.

Now that they stood face to face—looking almost like twin sisters—Marie could no longer doubt the girl's identity. She had altered since the old days. Probably Talbot, who had known her then, would not have recognised her now. But Marie did.

"Joan!" she exclaimed. "Joan Dawlish!"

The girl nodded.

"Your old friend Joan," she said, smiling. "Didn't you recognise me when you saw me just now, on the cinema steps?"

"I—I wasn't sure it was you," stammered Marie. "It hardly seemed possible that you could be in Abbotsford, Joan. I understood you were abroad."

"I am just home from France," said Joan Dawlish. "My father sent me over to Paris, two years ago, to finish my education. I'm through with schooling now, thank goodness! But I'm afraid, Marie, that I've a sterner education to go through now—not a 'Varsity education, but an adversity one."

And Joan Dawlish glanced down at her shabby costume and laughed ruefully.

Marie Rivers grasped the girl's meaning, and she looked sympathetic.

"You are poor, Joan?"

"Poor as a church-mouse," was the reply. "But never mind that now. I saw that the Toff was with you when you passed the cinema. Did he see me? Has he any idea that I am here in Abbotsford?"

Marie shook her head.

"I doubt if the Toff would recognise you now, Joan. You have altered a good deal since——"

Marie broke off, wincing at the recollection of the old days, when she and Joan had lived and worked amongst cracksmen.

"Since the good old days—eh?" said Joan, smiling.

"I prefer to call them the bad old days."

Joan Dawlish shrugged her shoulders.

"We had some good times together, Marie," she said. "Plenty of thrills, heaps of excitement. It was life! I've never quite forgiven my father for packing me off to school. Such a respectable school, too! Nobody ever thought of kicking over the traces. I found the life fearfully dull, after helping to carry out coups, and dodging detectives, and all the rest of it."

"Hush!" Marie raised her hand warningly. Not far away was a group of Abbotsford fellows.

Joan Dawlish took the hint.

"We can't talk here," she said. "And I've lots to say to you, Marie. Besides, if I stay here there's a chance that the Toff will recognise me. And I don't want that. I know some quiet tea-rooms where we shall be able to talk quite freely. Come along!"

It was with a heavy heart that Marie Rivers accompanied her old friend from the football ground.

Marie had hoped to find that Joan Dawlish was, like herself, a reformed character. But it was only too obvious,

from Joan's remarks, that the old life still had its fascinations for her—still held her with its evil spell. Probably she was quite prepared to return to it now that her school-days were over.

Joan was a cracksman's daughter; and her father, Jim Dawlish, had sent her to expensive schools, not with the object of converting her into an honourable member of society, but because he knew that a first-class education was an invaluable asset to anyone engaged in a career of crime. Dawlish himself had lacked such an education; but he did not intend that his daughter should lack it. Out of the proceeds of various burglaries he had managed to pay Joan's school fees; and now, her education complete, she was back in England.

Was it purely by chance that the cracksman's daughter was here in Abbotsford on the afternoon of the match with St. Jim's? Or had she come into the town with the set purpose of meeting her friend of former days?

Possibly Joan Dawlish had been apprised of the match beforehand, and of the fact that Marie Rivers generally accompanied the St. Jim's junior eleven on their "out" matches.

But, whether it was by chance or design that Joan Dawlish was in Abbotsford, Marie did not inquire. She felt very dispirited as she walked at Joan's side.

The meeting with her old chum afforded Marie no pleasure. She and Joan had been as thick as the proverbial thieves in the old days; but Marie wanted to forget the past, and all its grim associations, and all the friends and foes she had made at that unhappy time—with the exception, of course, of Talbot.

Marie had imagined she was done with the past; but the past, apparently, was not done with Marie. Putting the past behind her—blotting it out from the tables of her memory—was proving far from easy.

"Forget the dead, the past? Oh, yet
There are ghosts that will take revenge for it!"

And one of those ghosts had risen now—a very solid ghost of flesh and blood, in the person of Joan Dawlish. And Marie Rivers had grave fears as to what might be the outcome of their meeting. She was no longer the happy, carefree girl who had started out with the St. Jim's footballers earlier in the afternoon. She was troubled and silent as she walked beside her chum.

Joan Dawlish looked troubled also. She seemed to be absorbed in thought. And no word was spoken as the two girls—the one smartly dressed, the other almost painfully shabby, yet each bearing a striking facial resemblance to the other—passed through the quiet streets of sleepy Abbotsford.

CHAPTER 4.
Marie's Promise!

JOAN DAWLISH led the way into the tea-rooms she had suggested.

They were quiet, unpretentious rooms, on the outskirts of the town.

A couple of old ladies were taking tea in the room which fronted on to the street; but there was a cosy parlour at the back, which was deserted.

"This way," said Joan. "We are not likely to be disturbed here."

The two girls seated themselves at a little table in the corner. A waitress appeared, and Joan ordered tea for two.

Marie Rivers pulled off her gloves in silence. She was looking troubled and ill-at-ease.

Joan Dawlish caught the look, and she stretched her arm across the table, her hand seeking one of Marie's. Her grey eyes were full of appeal as they rested on her companion's face.

"Marie," she said, "you don't seem very pleased to see

Suddenly Miss Marie felt a hand on her arm, and heard herself addressed in a low, feminine voice. "Marie!" Turning quickly, Marie found herself confronted by the girl she had seen standing on the steps of the cinema. "Joan!" she exclaimed. "Joan Dawlish!" *(See Chapter 3.)*

your old friend again. It's a poor sort of welcome you've given me."

Marie flushed.

"Of course I am pleased to see you, Joan. But, oh, I hate the past and all that it meant! And you have somehow brought it all back to me. I feel thoroughly wretched."

"Come, cheer up!" said Joan. "Why brood about the past, Marie? No good ever came of that. It's the future we've got to think about. And, my dear girl, your worries are petty—trifles light as air—compared with my own. You are comfortably off at St. Jim's, in good, honest employment"—there was an inflexion of scorn in the speaker's tone—"and your father is making a name for himself at Scotland Yard, and prospering. As for me, I am without employment, without money, without prospects. And my father, as you know, is in prison—thanks to your father, Detective John Rivers!"

Marie Rivers withdrew her hand sharply from that of her companion.

"That is not so, Joan!" she answered abruptly. "My father had nothing to do with the arrest of Jim Dawlish. He was caught by one of the St. Jim's juniors in the act of rifling the Head's safe."

"That doesn't alter the fact that your father is the sworn enemy of my father, and has been a constant thorn in his side," said Joan. "But never mind that. I don't bear any malice. Your father has his duty to do, I suppose. He must uphold the law—he, who once took a positive pleasure in violating it! It's a queer world, Marie!"

The waitress glided in silently with a tray, and as silently withdrew.

Marie Rivers poured out the tea. Her hand trembled a little as she passed Joan's cup.

"What are your plans for the future, Joan?" she asked.

"I am going to help my father," answered Joan quietly.

"But he is in prison——"

"All the more reason why he needs my help. I intend to take his place in the gang until such time as he gets his release."

"Joan!"

"Don't look so shocked, Marie. We can't all be reformed characters, like you and the Toff. We can't all keep to the straight and narrow path. So long as the world lasts there will be crime and criminals. And, honestly, I've more respect for a criminal—a really clever criminal, I mean—than for a smug, highly respectable member of society. I'm not being horrid at your expense, my dear; I'm simply saying straight out what I think. I belong naturally to the criminal classes, and I'm not deserting them now—especially at a time when my help is most needed. I cannot fail my father."

Marie was silent.

"The gang is in a bad way just now," went on Joan. "My father will not be released for some time; and Pat Donovan and Peters are only just out of prison, and have no money. I have heard all about their repeated attempts to plunder St. Jim's—and their repeated failures. But they are not going to throw up the sponge. They intend to try again; and they will have my help next time, for what it is worth."

Marie Rivers looked startled.

"Joan! This is madness! You must not associate yourself with any plot to plunder the school. You must break with Donovan and Peters at once. They are desperate men, pledged to a life of lawlessness. And if they should be caught—as they will be—they would not scruple to drag you down with them. Think what it will mean—shame, disgrace, probably imprisonment. You are a young girl, Joan, with all your life before you. Don't run the risk of wrecking your career at the very outset! I implore you to sever with the gang once and for all—even as I did, and Talbot did. We have neither of us regretted the step. It was the wisest thing we have ever done. I entreat you, Joan, to do the same!"

There was eloquent appeal in Marie's voice and in Marie's eyes as she leaned towards her companion.

Joan Dawlish was not unimpressed. But she shook her head in response to Marie's appeal.

"It is my father's wish," she said in a low tone. "He wants me to take his place in the gang, and I will not oppose him. He has been a good father to me; he has spent a small fortune on my education. Other people's money, perhaps; but he might easily have neglected me, and left me to the mercy of the world. And now that he is in prison, and the gang is but a shadow of what it was, am I going to desert him? No, I should not dream of it!"

Joan paused.

"On my return to England," she went on, "I saw Donovan and Peters, and we talked things over. It is my father's implacable resolve to plunder St. Jim's. His many failures have only made him all the more determined—savagely determined, in fact. There are lots of valuables at the school, as you know, Marie. The haul would probably realise some thousands of pounds. It is not easy to carry off such a coup; there are many difficulties in the way. But most of them would be automatically removed if you, Marie, would agree to help us."

"Good heavens!"

Marie Rivers wondered if she had heard aright.

It was startling enough news to know that Joan Dawlish proposed to take her father's place in the gang. It was even more startling that Joan should solicit the co-operation of her old chum in the proposed raid on St. Jim's.

"For old times' sake, Marie," went on Joan, in a subdued voice, "I ask you to help us. Without your help, the chances are that we should fail. We could break into the school, perhaps; but we do not know which room would pay for plundering, or where all the keys are kept. With you as an ally, everything would be simple. You would admit us to the school on a given night, and deliver up to us the keys of the strong-room and other places. You would act as our guide, and make it dead-easy for us. And you would have your fair share of the spoils, of course."

Marie Rivers looked horrified.

"Joan! What are you saying? Surely you cannot be serious?"

"I was never more serious in my life, Marie."

Marie drew a deep breath.

"You want me to betray the trust and confidence of those who have been so good to me at St. Jim's—the Head, and the matron, and all my friends? You want me to go back to what I was before, an associate of thieves and criminals?"

"I want you to help an old friend, for the sake of former times," said Joan Dawlish quietly. "If you prefer it, you need have no hand in the actual robbery. It will be sufficient if you furnish us with the necessary information as to where the valuables are kept."

"Never!"

Marie's voice rang through the little parlour.

"I couldn't do it, Joan; I couldn't contemplate it, even. It is unthinkable. I have not forgotten our early friendship; I would do much for an old friend, but not—not that."

Joan Dawlish looked deeply disappointed. She had not expected such a sharp and crushing refusal.

In the old days, when Joan had proposed any daring enterprise, her friend Marie had heartily fallen in with it—had backed her up through thick and thin.

But it was a very different Marie to whom Joan was talking now. Not even for the sake of her dearest friend would Marie have turned aside from the path of honour. She had been appealed to, times out of number, to give up her post at St. Jim's and rejoin the gang of cracksmen, but always she had been adamant in her refusal.

Joan's appeal carried more weight than the others had done, for Marie had been deeply attached to Jim Dawlish's daughter in the old days. Even so, Marie's resolve never to revert to a life of crime was unshakable. Even her own father—had he been so minded—would not have induced her to go back to the old life.

"Is that your final decision, Marie?"

There was disappointment, but no trace of anger, in Joan's voice.

"Yes—absolutely!"

"You refuse to do your old friend a service?"

"I will help you in any honourable way, Joan. It would be a pleasure to do so. But it is useless to ask me to take part in any undertaking which is base and unworthy. Listen to me, Joan! If you persist in this scheme to join those men and plunder St. Jim's, it can only end in disgrace and ignominy. I urge you—I entreat you—to sever with the gang at all costs and to get honest employment. Put the past behind you. Finish with the old life once and for all. Now is the time to make a fresh start, now that you have finished your schooling. It will not be difficult to break with those precious scoundrels, Donovan and Peters."

"But my father? I must be loyal to my father."

Marie Rivers leaned across the table, taking both of Joan's slim white hands in her own.

"You will be best serving your father, Joan, by taking up honourable employment," she said. "It may shame him into following suit when he comes out of prison. When that time comes, you must reason with him, and make clear to him the insane folly of persisting in a life of crime, which can only result in further imprisonment and disgrace. In a word, Joan, you must reform your father. You can do it; I am sure you can do it. You can influence your father for good, and succeed where every other influence would fail. Joan, dear, I'm not trying to sermonise; I'm telling you what I feel most strongly you ought to do. You have asked me a favour, for old times' sake—a favour I could not possibly grant. I now ask a favour of you, for the sake of our old friendship. I want you to promise me, Joan, that you will renounce the gang and live honestly."

Marie paused. Her lips were trembling; tears had welled into her eyes.

Joan was also strongly moved.

It was a tense moment.

Marie's eyes gazed pleadingly, appealingly, into those of her old friend. And thus they sat, for a full moment, until Joan Dawlish broke the silence.

"I will think it over, Marie," she said at last, in a low tone. "You have half-persuaded me. I am beginning to see the folly of living crookedly. The law always wins in the end. It has beaten my father, and it would beat me, sooner or later. You've given me something to think about, Marie. I'm at the crossroads, and I've got to decide which way I'm going to take. I can't decide in five minutes. I will think the whole thing out, and let you know my decision."

Marie's face brightened. She was hopeful—confident, in fact, that she had won Joan Dawlish over.

"Bravo, Joan!" she said. "If you think it out, there is only one sane decision you can come to: to have done with those precious plotters, Donovan and Peters, who are merely making a catspaw of you, and to go straight in future. If I can help you in any way, you have only to say so."

"Thank you, Marie," said Joan gratefully. Her face coloured a little. "My greatest need at the moment is for money. A girl has precious little chance of getting a job nowadays unless she is smartly dressed. And you see how shabby I am."

Marie nodded.

"I have been able to save some money since I have been at St. Jim's," she said. "It isn't a princely sum, exactly, but it will be enough to put you on your feet and give you a start. I have twenty pounds in the bank. It shall be yours, Joan. You are more than welcome to it."

"Oh, Marie! You are a real brick, and I hardly know how to thank you!"

"Don't try, dear," said Marie, smiling. "I can let you have the money to-morrow evening. Where shall we meet?"

Joan reflected for a moment.

"Supposing we meet outside these tea rooms, at eight o'clock," she suggested. "Will that be convenient?"

"Perfectly!"

"You—you won't fail me, Marie? It—it means such a lot to me, you see."

"Of course I won't fail you, dear. You ought to know me better than that. Wet or fine, you'll find me outside these tea-rooms to-morrow evening at eight. And now I must hurry back to the match, or I shall be missed, and there will be awkward inquiries."

The two girls rose to their feet and quitted the little parlour. Marie settled the bill, and they passed out into the street. They halted on the pavement and shook hands.

"You won't tell the Toff you have seen me, Marie?" said Joan anxiously. "I do not wish him to know that I am in Abbotsford."

"Very well, Joan. I will keep my own counsel. Au revoir, until to-morrow!"

The girls parted company. Joan Dawlish turned and waved to her old friend, as Marie hurried back to the Abbotsford ground.

The St. Jim's nurse was lighter of heart now, happy in the belief that she had won Joan Dawlish over; and happy, too, to have the opportunity of assisting her old friend to put the past behind her, and embark upon an honourable career.

CHAPTER 5.
Talbot's Triumph!

"GOAL!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, Yorke!"

The match between Abbotsford and St. Jim's was drawing to a close when Marie Rivers arrived back on the ground.

Only a quarter of an hour remained for play, and Yorke, the Abbotsford skipper, had just shot a fine goal—the first of the match. The goal had been a long time coming, thanks to the brilliance of Fatty Wynn, who was playing the game of his life. But the persistent efforts of the Abbotsford forwards had at last met with tangible reward; and the crowd showed their approval in the usual manner.

There was a storm of cheering, and caps went whirling into the air, as Marie Rivers slipped unobtrusively through the gate and joined the throng on the touchline.

"Excuse me," she said, addressing one of the Abbotsford juniors. "Would you mind telling me the score?"

"Abbotsford are one-up," said the jubilant junior, lifting his cap. "It's a ripping game!"

Marie thanked her informant. She realised that at least two goals would have to be scored by St. Jim's to enable them to win. And time was flying fast.

But Tom Merry rallied his men, and the St. Jim's forwards played up with a will. By means of long, swinging passes from wing to wing, they swooped down upon the Abbotsford goal; and Jack Blake, side-stepping an opposing back, sent in a rasping shot which was only inches wide.

The ensuing goal-kick was feebly taken, and Tom Merry intercepted the ball with his chest. On being tackled, he swung the leather out to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who went away like the wind.

Pausing within a foot of the corner-flag, Gussy transferred to Talbot, who whipped the ball into the net with a suddenness that surprised everybody—the Abbotsford goalie in particular.

"Goal!"

Talbot's hand was wrung by his delighted comrades.

"Level, bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus. "That was a vewy smart piece of work, Talbot. I couldn't have impwoved on it myself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We want another, you fellows!" said Tom Merry. "And time's short. Play up!"

St. Jim's were in the ascendant now. They had taken a long time to find their true form, but, having found it, they were irresistible. They were a better trained team, too, than their opponents, who were showing signs of distress after the gruelling pace which had been maintained throughout.

The Abbotsford backs were played to a standstill; and the halves fell back to assist them. They packed their goal, determined to prevent their opponents from snatching a victory.

But the Saints were every bit as determined. They were all out for the winning goal.

Shots were rained upon the Abbotsford goalie from all angles. He stood up manfully to the bombardment.

Time after time, with the halves and backs hopelessly beaten, only the goalie stood between the St. Jim's forwards and their hearts' desire.

Three minutes to go—only two minutes! And now the referee was consulting his watch.

St. Jim's had a rare fright in the last minute; for the Abbotsford forwards, in a sudden and spirited breakaway, nearly caught Fatty Wynn napping. But Fatty punted the ball clear in the nick of time, and Dick Redfern trapped it, and rushed it forward to Tom Merry. Tom raced away, feinting this way and that, outwitting the Abbotsford halves by sheer wizardry of footwork. Then, challenged by one of the backs, Tom passed to Jack Blake, who shot without a second's hesitation.

It was a fine shot, and the goalie hurled himself full length at the inrushing leather. But the best he could do was to push it out to the feet of Talbot, who, taking cool and deliberate aim, planted it fairly into the net.

"Goal!"

It was the winning goal—scored on the tick of time—and Talbot came in for quite an ovation.

"Good man!" said Tom Merry, clapping his chum heartily on the back.

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "I fully intended to bag the winnin' goal myself, Talbot, but I have not the slightest objection to your depwivin' me of the honah. Bwavo!"

Talbot laughed breathlessly.

"It was Blake's goal, really," he said. "I merely applied the finishing touch."

The St. Jim's players trooped happily off the field. It had been a hard game, and they had won through by sheer dogged persistence. Talbot had taken both their goals, but every man had played his hardest.

Marie Rivers stood at the entrance to the visitors' dressing-room. She greeted the triumphant footballers with a smile.

"A splendid win!" she said. "Well played, everybody!"

"You are indeed our lucky mascot, Miss Marie," said Monty Lowther. "We always come out on top, when you are with us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But where did you get to at half-time, Marie?" inquired Talbot. "I looked out for you, but you seemed to have vanished into thin air."

Marie coloured slightly.

"I popped into the town to get some tea," she explained. "It sounds awfully mean, I know, to desert the match——"

"Not a bit of it, Miss Marie," interposed Fatty Wynn. "Watching footer matches is jolly hungry work. I can quite understand your wanting to pop out, and get some refreshment. Was it a decent sort of tea-room that you went to? If so, we'll go along right now, and have a feed before we start back to St. Jim's."

"No, we won't!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Time's too short, Fatty. Our train goes in twenty minutes."

"We can catch the next."

"There's not another for two hours. That would make us late for locking-up."

"Oh crumbs!" said Fatty dismally. "I'm feeling too famished for words! I'm sure I shall never survive the train journey without anything to eat."

The footballers hurriedly exchanged into their Etons, and made tracks for the station, accompanied by Marie Rivers.

Fatty Wynn grumbled and groused so persistently about the aching void in his interior, that Tom Merry popped into a pastrycook's in the High Street, and emerged with a bag of jam-tarts.

"To eat in the train," he remarked, handing the bag to Fatty Wynn. "It's my treat. You kept a fine goal this afternoon, Fatty, and we owe a lot to you!"

"Merry," said Fatty Wynn, "if I had tears, I'd prepare to shed them now—tears of gratitude, I mean. You're a brick!"

And Fatty investigated the contents of the bag as the footballers hurried along.

Tom Merry had specified that the tarts were to be eaten in the train, but by the time the station was reached they had already vanished into David Llewellyn Wynn's capacious interior.

During the homeward journey Marie Rivers sat very silent in a corner seat of the carriage which she shared with Talbot and the Terrible Three.

Marie had plenty to think about. The unexpected meeting with Joan Dawlish; the dramatic conversation in the tea-rooms; the half-promise that Joan had given to sever her connection with the gang of cracksmen, and to seek honest employment; and, finally the meeting which had been arranged for the morrow. All these things coursed through Marie's mind, making her oblivious to the presence of the juniors.

Talbot, seated opposite, eyed his girl chum curiously. It seemed to him that something was weighing on Marie's mind; for her expression, though not actually troubled, was unusually grave.

"Marie!"

The girl did not seem to hear Talbot address her. She was staring out of the window at the flying landscape, with unseeing eyes—obviously in a deep reverie.

Talbot leaned forward, and touched her on the arm.

"Marie, what is wrong? I caught you looking like that before, when we were on our way to the match. You laughed it off when I suggested something was the matter; but I am certain that something is troubling you."

Marie came out of her reverie with a start. She flushed uncomfortably. The eyes of Tom Merry & Co. were upon her as well as those of Talbot.

"I was day-dreaming, Toff!" she said. "There's nothing wrong, really. I was simply thinking about different things—nothing of any consequence."

Talbot was not satisfied.

"You're not in the habit of day-dreaming, Marie," he said. "If something has happened to upset you, for goodness sake tell me what it is. I have no secrets from you; you share my troubles when they crop up, and it's only fair that I should share yours. If something is preying on your mind, I insist upon knowing what it is!"

Marie looked steadily into Talbot's earnest face.

"Set your mind at rest, Toff," she said. "If anything was troubling me, of course I'd tell you. But, in any case, there's nothing to tell. I promise not to start day-dreaming again."

Still Talbot was not wholly satisfied. But he could not pursue the subject after Marie's confident assurance that nothing was wrong. Yet he had an uneasy feeling that his girl chum was keeping something back—that she had a secret which he could not share.

Talbot sat back in his seat, and Marie deftly turned the conversation into other channels.

Much as she disliked having a secret from her boy chum, Marie could not have explained to him the events of the afternoon. Joan Dawlish had pledged her to secrecy. In any case, Marie would have kept Talbot uninformed of their meeting.

The news that Joan Dawlish was in England, and in Abbotsford, would certainly have filled Talbot with alarm and dismay. It would have set up dark forebodings in his mind, besides bringing back the past in all its vividness. And Marie, knowing how easily Talbot was upset by ghosts from the past, would have kept her own counsel, even had she been under no obligation to do so. Better, she reflected, that Talbot should know nothing of what had transpired; better that he should be kept in blissful ignorance of Marie's meeting with the cracksman's daughter.

It was a very cheery party of footballers that arrived back at St. Jim's in the dusk of the evening.

When the news was broadcast that the Saints had won, and that Talbot had taken both goals, the popular Shell fellow came in for quite a crop of congratulations.

A handsome spread was prepared in the junior Common-room, to celebrate the victory. But Miss Marie did not stay for that. She explained that she had to be on duty in the sanny, and the St. Jim's footballers had to take a reluctant farewell of their lucky mascot.

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CHAPTER 6.
A Rift in the Lute!

"PHEW! It's a wild night!"

Talbot of the Shell stood in the lighted hall of the School House, staring out into the dark quadrangle.

It was the day after the Abbotsford match—the wildest and windiest March day that Talbot could remember.

From rising-bell to dusk the wind had shrieked and whistled around the old towers and turrets of St. Jim's, and the branches of the old elms had swayed and groaned in the gale. A deluge of driving rain had made footer out of the question, and the St. Jim's fellows had spent their leisure hours indoors, in the cheery warmth of their studies.

It was now seven o'clock. The hour was striking, but the boom of the school clock was heard but faintly amid the roar of the elements.

Talbot lingered in the hall for a moment, gazing out into the storm-swept quadrangle. He was about to turn on his heel and go back to the junior Common-room, where he had been playing chess with Manners, when suddenly he caught sight of a girlish figure battling its way across the quad.

"My hat!" ejaculated Talbot. "That's Marie! She can't surely be going out of gates on a night like this?"

He could discern the figure but dimly in the darkness, yet he knew it must be his girl chum, for she had come from the direction of the sanny.

Talbot ran down the School House steps, bareheaded and without protection from the storm, and hurried after the girlish figure.

"Marie!"

Talbot's voice penetrated the roar of the wind.

Marie Rivers, for it was she, halted and looked round. It was unfortunate that Talbot should have seen her going out. He would naturally want to know where she was going on such a night—probably he would insist on accompanying her.

Talbot sprinted up breathlessly.

"Marie! You are going out of gates?"

"Yes, Toff."

"If it's an urgent case of illness, Marie, let me go to the doctor's for you."

"Nobody is ill," said Marie.

"Then where are you going?" asked Talbot, in bewilderment.

Marie was silent. She was about to set out on her mission to Abbotsford, to meet Joan Dawlish. She had promised that she would keep the appointment without fail. Naturally, Marie had not anticipated such a wild night as this, but she would have kept her promise even if a blizzard had been raging.

There was a train from Rylcombe at seven-twenty to Abbotsford, and Marie knew she would have to hurry. Talbot's interception of her in this way was a nuisance. If he detained her many moments she would miss the train and be hopelessly late for her appointment.

Talbot was puzzled by Marie's silence. He peered at her closely through the gloom.

"Marie," he said, "surely you can tell me where you are going?"

The girl shook her head.

"Impossible, Toff. I'm sorry, but——"

Talbot scanned her face critically.

"You are keeping something back from me," he said, with a touch of bitterness. "You have a secret which I may not share."

Marie bit her lip.

"I can't stop and talk just now, Toff," she said. "I'm in a great hurry. You'd better run indoors, or you will be soaked."

Talbot frowned. He resented being spoken to like a small boy. He did not realise that Marie's ungracious way of speaking was due to her embarrassment and agitation. The girl was longing to be rid of him; already she feared that she would lose her train.

"I'm not going in, Marie," said Talbot stubbornly, "until you tell me where you are going. It isn't that I'm merely inquisitive, but I don't like the idea of your being out alone in such a storm. There will be danger."

"Nonsense, Toff! Even the most optimistic footpad wouldn't venture out on a night like this!"

"I wasn't thinking of footpads. It's this awful storm. I'm certain the matron would have a fit if she knew you were going out ot gates on such a night."

"She does know," said Marie. "She wouldn't consent at first to let me go, but when I pointed out that it was very urgent——"

"What is very urgent, Marie? I don't understand. You seem to have a secret appointment to keep. Is that it?"

"I really can't stop any longer," said Marie. And she moved away.

Talbot took a quick stride after her.

"Marie! If you really must go out, then you must let me come with you. It won't take me a minute to fetch my coat and cap."

"No, no!" said Marie hastily. "I shouldn't dream of it, Toff! I am quite capable of taking care of myself. Good-night!"

Marie was gone. She was swallowed up in the darkness, and Talbot stood staring after her for a moment, bare-headed amid the raging elements.

The junior's handsome face was clouded. He could not understand Marie's conduct. Never had she treated him like this before. There had hitherto been perfect trust and confidence between them; they had had no secrets one from the other.

But now——

Talbot's mind went back to the events of the previous day. On two occasions he had found his girl chum looking very thoughtful and abstracted. She had assured him that nothing was amiss, that there was no trouble of any sort on her mind. Then why this secret appointment and this reticence on Marie's part as to where she was going and whom she was meeting?

Talbot hurried back into the building to fetch his cap and his raincoat. Marie had refused to let him act as her escort, but the junior felt very strongly that it was not safe for her to be out alone on that wild night. Talbot resolved to follow her—not from any motive of curiosity as to where she was going, but simply so that he might offer his protection should the need arise. He simply could not settle down to another game of chess with Manners with the knowledge that Marie Rivers was out in the storm. He would follow her and endeavour to keep her in sight without her knowledge.

Meanwhile, Marie was hurrying down to the station. Precious time had been lost, and her only hope now was that the seven-twenty might be a few minutes late. If she missed the train, then she would have to charter a taxi to take her over to Abbotsford, and that would be a very costly proceeding. But she must keep her promise to Joan Dawlish, at all hazards.

Safe in Marie's handbag was the sum of twenty pounds, in notes, which she had withdrawn from her bank in Wayland that day. That sum represented the savings of a long period; it was practically all the money Marie had in the world. But she did not begrudge it to her old friend. She reflected that it would save Joan Dawlish from privation and penury—and worse. For, without money, Joan would be forced to take advantage of the hospitality of the gang of cracksmen.

Never had the road to the station seemed so interminable. It was abominably muddy, and the cart-tracks were welling

St Jim's Jingles!

No. 26. Mr. VICTOR RAILTON, M.A.

THE School House may be justly proud
Of this most manly master,
Whose dauntless heart is never cowed
By danger or disaster:
Who served his country in the War,
And won renown and glory;
His exploits, in the days of yore,
Would make a thrilling story!

No tyrant, fierce and stern, is he;
No counterpart of Nero.
The School House fellows all agree
That Railton is a hero.
He rules by kindness, not by awe:
Although he does not scruple
To deal with breaches of the law,
And cane the errant pupil!

No scholar dares to give him "cheek,"
Or treat him as he pleases;
And jolly japers dare not seek
To carry out their wheezes
When Mr. Railton's on the scent,
Or it will mean detection;
It pays us to be innocent,
And walk with circumspection!

The Popular School House Master.

The New House fellows envy us
So kind and wise a ruler;
For Ratty's apt to fume and fuss—
His temper should be cooler!
Figgins, and Kerr, and Fatty Wynn,
He's always keen to punish;
And though they bear it with a grin,
They hate his ways so Hunnish!

The honour of the House, of course,
Is prized by Railton dearly;
His influence is a potent force,
He likes his boys sincerely.
His heart and soul are in his work
(This is his own confession);
He never has been known to shirk
The cares of his profession.

Diogenes, in ancient days,
Searched for a man of merit;
A man who, in his works and ways,
True manhood did inherit.
He failed to find one; sad, but true,
And put his quest behind him;
But if he made his search anew,
Here, at St. Jim's, he'd find him!

NEXT WEEK:—TOBY MARSH, THE ST. JIM'S PAGE BOY.

with water. On either side of Marie as she sped along, the trees creaked and groaned beneath the buffetings of the storm. There was a tree down at one part of the road, and Marie narrowly avoided stumbling over the outstretched trunk.

The station lights came into view at last. From the distance, faintly heard amid the storm, came the rumble of a train. Marie quickened her pace.

When only a few yards from the station she fancied she heard the patter of footsteps behind her.

Turning sharply, Marie observed a running figure. Her eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness by this time, and as the figure drew nearer she recognised Talbot.

Marie compressed her lips. Her hands were clenched angrily.

"So you have followed me, Toff?" she said bitterly.

Talbot came pounding up. He had not intended Marie to see him; but when he realised that she was about to board a train, and that the train was already steaming into the station, he had been obliged to quicken his pace. He halted at Marie's side, pumping in breath.

Marie regarded him with flashing eyes.

"I strongly object to being spied upon, Toff!" she said, in tones of indignation.

Talbot winced as from a blow.

"Marie, I—I thought it advisable——"

"To follow me up and find out where I was going, and whom I was meeting!" said Marie scornfully. "It is contemptible, Toff! I should not have thought it of you!"

The words cut Talbot like a knife. Marie was rebuking him as if he had been Baggy Trimble, the Paul Pry of the Fourth.

"It wasn't out of curiosity, Marie, that I came along," he explained. "I felt worried about you. I felt that someone ought to be at hand——"

"Enough!" said Marie curtly. "You followed me, after I expressly told you that I did not require an escort. I am very angry with you, Toff! Do not dare to follow me any farther! Go back!"

Marie's tone was imperative. She pointed with outstretched hand along the windswept road.

Talbot hesitated; but only for an instant. Then he turned, and started to walk back to St. Jim's with a heavy heart.

So it had come to this! In acting solely out of regard for the safety of his girl chum, he had incurred Marie's keen displeasure. Her stinging rebukes still rang in his ears. She had accused him of spying—of showing undue curiosity on the subject of her movements. That was his reward for showing anxiety for Marie's welfare.

Small wonder that Talbot, as he tramped moodily along the muddy road, felt crushed and dispirited. His little world, which but yesterday seemed bright and cheery, was now dark and gloomy. Marie Rivers, the sweetest and most even-tempered of girls, in the usual way, was angry with him. Their friendship, which had flowed along so smoothly these many months, was threatened and jeopardised. It was "the little rift within the lute," and Talbot had an uneasy premonition that the rift would widen. Marie had a secret from him; she did not seem to trust him sufficiently to share it with him. And friendship founded upon distrust was a house built upon sand.

"It's rotten!" muttered Talbot, as he strode along. "I'd have given worlds for it not to have happened. I was a fool to follow her. I might have known how it would turn out. And, anyway, wild horses wouldn't have prevented Marie from keeping her appointment, wherever it is. Hope to goodness she gets back safely, that's all!"

But the wind, making wild music in the trees, seemed to mock Talbot's hope, seemed to tell him that a long time would elapse before he set eyes on his girl chum again.

CHAPTER 7.
Treachery!

MARIE RIVERS was the only passenger to alight from the train at Abbotsford.

A solitary porter collected her ticket, and bade her good-night.

Outside, the storm was raging with ever-increasing violence. Practically the entire population of the little town seemed to be indoors. It was a night—as the porter had remarked to Marie—not fit to turn a dog out.

On the taxicab-rank outside the station was an isolated vehicle. The driver's name must have been Mark Tapley, certainly he was a sublime optimist if he expected to pick up many fares on such a night, when even the places of amusement were deserted, and had closed for lack of patronage.

"Taxi, miss?"

Marie shook her head. Buttoning the collar of her raincoat about her neck she set off through the rain-splashed streets.

Having managed to catch the seven-twenty train from Rylcombe, Marie was in good time for her appointment with Joan Dawlish. She was looking forward to the meeting. She hoped that Joan, having thought over the conversation of yesterday, had definitely decided to sever with the gang, and to avail herself of Marie's help. The sum of twenty pounds would make Joan independent of the gang; and, meanwhile, she would be able to look around for a suitable berth.

It pleased Marie greatly to think that Joan would probably renounce the gang, and live honestly; and, later, when her father came out of prison, would exert her influence to reform him. If only Jim Dawlish could be induced to go straight, the gang would cease to function, for Dawlish was the moving spirit of it.

The future seemed very bright and hopeful to Marie, as she battled her way through the storm. It did not occur to her that Joan Dawlish might not, after all, agree to sever with the gang. Already Joan had given a sort of half-assurance that she would go straight in future, and Marie confidently believed that she would.

She came presently to the outskirts of the town—to the tea-rooms where she had chatted with Joan the day before. The tea-rooms were closed now, and the blinds drawn. The whole street had an air of desolation. The wind was blowing great guns, and the rain splashed down from the brimming gutters of the roofs.

As Marie approached the tea-rooms a car passed her, churning its way through the slush. It was a closed-in car of the saloon type, and it slowed up a little way past the tea-rooms.

Marie merely gave the car a casual glance; but her attention was attracted to it again a moment later when she heard her name called.

"Marie!"

It was the voice of Joan Dawlish. Joan had stepped out of the now stationary car, and was holding the door open.

Marie hurried towards the vehicle.

"What a night!" exclaimed Joan, as Marie came up. "Why, Marie, you are soaked! It was jolly good of you to turn up!"

"Not at all," murmured Marie. She was wondering how the shabby Joan Dawlish had come to be riding in a luxurious saloon car. Obviously it was not a hired car. Marie was very curious, but her politeness forbade her from asking questions.

"Step inside," said Joan cheerily. "We can't possibly stand talking in this beastly rain."

All unsuspectingly, Marie Rivers stepped into the vehicle. It was dark inside, and she found herself groping for the seat.

Joan Dawlish, instead of following Marie into the car, suddenly slammed the door upon her. She then walked to the front of the vehicle, and clambered up into the driver's seat, beside the driver.

That sudden and unexpected slamming of the door startled Marie. Until then she suspected nothing; but now, groping in the darkness, it suddenly dawned upon her that she had been tricked and trapped.

With an exclamation of alarm, Marie sprang to the door, but before she could reach it she was suddenly seized from behind, and a scarf was thrown over her head and drawn tightly about her mouth, forming an effective gag. Then her hands were seized and pinioned behind her back, and her wrists were dexterously bound together with a handkerchief.

It all happened so suddenly that Marie had no chance to offer resistance. She was pushed on to the seat by her unknown captor, who then rapped on the glass partition in front of him, as a signal to the driver to start.

The next instant the car leapt forward like a live thing, and was whirled away through the deserted streets.

For some moments, Marie Rivers sat as if spellbound. The realisation that she had been kidnapped seemed to stupefy her.

She heard a low chuckle from her mysterious assailant, who was seated opposite. Marie could not distinguish the man's features, however, owing to the darkness.

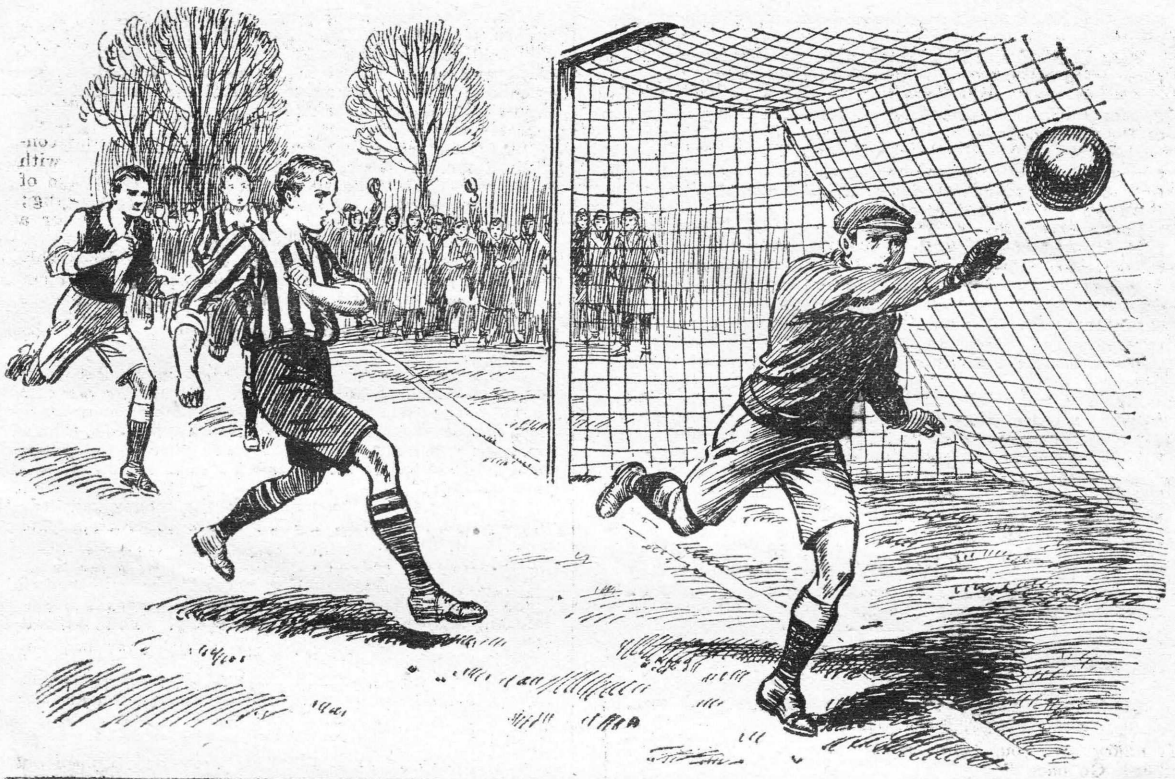
Neither could Marie speak. The scarf around her mouth effectively prevented that.

The car had left Abbotsford behind now, and was forging its way along the muddy country lanes.

Gradually, a full understanding of the situation came to Marie.

She had been betrayed—basely and treacherously betrayed—by her friend of former days. She had walked blindly into the trap which Joan Dawlish had prepared for her.

The saloon car was evidently the property of the gang



With a suddenness that surprised everybody, particularly the Abbotsford goalkeeper, Talbot whipped the ball into the net. "Goal!" A roar of applause went up from the crowd gathered on the touchlines. *(See Chapter 5.)*

of cracksmen—stolen property, most likely—and the driver was Pat Donovan.

The man inside, who had gagged and bound Marie, was Peters, the accomplice of Donovan.

Why had they kidnapped her in this fashion?

Marie pondered over this problem, but she could find no ready solution. It was possible that they had intended to coerce her into joining the gang. Possible, but not probable. But Donovan and Peters well knew the futility of such a proceeding. They had tried before, by threats, by intimidation, and by entreaty, to persuade Marie to throw in her lot with them. So stubbornly had Marie resisted them that they were optimists indeed if they imagined they would succeed this time.

Where were they taking her?

That was a less difficult question to answer. Undoubtedly Marie was being conveyed to the gang's headquarters—a lonely house, probably, where she would be kept a prisoner.

It was a far from cheerful outlook for the young nurse of St. Jim's. She had been imprisoned by the gang before, and she well knew that it was no picnic. The prospect of spending days—perhaps weeks—in an isolated attic, or a gloomy basement, was sufficient to make the stoutest heart quail.

But it was not the prospect of imprisonment that worried Marie most. It was the treachery of Joan Dawlish.

It seemed incredible that any girl could behave so basely. It was only too clear to Marie, now, that when Joan had given her half-promise to reform, she had merely been playacting. She had not had the slightest intention of reforming. And she had arranged the appointment with Marie, with the deliberate object of inveigling the school nurse into the clutches of the gang.

Very black and bitter were Marie's reflections as she sat helpless in her fast-moving prison. After what had occurred, she felt that she would never be able to trust anybody again.

Then her thoughts turned to St. Jim's, and to Talbot. She remembered the high words which had passed between them, when she had found him following her.

How she wished now that she had taken the Toff into her confidence, and let him accompany her to Abbotsford! With Talbot at her side, the kidnappers would have had a much more difficult task. They would have found the athletic St. Jim's junior a more formidable proposition than a defenceless girl.

But it was too late for vain regrets. Talbot's fears for Marie's safety had been only too well-founded. She had ignored his warnings, had scoffed at his anxiety, and had insisted upon making her way to Abbotsford alone. And now she was trapped, with not the remotest possibility of escape.

The car swept on through the blinding storm. The rain lashed against the windows; the surrounding countryside seemed to be locked in the grip of a cyclone.

It was marvellous how the driver managed to maintain such a speed, under those terrible conditions. The lanes were very narrow hereabouts, too, and the slightest error of judgment would have brought disaster.

Wilder and more desolate became the scene as the car sped on. When at last it slowed up, it seemed that civilisation had been forsaken and left far behind.

It was in a hollow of the Sussex Downs that the car eventually came to a standstill.

There was one solitary house to be seen, and no other habitation.

However charming and attractive that particular spot might have been in the summer-time, it was the dreariest and loneliest place imaginable under present conditions. Even a hermit would have thought twice before taking up his residence in such a lone retreat.

Adjoining the house was a garage, which had once been an old coaching-shed. Joan Dawlish jumped down from her seat and opened the garage doors, and Pat Donovan carefully steered the car inside.

Marie Rivers had experienced great discomfort on account of the gag, and the fact that her hands were trussed behind her. It came as a welcome relief, therefore, when the man Peters unfastened the scarf and then the handkerchief.

"Welcome home, Marie!" he said, with grim irony.

"You scoundrel!"

Peters laughed. He was used to hard names.

"You will walk in front of me to the house," he said. "And you will know better than to try to escape."

Marie knew that the man would be armed, and that Pat Donovan also carried a revolver. Escape was not to be contemplated for an instant. In silent submission the girl walked towards the house. Peters followed close behind, and the light from his electric-torch illuminated the name on the gate. Marie saw it was "Lonedeep." She reflected

that the house could not have been more appropriately named.

Joan Dawlish and Pat Donovan were following up behind. They were talking and laughing as they came.

"Allow me!" said Peters, with mock politeness. And he stepped in front of Marie, and inserted a key in the lock of the front door.

Marie was ushered into the house. The others followed, and when the door closed behind them, Marie felt that the door of Hope had been slammed upon her also.

"Take her to her quarters!"

It was the voice of Pat Donovan; and Peters, with a grin, conducted Marie through a draughty hall, and down a flight of stone, uncarpeted steps to the basement.

The place was utterly cheerless and abysmal. It struck a chill into Marie's heart. There was no furniture, save for a broken chair. The only means of ventilation was an iron grating. The place was in a state of terrible neglect, all sorts of lumber and litter being scattered about the stone floor.

Marie stared wildly at her future prison. Even Peters, callous scoundrel though he was, showed a vestige of pity.

"We'll bring down a camp-bed for you," he said gruffly. "And Joan shall bring you some supper later on."

Marie said nothing. She seemed resigned to her fate. She took off her raincoat and hat, and seated herself on the rickety chair, while Peters lighted a smoky oil-lamp and placed it in a recess in the wall.

The man then withdrew, carefully locking and bolting the door behind him, and leaving Marie Rivers alone to her reflections. And Marie's reflections were as gloomy as her surroundings.

CHAPTER 8.
An Amazing Masquerade!

ALONE in her prison, the hours dragged wearily, interminably, for Marie Rivers.

A couple of hours passed—each seeming a separate eternity—before anything happened to break the monotony.

Then there was a crashing and a bumping on the stairs without, accompanied by sounds of grunting and gasping.

The door of the basement was unlocked and unbolted and pushed open. And Donovan and Peters came in, bearing a camp-bed between them. There was a pile of blankets on the bed, also a couple of pillows.

The two cracksmen heaved the bed into a convenient position and then withdrew. Donovan paused in the doorway and glanced at the prisoner. Marie was sitting with bowed head on the dilapidated chair.

"Good-night, Marie," said Donovan sardonically. "Pleasant dreams!"

Marie looked up. Her eyes blazed at the scoundrel, but she did not speak.

Donovan, a trifle disconcerted by the look which Marie gave him, passed out.

Marie listened for the sound of the bolts being shot into their place, but no such sound came to her ears. Instead, she heard fresh footsteps approaching, and this time it was Joan Dawlish who came in, carrying a tray, on which were a plate of cold meat, some bread and cheese, and a glass of water.

Joan set the tray down on the end of the bed and paused, with her eyes on Marie Rivers. It was the first time the two girls had come face to face since Marie had been kidnapped by Joan's subterfuge.

There was a tense pause while each waited for the other to speak.

Marie was trembling a little. Her face was flushed, her grey eyes full of reproach. She was finding it difficult to preserve her self-control.

Joan Dawlish, on the other hand, was as cool as a cucumber.

It was Marie who broke the long silence.

"So this is your idea of friendship, Joan?" she said bitterly. "You led me into a trap—you deceived me—you betrayed me into the hands of these scoundrels! You, who asked me to help you for old times' sake!"

Joan shrugged her shoulders.

"You have brought this on yourself, Marie," she said. "Had you been reasonable yesterday and fallen in with my proposals this would never have happened. We wanted your help in the proposed raid on St. Jim's, and you refused to give it. You talked a lot of sentimental nonsense about reforming and keeping to the straight and narrow path. You even suggested that I should attempt to reform my father when he came out of prison!"

"And you promised to do so," said Marie.

"Pardon me, but I made no promise. I said I would think over what you had told me and let you know my decision. Well, you know my decision now. I have taken my father's place in the gang, and I shall carry out all his wishes to the letter. You were a fool, Marie, to think that I should fail my father! I shall stand by him through thick and thin. He is in prison now—ruined, disgraced, penniless. Did you imagine for one moment that I should desert him at such a crisis?"

Marie was silent.

"All your fool-talk about honesty and rectitude merely amused me, my dear," went on Joan callously. "I may have pretended to be impressed by it at the time, but it had no more effect on me than a Sunday sermon."

Marie winced.

"I trusted you, Joan," she said quietly. "I thought you were really willing and anxious to make a fresh start. I offered to help you; I withdrew from the bank every penny that I possessed, and I brought it to you in Abbotsford, as we arranged."

"The money was in your handbag?"

"Yes."

"Then you can say good-bye to it now. Pat Donovan has commandeered your handbag. The money will come in very useful just now; our sole assets being one motor-car—and that a stolen one. But I'll tell you this, Marie. I shall make a point of refunding you your money when I'm in a position to do so. I haven't sunk so low as to steal your savings!"

"If you propose to pay back the money out of the proceeds of burglaries I shall refuse to touch a penny!" said Marie firmly.

Joan Dawlish laughed.

"You're too squeamish for words!" she said scornfully. "The worst of you reformed characters is that when you reform, you do the job so thoroughly. You become too good to live."

"What's the use of talking?" said Marie wearily. "We were friends once—we had everything in common—but we live in different worlds now. Our view-points are totally different. You are contemptuous of honesty and right living; I believe in honour before all. Joan, I am utterly sick at heart. I never thought it possible that you could behave so basely towards me. Have you no feeling, no sense of what is right and decent? I tried to help you, and this is how you repay me! On your account I have quarrelled with my best chum."

"With the Toff?" queried Joan.

"Yes."

"This is interesting! You did not tell the Toff that you met me in Abbotsford?"

"No," said Marie. "I kept it secret, as you wished, and it led to an awkward situation. Talbot saw me leaving St. Jim's to-night. He naturally wanted to know where I was going, but I could not tell him. He insisted on coming with me, but I refused to let him. Then he tried to follow me, and we—we had words. All the reproaches were on my side. I spoke harshly to him—called him hard names—and sent him back to the school utterly wretched."

"Excellent!"

Marie's eyes flashed.

"You are taunting me!" she cried angrily.

"Not at all," said Joan, unperturbed. "I merely said 'Excellent!' because I shall now know what attitude to adopt towards the Toff when I get to St. Jim's. You have given me my cue."

Marie stared at Joan Dawlish in amazement.

"When you get to St. Jim's?" she echoed. "What do you mean?"

Joan laughed—a laugh that rang eerily through the gloomy basement.

"Let me explain," she said. "There can be no harm in explaining, since you are powerless to frustrate my plans. I'm going to St. Jim's to-night to take your place there! I shall assume your name and identity."

"What?" muttered Marie, aghast.

"It should not be too difficult," went on Joan Dawlish. "We resemble each other very closely, so far as features are concerned. And you will notice that I have now had my hair bobbed in the same style as your own. I shall relieve you of your raincoat and hat, and I shall be able to help myself from your wardrobe when I get to St. Jim's. To-night I shall cease to be Joan Dawlish. To-morrow, as Marie Rivers, I shall be carrying out your duties in the school sanatorium. I've had no experience of nursing, which is rather a handicap. But I do not intend to remain long at the school—merely long enough to discover where all the valuables are kept, and to pave the way for the proposed raid."

Marie Rivers sat dumbfounded. Slowly she began to comprehend why she had been kidnapped and imprisoned in this lonely house. Joan Dawlish intended to impersonate her, and to take her place at St. Jim's as nurse.

The reckless daring of such a manœuvre took Marie's breath away.

Only the most skilful of actresses could hope to play such

a part successfully. It was an undertaking that was crowded with risks.

To begin with, Joan Dawlish would have to hoodwink the matron, Miss Pinch. Perhaps this would not be very difficult, for that good lady was very guileless and shortsighted.

But what of the Head and the masters and the boys? Could they be deceived so easily by an impostor? Marie did not think so.

Joan Dawlish admitted that she had no knowledge of nursing, and this being the case, some very awkward and embarrassing situations were bound to arise.

However, Joan seemed to have reckoned up all the risks, and to consider them worth while. Late though the hour was, she proposed to travel to St. Jim's that night and take the place of the girl she had betrayed. She did not intend to stay at St. Jim's a moment longer than was necessary—merely enough, as she had said, to find out where all the valuables were stored, so that all would be plain-sailing for the gang of cracksmen when the night of the raid came.

"What do you think of my plan, Marie?" asked Joan, with a quizzical smile.

"I think it will fail. I sincerely hope it will, anyway."

"Thank you! You haven't a very high opinion of my capabilities as an impersonator."

"I always knew you were clever, and now I know that you are unscrupulous as well as clever," said Marie. "But you will find it hard to deceive St. Jim's."

"We shall see."

"You will be taking tremendous risks."

Joan laughed.

"It will be an adventure, and risks are the very spice of adventure," she said. "Well, I shall have to be going now. There is your supper. The men will see that you are well-fed in my absence. When we shall meet again I can't say. Will you shake hands, Marie, before I go?"

"No!" Marie drew back quickly. "I shall find it hard to forgive you for what you have done, Joan, and for what you are attempting to do."

Joan Dawlish shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well," she said indifferently.

Then she gathered up Marie's raincoat and Marie's hat, and, without another look at the girl she had wronged, she quitted the gloomy basement, locking and bolting the door behind her.

Marie Rivers was alone again.

Joan's footsteps died away up the stone stairs, and the house became still and silent.

Outside the storm had abated, and the stars were twinkling in the sky.

After a short interval, Marie heard the throbbing of an automobile, mingled with the sound of voices—a man's and a girl's.

The car departed, and its vibrant hum died gradually away on the night air.

Joan Dawlish had set out on her daring adventure.

With an exclamation of alarm Marie sprang to the door of the car. But before she could reach it she was suddenly seized from behind, and a scarf was thrown over her mouth. (*See Chapter 7.*)

CHAPTER 9.

Talbot's Vigil!

MIDNIGHT!

St. Jim's stood still and silent beneath the stars. The last boom from the school clock, striking the hour, had died away. No lights gleamed from any of the windows; even the most studious of the masters had put away their books and betaken themselves to bed.

In the various dormitories, the St. Jim's fellows were sleeping the sleep of the just, with one exception.

The exception was Talbot of the Shell.

Talbot was not only awake, he was dressed, and out in the quadrangle. He had stationed himself in the shadow of the school wall, not far from the gates, and he was waiting, with growing anxiety, for the return of Marie Rivers.

Five long hours had elapsed since the school nurse had set out on her mysterious mission, and she was not yet back. They had been worrying hours for Talbot, each more worrying than its predecessor.

And now that midnight had come, and passed, Talbot's anxiety was keener than ever. He started to pace to and fro beneath the ivy-clad wall. His handsome face was clouded, his mind sorely troubled.

His apprehension for Marie's safety had grown with the passing of the hours. He had waited for her until the official bedtime, but she had not come in. Talbot had then retired to the Shell dormitory with his schoolfellows, but shortly after "lights out" he had risen and dressed, and let himself out of the building by means of the box-room window. He had then gone down to the school gates, to resume his vigil.

Marie had not come in during the bedtime interval. No light had been visible from the window of her room in the sanny. That was a sure indication that she was out, for Marie invariably sat up reading until a late hour.

The window of the matron's room was also in darkness. Apparently, Miss Pinch had gone early to bed, without being in any way anxious about the school nurse. The storm having abated, Miss Pinch had every reason to suppose that Marie would return to St. Jim's safe and sound. The girl occasionally visited the Wayland Theatre, and was back very late, and on those occasions Miss Pinch would retire for the night, leaving Marie to let herself in. The matron had implicit trust in her charming subordinate.

Apart from Talbot, nobody was concerned about Marie's absence. Taggles, the porter, had not seen her go out. He had been snugly ensconced before the fire, in his parlour, at that hour.

Taggles had locked the gates long since, blissfully unaware of the fact that the school nurse was out.

Talbot alone was concerned about Marie and anxious for her safety.

(*Continued on page 16.*)

A House Match Twenty Years Hence.
Visualised By MONTY LOWTHER.

THE annual match between School House and New House was played on Saturday afternoon. The start was delayed owing to the belated arrival of Tommy Shuter, the School House skipper. Tommy had popped up to London in his aeroplane to do some shopping, and had been forced to descend on the return journey owing to engine trouble. He completed the journey by car, and could only crawl along at a hundred miles an hour.

Lots of distinguished visitors had arrived by aerobus to see the match, and the rival teams lined up as under:

SCHOOL HOUSE.

Stopham; Bigge, Burleigh; Goodman, Pivott, Tackler; Hare, Dribbell, Shuter, Pass, and Golightly.

NEW HOUSE.

Fumbler; Poore, Weeke; Juggins, Huggins, Muggins; Looney, Funck, Beeton, Dudshott, and Missingham.

Now that the offside laws had been made still more elastic, a good crop of goals was anticipated.

There was a sensational start. The School House forwards, ably led by Shuter, put on six goals in as many minutes. Poore and Weeke, the New House backs, were too weak and poor to stem the repeated onslaughts of the School House forwards, who displayed rare dash and perfect understanding.

Shuter's first goal was a beauty. The ball whizzed into the net with the velocity of a cannon-ball. It seemed to pass clean through the body of Fumbler, the goalie, who was temporarily laid out.

Other goals followed in monotonous sequence. No sooner was the ball gathered out of the net and punted to the centre of the field than it was returned to the net again.

The School House maintained their average of a goal per minute, and the scorers must have thought they were attending a cricket match, for the half-time score read:

SCHOOL HOUSE 45
NEW HOUSE 0

The New House pulled themselves together on the resumption. Dudshott, their skipper, rallied them with the rousing words:

"Come on, New House! Pull your socks up! We only want a miserable forty-six goals to win!"

There was a concerted raid on the School House goal, where Stopham was in great form. High shots, low shots, fast shots, slow shots—Stopham always managed to stop 'em.

On the whole, the shooting of the New House forwards was poor. Dudshott repeatedly sent the ball hopelessly wide, and Missingham, his partner, was always missing 'em when well placed. As for Funck and Beeton, the former always hopped out of the way of Bigge and Burleigh, the School House backs; while Beeton was repeatedly beaten for pace. Looney, on the wing, was inclined to wander.

In order to encourage the New House, the goalposts were widened considerably, and the crossbar elevated in proportion; whilst Stopham, the goalie, retired from the game.

Thus encouraged, goal-scoring became mere child's play to the New House forwards. The goal was so wide that it would have been harder to miss than to score.

Dudshott helped himself to a dozen, and Beeton carried the ball into the net several times when the referee wasn't looking.

It began to look as if the School House would have to pay dearly for making concessions to their rivals. But they rallied strongly towards the end, and won in a canter.

Final score:

SCHOOL HOUSE 77
NEW HOUSE 30

After the match both teams attended a great celebration in the junior Common-room, where a tabloid tea was vastly enjoyed by all.

Mr. Railton, the venerable Housemaster of the School House, made an interesting speech. He said he well remembered the time when goals were very scarce in football. He had actually refereed a House match as far back as 1926 which ended in a goalless draw! That, of course, was before the rules were altered.

Mr. Railton also recalled the period before tabloid meals came into existence.

"In those days," he said, "bodily sustenance was taken in the form of jam-tarts, doughnuts, and other unwholesome comestibles. I remember a boy named Wynn who once consumed fifteen jam-tarts at a single sitting! Needless to say, he was not a School House boy. The School House boys have from time immemorial comported themselves like little gentlemen!"

Mr. Railton's speech was cheered to the echo by the School House contingent, and heartily booed by the New House partisans!

LOOK OUT FOR
A TOPPING

"ZOOLOGICAL"

SUPPLEMENT NEXT WEEK, CHUMS.
IT'S THE GOODS!

EDITORIAL!

By TOM MERRY.

SCHOOL HOUSE and New House have waged unceasing warfare ever since the New House came into being.

There has been one long feud between the two Houses—a friendly feud, but not exactly a 'kid-glove affair. When the partisans of the rival Houses meet in a snow-fight, or a pillow-fight, or a scrap with fists, no quarter is asked or given! The School House generally comes out top-dogs, though it is only fair to point out that we are numerically stronger than our New House rivals.

The School House is the old original part of St. Jim's. It was built generations ago, and its old-fashioned architecture compares very favourably with that of the New House. The School House has a green mantle of ivy; the New House walls are bare—or, as Monty Lowther puts it, the School House has grown whiskers, and the New House is cleanshaven!

It was the growing popularity of St. Jim's as a public school which necessitated the building of the New House. The School House was getting uncomfortably overcrowded, and the authorities saw that something would have to be done. So a new House was constructed to accommodate the overflow of scholars.

I am a School House fellow myself, but I won't pretend that we have all the advantages. We have all the old traditions of St. Jim's behind us, but we lack the modern conveniences which exist in the New House. Our corridors and studies are draughty and ill-lit, whereas in the New House they have electric light, and everything is on a more hygienic scale.

The rivalry between the two Houses is tremendously keen; but when a crisis arises in which the honour of the school is involved, then School House fellows and New House fellows stand together, shoulder to shoulder and forget their differences.

The School House happens to be "cock House" at present, but this has not always been so. There have been periods in the school's history when the New House star has been in the ascendant. In one memorable year they carried off the inter-House cricket trophy, the football cup, the boxing shield, and the swimming championship, and the School House fellows had to hide their diminished heads.

Our New House rivals are pretty well held these days, but occasionally they give us a rude shock by unexpectedly beating us in a House match or by carrying out a successful raid on our quarters.

I forgot to mention that in one respect we have an overwhelming advantage over the New House. Generally speaking, a House is either made or marred by its Housemaster, and Mr. Victor Railton, M.A., who rules the roost in the School House, is one of the very best. Mr. Horace Ratcliff, who presides over the New House, is a sour old stick-in-the-mud who doesn't believe in healthy House rivalry; and it is surprising how Figgins & Co. manage to keep their end up at all with such a frowning killjoy as Mr. Ratcliff always looming in the immediate background.

Tom Merry

NOT NICE for KNOX!

A Midnight Comedy

BY HARRY NOBLE.

"YOU sent for me, sir?"

Knox of the Sixth stepped into Mr. Railton's study. The Housemaster nodded.

"Yes, Knox. You are the prefect on duty this evening, I believe? Well, it has come to my knowledge that the boys in the Shell Form propose to hold some kind of a celebration to-night at midnight in their dormitory. They have, apparently, planned an orgy of feasting and revelry, to which their friends in the School House Fourth have been invited."

Knox's eyes gleamed. The unpopular prefect was eternally at war with the School House juniors, and he supposed that Mr. Railton had sent for him to ask him to keep a special eye on the Shell dormitory that night, and to frustrate anything in the nature of a celebration. Knox was only too keen to play the policeman.

"Naturally, Knox, I strongly disapprove of these midnight orgies," Mr. Railton went on. "The matter came to my knowledge in a roundabout way, and it is possible that I have been misinformed by a mischief-maker. I have, therefore, taken no disciplinary action. But as I shall not be here to-night—I have been urgently summoned to the bedside of a sick relative in London—I shall be glad if you will keep your eyes open. Should anything of an untoward nature occur, you will repress it at once."

"Of course, sir!" said Knox.

"The Shell dormitory has been very unruly of late," said the Housemaster, frowning. "There has been quite an epidemic of pranks, consisting chiefly of pillow-fighting and raids upon rival dormitories. The prefects have not been sufficiently vigilant."

"I'll promise you there shall be no larking about to-night, sir," said Knox, with a grim smile. "The most effective way of preventing any disturbance would be for me to sleep in the Shell dormitory just for to-night. The juniors would not dare to attempt any pranks with a prefect in the room."

"Very well, Knox," said Mr. Railton. "Will you arrange for your bed to be transferred to the Shell dormitory?"

"Certainly, sir. I'll see about it at once."

Knox quitted the Housemaster's study, grinning with satisfaction. He was quite looking forward to bedtime. Never before had he been given the opportunity of sleeping in the junior quarters. He told himself that he would be able to pay off some old scores against Tom Merry & Co. Not only would his presence in the dormitory prevent anything in the nature of skylarking, but he would have an opportunity of throwing his weight about, and giving the juniors a very unpleasant time.

During the evening Knox's bed was shifted to the Shell dormitory, and Tom Merry & Co. heard what was in store for them. Naturally, they were far from pleased.

It was a fact that the juniors had planned a midnight feast on a particularly lavish scale to celebrate a great football victory over the New House.

Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth had been invited, and the tuck had already been procured, and the hamper smuggled into one of the upstair lumber-rooms, conveniently to hand when midnight came.

The news that Knox of the Sixth was to sleep in the Shell dormitory that night came as a bombshell to the juniors. It meant that the feast was "off." It would have to be postponed for a more convenient occasion.

"It's rotten!" growled Tom Merry. "I'm surprised at old Railton putting Knox up to the idea of sleeping in our dorm."

"I expect it was Knoxy's own idea," said Manners. "He probably suggested it to Railton, in the first place."

"Well, the feed's off, anyway," said Monty Lowther lugubriously. "We look like having a pretty hectic night of it, with Knox on the warpath!"

The Terrible Three had been keenly looking forward to bedtime. But now they fervently wished that bedtime would never come.

It came all right, and Gerald Knox came with it. And with Gerald Knox came an ashplant, which showed that the prefect was looking for trouble.

Knox shepherded the Shell fellows up to their dormitory, and at once proceeded to make himself unpleasant. His bed had been placed near the door, and Knox sat on it, with all the dignity of a monarch on his throne, and scowled at the juniors as they started to undress.

"Listen to me!" said Knox. "I'm going to maintain strict discipline in this dormitory to-night! Any fellow who gives me the slightest trouble will get a licking! No talking, mind, and no dawdling! Buck up and turn in, all of you!"

The juniors obeyed as meekly as lambs. The alacrity with which they undressed and got into bed rather nettled Knox. He watched them turn in with a scowling face; then he himself undressed in a leisurely manner, and put out the light and got into bed. But he did not go to sleep immediately. He suspected that the juniors were lying low, and that they had planned to carry out some form of mischief as soon as their warder was asleep.

An hour passed, but nothing happened.

The dormitory was still and silent, save for the deep breathing of the sleepers.

Knox himself fell asleep at length from sheer boredom.

The first sleep being the deepest, and Knox being a heavy sleeper, the creaking of the dormitory door at midnight failed to disturb him.

Softly the door was opened, and into the pitchy blackness of the Shell dormitory—for it was a moonless night—crept three figures, clad in pyjamas and dressing-gowns and rubber-soled shoes.

It was a New House invasion, the invaders being Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. They did not advance very far into the dormitory. They merely groped their way to the bed nearest the door.

Tom Merry usually occupied the bed nearest the door, and Tom Merry was the intended victim of the three midnight marauders.

Figgins carried a coil of rope, and Fatty Wynn a tin of treacle and a bag of feathers, and Kerr a hideous face-mask with an abnormally long red nose.

Working cautiously and with difficulty in the intense darkness, Figgins proceeded to truss Tom Merry—as he blissfully imagined—to his bed. He passed the rope over the slumbering form, and then under the bed, and then repeated the performance until the sleeper was securely bound to his bed.

Meanwhile, Kerr groped for the sleeper's face, to which, when found, he affixed the grotesque mask. And Fatty Wynn applied a sticky mass of treacle to the sleeper's hair, and then decorated it with feathers in the Red Indian style.

These manœuvres took a good deal of time, but they were completed at length without the occupant of the bed having been awakened. He had twitched once or twice and muttered in his sleep, and that was all.

Little did the New House raiders dream, as they went chuckling back to their own quarters, that it was the sacred person of Knox, the prefect, upon whom they had laid vandal hands.

At one o'clock precisely Knox awoke. The extreme discomfort of his position had accelerated his awakening.

When Knox found that it was impossible for him to move more than an inch or two, and that something seemed to be covering his face and hair, he emitted a roar which the Bull of Bashan might have envied—a roar that brought Tom Merry & Co. out of their slumber and caused Manners to jump out of bed and switch on the light.

There was a yell as the sudden glare illuminated the scene.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What's happened to Knox?"

"Is it really Knox or the Wild Man of Borneo?" gasped Monty Lowther.

The prefect presented an extraordinary spectacle. He was trussed to his bed and masked most hideously, whilst long feathers protruded from his sticky hair. The juniors stared, and laughed and yelled until the dormitory was in an uproar.

As for the victim of the outrage, he was almost speechless with rage. It was quite a long time before he managed to articulate his desire to be set free. Knox stuttered and spluttered and wriggled, and his feelings towards the unknown japers were positively Hunnish.

Tom Merry & Co. released the prefect at last, and Knox, discarding the mask and wrenching away the feathers, stamped up and down the dormitory, brandishing his ashplant, and demanding to know who were the perpetrators of the jape. He threatened them with all sorts of dire pains and penalties, which was hardly an inducement for the japers to confess.

But Knox, though he finally adopted the expedient of questioning each junior individually, failed to extort a confession, and he was eventually obliged to give it up as a bad job and get back to bed. And he made a mental resolve that he would never sleep in a junior dormitory again!

Figgins & Co., of the New House, were amazed when they heard the story next morning. Their jape on Tom Merry had missed fire completely; but they had provided their School House rivals with an enjoyable entertainment, over which the whole school chuckled gleefully—with the exception of Knox of the Sixth!

THE END.

SCHOOL HOUSE FOR EVER!

BY DICK ROYLANCE.

SCHOOL HOUSE fellows, unite with me
In the lilt of a lively song!
Talbot, Noble, the Terrible Three,
All the illustrious throng!
Bring your cornets, and bring your flutes,
And make the welkin ring!
Old tin-whistles will serve as lutes—
Merrily, boys, we'll sing!

School House first, in school and sport,
In the field of keen endeavour;
Top of the tree we'll always be—
School House, boys, for ever!

Her stalwart sons are wide awake,
And they fear no New House foe;
Merry and Manners, Gussy and Blake,
And a dozen more we know!
To every land the wide world o'er
Their fame has travelled fleetly;
Leal friends in peace, stern foes in war,
They rule the roost completely!

The rival Houses at St. Jim's
Are only two in number;
And first of the twain we'll always reign
While our New House rivals slumber!

Greyfriars, Rookwood, and Highcliffe, too,
May envy the likes of we!
For the first, the best, in every test,
The pick of the bunch we'll be!
Up with the School House banner, boys,
And keep it gaily flying!
The School House name and the School House fame
Will flourish for aye, undying!

School House first, and all the time,
Mighty and meritorious;
Steady and strong, marching along,
Valiant and victorious!

FRIENDS DIVIDED!

(*Continued from page* 13.)

Why had she not returned? Marie had taken the seven-twenty train from Rylcombe—where to, Talbot could only surmise. That was the last he had seen of her—nearly five hours ago. What had happened to his girl chum during that long interval?

All sorts of fancies and fears obsessed Talbot as he tramped to and fro under the old elms. Had there been a railway accident? Had Marie, visiting some unfamiliar part of the country, lost her way in the storm? Or what other calamity had happened to account for her non-return?

The suspense was growing terrible.

From time to time Talbot sprang to the top of the school wall, and explored with his eye the long stretch of roadway, gleaming ghostly in the starlight. But he saw no approaching figure, heard no approaching footsteps.

The quarter after midnight chimed from the school clock.

Talbot's face was haggard with anxiety. Never had he spent a more miserable evening. The high words which had been spoken outside Rylcombe Station, when Marie had found that he was following her, were still painfully fresh in Talbot's memory. Marie had been very angry with him; she had peremptorily ordered him back to the school, making him feel abashed and humiliated. She was angry with him still, for all he knew; and Talbot was desperately anxious to see her, so that he might smooth things over. He was prepared to put himself in the wrong—to take the full blame for what had occurred, and to apologise to his girl chum. After all, it had been hardly "cricket" to follow Marie to the station, even though it had been done with the best of motives.

Talbot was most anxious to heal the breach in their friendship, lest it should widen to such an extent as to become irreparable. He well knew how easily friendships were broken. A hasty word, a trivial misunderstanding, had often caused the closest of friends to drift apart. That was the peculiarity of friendship; it was proof against the big crises of life, but it often failed to withstand the pin-pricks.

Talbot's anxiety, therefore, was twofold. He was intensely anxious for Marie's safety, and he was anxious for the future of their friendship. Torn between these two anxieties, the junior's lonely vigil was proving far from pleasant.

Talbot paused suddenly, stopping short in his stride. He seemed to hear, faintly, in the distance the hum of a car. The sound drew nearer, but presently it ceased abruptly.

The junior clambered on to the top of the wall again, and scanned the white stretch of roadway. But he saw nothing.

He remained on his perch for a moment, a dark figure, silhouetted against the sky. Straining his ears to listen, he presently heard a sound that was unmistakable—the sound of footsteps.

Was it Marie returning at long last?

Talbot peered eagerly through the gloom. The footsteps became more distinct, and presently a slim, girlish figure came into view.

"Marie!"

Talbot called the name softly as the figure drew nearer.

The girl stopped short with a little gasp of alarm. Evidently she was startled to hear her name called, and to see the crouching figure on the top of the school wall.

"Who—who is that?" she asked quickly.

"It is I—Talbot," answered the junior reassuringly. "Don't be alarmed, Marie. I've been waiting for you. I thought something dreadful must have happened."

There was no reply from the girl in the roadway. Talbot felt that Marie was still angry with him.

"Do you think you can get over the wall, Marie, if I give you a hand?" asked Talbot. "The gates were locked long ago, of course, and old Taggles is inclined to cut up rusty when his beauty sleep is disturbed. Can't very well knock him up at this time of night."

The girl stepped back a couple of paces, facing the wall.

"Thank you, Toff," she said coldly. "I can manage without your help."

She took a short run, and sprang, nimbly as a panther. Her gloved hands gripped the top of the wall, and she pulled herself up. Talbot jumped down, on the other side, and stood with outstretched hand to assist the girl to descend. But she ignored the proffered hand, and swung herself down, landing lightly upon terra firma.

"Marie!" Talbot's voice was low and tense. "Are you still angry with me?"

"Very!"

The girl had started to walk towards the building. Talbot ran after her and caught her by the arm.

"Look here, Marie——" he began desperately.

Indignantly the girl wrenched herself free from Talbot's grasp.

"How dare you, Toff?" she panted.

"I must speak, Marie! We cannot part in anger like this. I've been waiting here for hours for you to come in."

"You were not asked to wait."

"I know; but I've been fearfully anxious about you, Marie. I imagined all sorts of horrible things had happened. It's been a nightmare. And, now that you're back, I want to speak to you about that—that little affair earlier in the evening, when I followed you down to the station."

"I don't wish to discuss it," said the girl icily. And again she started to walk away.

Talbot stood crestfallen and bewildered. He had been prepared for a slight coolness and aloofness on the part of his girl chum, but he had not expected these rebuffs. Marie had never treated him like this before. She had been angry with him at times, but her anger had quickly evaporated. She was not the sort of girl to nurse a grievance.

Not only was Marie's present attitude foreign to her usual demeanour, but her voice somehow seemed different. It was harsh and unnatural.

Whilst Talbot stood there, hesitant and uncertain, the girl glanced back at him over her shoulder.

"Our friendship is finished," she said. "I never wish to speak to you again!"

She walked on towards the house.

Talbot stood dumbfounded. His brain was in a whirl. That last remark—that Marie was finished with him, and that she never wished to speak to him again—was the unkindest cut of all. He had done nothing to deserve such treatment. He had been eager to "make it up" with his girl chum; he had been willing to take the blame for the differences which had arisen between them; yet he had not even been given a fair chance to speak. He had been snubbed and slighted.

Marie had gone in, leaving him abruptly with the remark that she wanted nothing more to do with him. Their friendship, extending over many years, had been shattered in a single moment.

Talbot stared after the girl's retreating figure—stared after it stupidly, dazedly. He did not call her back; he knew it would be futile.

It seemed, to Talbot, that the world had suddenly turned upside-down. Marie had spurned and rejected him, and the shock of it had stunned him. He could not fully comprehend it as yet.

Worn out by his long vigil, and utterly dejected by its amazing sequel, Talbot dragged his way across the dark quadrangle, and entered the building by the box-room window, and made his way to the Shell dormitory.

CHAPTER 10.
Joan at St. Jim's!

JOAN DAWLISH stood before a full-length mirror, in Marie Rivers' room, and surveyed herself critically.

It was the next morning. The rising-bell had sounded on the fresh spring air, and the school was astir.

The cracksman's daughter was attired in a nurse's uniform, taken from Marie's wardrobe; and so striking was her resemblance to the girl whose place she was taking, that only the keenest observer would have divined any difference.

Had the two girls stood side by side, it would have been possible to detect slight differences here and there. But Marie Rivers was far away, at Lonedeep. Joan Dawlish had taken her place at St. Jim's. It was Joan, of course, whom Talbot had met after midnight. It was Joan who had rebuked and spurned him, and turned her back on him, saying that she never wished to speak to him again.

That unexpected meeting with Talbot had been a severe ordeal for Joan Dawlish. It had required all her coolness and resource to meet the situation.

Fortunately for her, she had been apprised of the little tiff between Marie and Talbot; and she had therefore known what attitude to take. She thought it advisable to shake off Talbot there and then. She did not want him to call on her in the sanny—did not want him to see her at

all, in the daytime. If he did, he would probably penetrate her imposture, ingenious though it was.

Joan congratulated herself that she had effectively got rid of Talbot.

"The Toff will hardly dare to try and force an interview with me after what has happened," she reflected. "I don't suppose I shall see him again. He isn't the sort that comes to the sanny for medicine. He keeps himself as fit as a fiddle—thank goodness!"

With Talbot out of the way, Joan considered that she had very little to fear. It would be easy to bamboozle the matron; and as far as the fellows were concerned—those who came to the sanny with minor ailments—Joan proposed to minister to them as speedily as possible, and get rid of them.

So far, fortune favoured her. There were no patients in the sanny. St. Jim's showed a clean bill of health. It was possible that, during her brief stay at the school, the services of the nurse would not be requisitioned. Joan hoped this would be the case, for it would simplify the part she had to play.

Satisfied that there was no flaw in her appearance, Joan stepped out into the corridor.

Miss Pinch, the matron, was coming along, and she greeted the girl cordially.

"Good-morning, Marie!" she said, gazing benignly at Joan through her spectacles. "I trust you feel no ill effects from being out last night in that dreadful storm?"

"None whatever, matron," was the cheerful reply.

Miss Pinch beamed, and nodded, and passed on.

Joan Dawlish drew a quick breath of relief. It was obvious that the kindly old matron suspected nothing.

Joan devoted the next half-hour to exploring her immediate surroundings, and making herself familiar with the geography of the place. She returned to her own room just as the maid was bringing up her breakfast.

With a respectful "Good-morning, Miss Marie!" the maid set down the tray, and withdrew.

Joan Dawlish sat down to her solitary meal with a good appetite. She felt that everything was working like a charm.

"Marie seems to have an awfully good time here," she murmured. "Waited on hand and foot, and having practically nothing to do, except when there happens to be an epidemic of something. Wonder how she passes the time? Reading and knitting, I suppose. None of those simple pleasures for this child, though. My leisure will be spent in exploring the place, and finding out which rooms and studies will pay for ransacking. I shall have plenty of opportunity when all the boys are in their Form-rooms."

But there was an hour's interval before morning lessons began. And that hour was destined to prove a very trying one for the bogus nurse.

Having finished her breakfast, Joan stepped along to the dispensing-room where medicines and surgical appliances were kept.

She hoped to find the room empty, but she was disappointed. Sounds of sneezing and wheezing and coughing and snuffling came to Joan's ears as she passed along the corridor.

Three members of the fag fraternity were in the dispensing-room, obviously awaiting the arrival of the school nurse.

Wally D'Arcy of the Third was there, accompanied by his two chums and henchmen, Curly Gibson and Jameson.

Wally was very red in the face after a violent fit of sneezing. Curly Gibson was barking furiously. Jameson was snorting and snuffling into his handkerchief.

At first sight the condition of the fags seemed quite alarming. One would suppose that they were sickening for the 'flu, at least.

But there was nothing really the matter with the young rascals of the Third. The fact was they had developed a liking for a special cough and cold mixture which Marie Rivers was in the habit of dispensing. The mixture was very pleasant and palatable. Wally D'Arcy had been the first to discover it, and he had straightaway been afflicted with a very stubborn cold, which refused to leave him. Every morning Wally was in the habit of presenting himself in the dispensing-room and receiving a copious draught of the special mixture which tasted, to Wally, like the nectar of the gods.

Of course, Wally had told his chums about it, and they, too, had developed stubborn coughs and colds.

It had become quite the regular thing for the three fags to visit the sanny after breakfast, and to set up a chorus of sneezing and wheezing, until Miss Marie came to the rescue with liberal doses of that delightful mixture. When the doses had been taken the coughs and colds would vanish with the suddenness of a ghost at cock-crow, and would not return until the following morning!

Joan Dawlish hesitated for a moment outside the door of the dispensing-room. Then she turned the handle and entered.

Her entry was the signal for a renewed outburst of coughing and sneezing and snorting and snuffling.

"'Shoo! 'Shum!" sneezed Wally D'Arcy violently. "Good-morning, Miss Marie!"

"Good-bordig!" echoed Curly Gibson.

"Atishum-yum!" was Jameson's greeting.

Joan Dawlish looked gravely at the trio.

"You sound very bad," she observed.

Wally D'Arcy nodded.

"By gold is awful!" he groaned. "Buck up with the special mixture, Miss Marie!"

The fags pressed forward eagerly. Curly Gibson was licking his lips in anticipation.

Joan Dawlish was nonplussed. She did not know how to proceed. She scanned the rows of bottles which stood upon the shelves—big glass bottles, containing physic of various kinds and colours.

The bottles were labelled—not in good honest English, however, but in abbreviated Latin.

Joan's education had been pretty extensive, but it had not included the study of Latin. Her father was contemptuous of the dead languages, and he had arranged for his daughter to be taught more up-to-date and practical accomplishments, in lieu of Latin and Greek. The names on the bottles, therefore, conveyed nothing to Joan. They might have been Latin; they might equally well have been Dutch or Sanskrit. She had no idea what "Menth Pip" meant, or "Sal Vol," or "Inf. Gen," or all the other mystic words.

But Joan Dawlish showed no sign of confusion.

The fags were waiting, wondering why Miss Marie, who usually dispensed the special mixture without delay, was hesitating now.

Curly Gibson emitted a sharp series of barks, like a mongrel impatient for its bone. Wally D'Arcy and Jameson sneezed loudly and clamantly.

It was a very awkward moment for the impersonator of Marie Rivers. Something had to be done, however, and Joan did it.

There was one bottle, bigger than all the rest, standing by itself at the end of the top shelf. This bottle was boldly labelled, "White Mixture."

Joan decided that the best way of getting over her difficulty would be to administer white-mixture to all and sundry. It was quite harmless—indeed, it was beneficial; but if she started to tinker with some of those medicines with the Latin names, she might make some serious mistakes, with alarming results.

To the dismay and horror of the three fags, Joan, standing on tintoe, reached down the big bottle of white mixture.

"Who—who is that for, Miss Marie?" stammered Wally D'Arcy.

"You!" was the curt reply.

"But—but it's white-mixture in that bottle——"

"Exactly!"

"You—you're not going to dole out that awful muck?" gasped Curly Gibson.

The nurse nodded. And the three fags, whose coughs and colds had suddenly ceased, exchanged glances of dismay. They liked the special mixture—they would have lapped up any amount of it—but they hated white-mixture like poison. Wally D'Arcy declared that it actually was poison.

What was the matter with Miss Marie this morning? Why was she so snappy in her speech, so strange in her manner? Instead of greeting the fags with her usual charming smile, she had seemed annoyed at finding them there.

The only conclusion that Wally & Co. could come to was that Miss Marie had tumbled to the fact that their coughs and colds were merely "put on" for the occasion, and that she was angry with them in consequence. Her idea of punishment for the deception was to inflict doses of the hateful white-mixture upon the young pretenders.

The nurse took a large medicine-glass, and filled it to the brim with the odious liquid. Then she handed it to Wally D'Arcy.

"Oh crumbs!" Wally made a grimace. "What's the idea, Miss Marie? Why have you doled out this awful stuff?"

"Swallow it!" commanded Joan tersely.

Wally glanced appealingly at the nurse, but her expression showed clearly that she meant to be obeyed. Shutting his eyes, and screwing up his face like a contortionist, Wally gulped down the objectionable white-mixture. By contrast with the delicious mixture he had been used to, it was truly horrible.

"Gerooogh!" gurgled Wally, setting down the glass. "Wow!"

The nurse made a gesture of dismissal. She was smiling a little grimly.

"I think that will cure your cold," she said. "If it doesn't,

come to me again to-morrow morning, and you shall have a bigger dose."

Wally D'Arcy was almost doubled up. He fairly scuttled out of the dispensing-room, fearful lest Miss Marie should call him back and make him take a repeat dose there and then.

Meanwhile, Curly Gibson and Jameson were given generous doses of the white-mixture, and they enjoyed it no more than Wally D'Arcy had done.

When the ordeal was over, the three fags met together in the sunny quadrangle to discuss the extraordinary situation.

"Well, my giddy aunt!" ejaculated Curly Gibson. "What's the matter with Miss Marie this morning? She's generally as nice as pie."

"She must have twigged that we were shamming," said Wally D'Arcy.

"I suppose so," grunted Jameson. "But that's no reason why she should snap our heads off, and try and poison us with white-mixture!"

"I can still taste the awful stuff!" groaned Curly. "Groo! Let's go along to the tuckshop and get some acid-drops, to take the taste away."

The fags were greatly occupied in their minds concerning the sudden and surprising change which had come over Miss Marie. The school nurse had always been renowned for her sunny disposition, and for her sympathetic treatment of patients. Even with malingerers, Marie had never lost her temper, nor behaved so harshly as she had behaved that morning.

Wally D'Arcy & Co. were greatly mystified by the change. And they were not the only ones.

The school nurse had a very busy hour in the interval between breakfast and morning school. The fame of the special cough and cold mixture must have travelled abroad, for lots of fags called at the sanny to sample it. To their dismay, they were forced to sample white-mixture instead.

White-mixture, in fact, was doled out to all and sundry. It seemed to be the universal remedy—the panacea for all ills.

Baggy Trimble was given white-mixture for indigestion; Grundy of the Shell was given white-mixture to relieve a sore throat; Percy Mellish, who complained of feeling out of sorts, became suddenly fit again, as the nurse's hand strayed to the big bottle with the bold label.

But the most extraordinary event of the morning was that in which Skimpole of the Shell figured. Skimmy suffered from weak eyes, and it was his custom to bathe them each morning with a special lotion. On this particular morning, however, Skimmy missed his lotion. He was given a stiff dose of white-mixture instead!

Small wonder that the St. Jim's fellows were mystified. The strange conduct of Marie Rivers was quite inexplicable. Tom Merry & Co. discussed it, without being able to find a satisfactory explanation. The New House fellows discussed it: everybody, in fact, commented on the matter, and wondered what was wrong with Miss Marie.

The St. Jim's fellows would have been mightily astonished had they known that Miss Marie was no longer with them—that she was miles away, a prisoner in a lonely house, and that her place at St. Jim's had been taken by an impostor!

CHAPTER 11.
Talbot's Despair!

"TEA!" said Monty Lowther cheerily.

"Thank goodness the study's in funds!" said Manners.

"Rather!" said Tom Merry heartily.

Study No. 10 in the Shell passage was a land flowing with milk and honey, just then. Both Manners and Lowther had received remittances that morning, and Tom Merry's old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, had weighed in with a really handsome donation. Therefore, the Terrible Three were feeling very merry and bright. They came in, ruddy and cheery, from a practice match on Little Side.

There was only one fly in the ointment, so to speak, and that was the curious behaviour of Talbot.

All that day, Talbot had been moody and morose. He seemed to be in a chronic state of "the blues." He had risen that morning, haggard and heavy-eyed after his vigil of the previous night, concerning which Tom Merry & Co. knew nothing.

In the Shell Form-room, Talbot had been far from his usual self. He had not been able to give his mind to lessons, and Mr. Linton had rebuked him sharply on several occasions.

And now, in the practice match, Talbot had played deplorably. He had not been able to put a foot right. He had shaped like a novice—worse than a novice, in fact.

Obviously, there was something seriously amiss. Tom Merry & Co. had seen that at once. They had questioned

Talbot, in a friendly and tactful way, but he had not been communicative. He had simply said that he was all right; whereas there was every indication that he was all wrong.

It could be seen with half an eye that Talbot was greatly troubled and depressed. His chums were puzzled, but they did not press for an explanation. Talbot had experienced these black moods before, and while they lasted he preferred to be alone.

Tom Merry & Co. did not connect Talbot's fit of depression with the strange conduct of Marie Rivers. Had they done so, they would have realised that there must have been a breach between Talbot and his girl chum. But the juniors imagined that Talbot and Marie were still on the same friendly terms. They had not the remotest notion that there had been any estrangement.

Talbot was walking on ahead of the Terrible Three—walking slowly, with his eyes towards the ground. He appeared to be in a deep reverie.

"There's something very much up with old Talbot," said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded, and his cheery smile vanished.

"The blue devils seem to have got him," he said. "I wish to goodness the fellow would tell us what was wrong; then we might be able to help him. But you can get nothing out of him when he's in these moods."

"Let's bring him along to tea, and cheer him up," suggested Manners.

"I doubt if he'll come."

"Make him!" said Lowther. "That's the only way to cure a fellow with the blues. March him along to the study, and make him eat, drink, and be merry, and don't give him a chance to brood."

"Something in that," assented Tom Merry. And he quickened his pace, and called to the solitary figure in front.

"Talbot!"

The junior did not seem to hear.

"Talbot!" roared the Terrible Three in chorus.

Talbot heard this time. He could hardly help doing so, for that roar would have awakened the celebrated Seven Sleepers.

"Care to come along and have tea with us, old man?" said Tom Merry as Talbot turned slowly.

"Thanks, Tom. But——"

"We're taking no buts, and no refusals," said Lowther. "Will you come quietly, or must we employ force?"

Talbot smiled.

"I'd rather you made it another time, you fellows," he said.

"Rats! Another time we shall be broke, and there will be a famine in the land. At present we are enjoying the years of fatness. And you're going to help us scoff the good things. Come along!"

Talbot had no option in the matter, for Tom Merry took one of his arms, and Monty Lowther the other, and he was marched on towards the House.

Tom Merry & Co. tried all they knew to rally Talbot from his mood of depression. They did not succeed. Monty Lowther cracked his merriest jokes, while Tom Merry and Manners kept up a running fire of cheery conversation, and strove manfully to infect Talbot with their cheeriness. But Talbot, like Rachel of old, mourned, and would not be comforted.

It was not a merry tea-party Talbot ate little, and talked less. He was not trying to be a wet blanket; but he simply could not assume a mood which he did not feel.

Everybody was relieved when the meal was over. Monty Lowther's bright idea for curing Talbot's "blues" had failed of all its ends.

Talbot was glad to get away. He was in no mood for the society of his care-free chums. Their laughter and hilarity had struck a jarring note. Talbot's mind was full of the events of the previous night. Marie Rivers had told him to his face that she was finished with him. That was a stunning blow; and the shock of it, like the shock of a railway accident, took time to show all its effects.

"We are taking no buts, and no refusals," said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "Will you come to tea quietly or shall we employ force?" Talbot smiled. "I'd rather you made it another time," he said. "Rats! Come along!" Tom Merry took one of Talbot's arms, and Monty Lowther the other; and Talbot had no option but to go along. (*See Chapter* 11.)

Never before had Talbot felt so deeply depressed. He had never dreamed that depression could go to such poignant depths.

Without the warm and sympathetic friendship of Marie life was not worth living. It had been robbed of all that Talbot held most dear.

He had other friends, and staunch friends, in Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther. But their friendship, though prized, was not quite the same thing. It could not effectively fill the void which had been created by his severance from Marie.

Talbot went along to his study, and sat there alone, in the gathering twilight, to think the matter out.

He could not reconcile himself to the situation. He could not accept Marie's dismissal of him as final. He must see her, and reason with her, and bring her to a more tractable frame of mind. He must convince her that life, without her friendship, would be empty and desolate and scarcely worth living. He must urge her to forget all that had transpired, and to come back to him on the old footing.

Talbot sat there for a long time, in the shadows, thinking. At last he rose to his feet, with a look of resolution.

"I'll send Marie a note, asking if I may go round and see her," he muttered.

He turned on the light, took a sheet of notepaper from a drawer of his desk, and sat down to the table to indite a brief note.

"Dear Marie,—I simply must see you, to talk things over. I cannot accept as final your decision of last night. Please let me know, by bearer, if seven o'clock will suit.

"Ever sincerely,

"REGINALD TALBOT."

Having sealed the note, Talbot sallied forth in quest of a

messenger. Down in the hall he came upon Joe Frayne, of the Third.

"I say, kid, I want you to do me a favour. Will you take this note to the sanny for me, and hand it to Miss Marie?"

"Like a shot!" said Frayne promptly.

He had a high regard for Talbot, and would have done much more for him than this trifling favour.

"Thanks!" said Talbot. "Wait for Miss Marie's answer, and bring it along to my study."

"Right-ho!" said young Frayne. And he took the note and sprinted away in the direction of the sanny.

The school nurse was in her room.

Joan Dawlish had survived her first day at St. Jim's—though not without many embarrassing and awkward situations. She was finding her path beset with difficulties; and she well knew that she could not hope to keep up her amazing imposture for any length of time. However, she hoped to be able to remain at St. Jim's long enough to collect all the information that would be necessary for the use of the gang.

She was seated at the table now, with a large plan of St. Jim's laid out in front of her. There was a reading-lamp at her elbow, and Joan was scrutinising the plan intently, when there came a tap on the door.

Hastily Joan folded up the plan and tossed a book over it.

"Come in!" she called.

Joe Frayne entered with the note. He smiled at the nurse and handed over the missive.

Joan Dawlish looked at him keenly.

"Who is this from?" she inquired.

"From Talbot, Miss Marie. Surely you know his writin'?"

Joan bit her lip as she realised that she had made yet another blunder. A trifling blunder, perhaps; but she had made a good many that day, and they were certain to arouse comment, if not actual suspicion. In the role of Marie Rivers she ought, of course, to have been well acquainted with Talbot's handwriting.

Joan ripped open the envelope and drew out the message. Then she frowned and screwed the note in her hand—rather viciously, it seemed to the watching Frayne.

Talbot was making himself a nuisance, she reflected. She dared not answer his note with another, for her handwriting would have given her away. There was nothing for it but to send back a verbal message.

Joan turned to the waiting fag.

"You will go to Talbot," she said, with quiet deliberation, "and tell him that my decision of last night was final. Will you remember that?"

Joe Frayne nodded. He had not the faintest notion what it was all about, but he memorised the words.

"Miss Marie seems jolly annoyed about somethin'," mused the fag, as he wended his way to Talbot's study in the Shell passage. "She don't generally speak to a fellow so snappily."

Arrived at Talbot's study, Joe Frayne delivered the verbal message. He gave it word for word, and Talbot's face paled and his lip trembled.

"Thanks, kid," he said, a little huskily. "You can cut off now."

The fag withdrew, and Talbot paced restlessly to and fro. So Marie had seen fit to administer another rebuff! She refused to give him audience; she had not troubled, even, to send him a note. Simply a verbal message by Frayne, that her decision was final.

"This is altogether too thick!" muttered Talbot. He had never dreamed that Marie could be so harsh and unkind. He couldn't think what had come over her. She was treating him as if he were the rankest of rank outsiders, as if she had never been his friend.

Talbot could not accept Marie's answer. He would have no peace of mind until he had seen her and talked things over with her, and induced her to think better of her harsh decision. Marie had not allowed him an interview; yet they could not part like this. Emphatically, this must not be the last word.

Talbot determined to force an interview with his old chum. And with this object in view, he made his way to the sanny.

Outside the door of the nurse's room he paused, his heart beating faster than usual. Then he rapped on the panels.

But he was not bidden to enter.

"Who is there?" came a sharp voice from within—a voice which sounded strangely dissonant, strangely unlike that of Marie Rivers.

"Talbot," said the junior quietly. "May I come in, Marie?"

"No!" The answer was quick and peremptory. It was followed by the sound of a key being turned in the lock.

Talbot fell back a step in utter dismay. Inconceivable though it appeared, Marie had locked the door to prevent him from entering!

"Marie, I—I simply must see you——"

Talbot was sharply interrupted.

"I have told you that I do not wish to have anything more to do with you, and that my decision is final. If you do not go away immediately, Talbot, I shall have no alternative but to complain to the matron that you are annoying me!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Talbot.

His face was white as chalk now. His hopes—the faint hopes that he had nursed of a reconciliation with Marie—were ruthlessly shattered. He had been given marching orders. Marie had threatened to report him to the matron should he persist in his attempts to force an interview with her.

It was the last straw.

Talbot had to accept the situation—had to accept the fact that his friendship with Marie Rivers was a thing of the past.

A lump came into the junior's throat, but he made no further appeal to the girl who had spurned him.

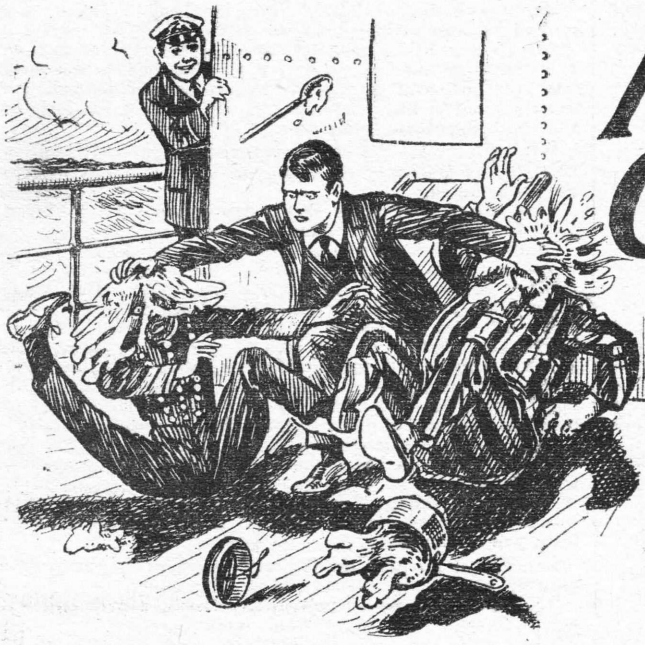
Talbot turned slowly away, and groped his way blindly down the stairs.

It was a dark hour, indeed, for Reginald Talbot, who little dreamed that he, in common with the rest of St. Jim's, had been duped and deceived, and that Marie was in reality languishing in captivity, whilst her place at St. Jim's was occupied by the cracksman's daughter, Joan Dawlish.

THE END.

(So far all the cards played in this little drama have fallen in favour of Joan, impersonating Marie Rivers. But there's many a slip twixt the cup and lip as you will learn from reading next week's fine yarn.)

THE LAST LAUGH! The merry crew aboard the Lord of the Deep chip David Ap Rees because he hails from Wales. But Dave is all there! What-ho! Anyway he succeeds in . . .



Pulling Gan Waga's Leg!

A Long Complete Story of Gan Waga & Co., full of sparkle and pep.

By SIDNEY DREW.

CHAPTER 1.
The Boy from Wales!

THE day was foggy and damp, and the trains running in and out of Porthampton were late, but at last the train Midshipman Valentine Hilton had been waiting for crept cautiously into the station and pulled up with a jerk.

"Cheerio, Dave!"

"Cheerio, Val!"

Val Hilton and his old school chum, Master David Ap Rees, shook hands, tremendously glad to see each other again.

"You just look fine and rosy, Dave," said Val. "You look fine whateffer, inteed you do. I was jolly glad when your wire came, for I was beginning to think my letter had gone astray. I knew I hadn't spelt the address properly. Got any more luggage?"

"Only this box," said David Ap Rees.

Val waved his hand, and a brawny sailor came forward and shouldered the box.

"Guess you could do with a bite, old chap?" said Val. "We'll have a feed before we go aboard. You'll have to perch on the rack behind, for the side-car is about full up. When you see what it's filled with you'll want to grin."

The side-car of Val's motor-cycle happened to be filled with Eskimo. Gan Waga was waiting there, without a hat, smoking a cigar. He smiled a large, oily smile when Val introduced him to Master David Ap Rees.

"From Wales, where the leeks and Welsh choirs come from," Val explained. "Don't judge him by his face, for that would hang him anywhere, but he's quite a decent sort of guy when you get to know him. We were in the same Form at Calcroft School."

"I jolly gladness to meet yo', old beans," said Gan Waga. "And yo' mind how yo' drive over the cobble-stones and tram-lines, Val, fo' yo' nearly shook all my teeth loose coming along."

David Ap Rees seated himself beside Val. In his letters to his chum Val had frequently mentioned the Eskimo, as well as other members of the crew of the Lord of the Deep. Val stopped outside the door of Porthampton's most famous restaurant.

"You and Gan get inside out of the drizzle," he said. "We sha'n't want the old bus again to-day, so I'll shove her away."

"And we have a few oysters to starts with, old pine-apple," said Gan Waga. "Yo' fondness of oysters, hunk?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm not, but I don't mind standing by while you eat a few," said David.

Gan Waga was no stranger, but as he approached the oyster counter a worried look came into the eyes of the man in charge.

"Oysterses, olds sport," said the Eskimo. "About five dozens."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Gan Waga," said the man, "but if you don't put down the money I can't serve you. When the prince paid the last bill he gave orders that you weren't to be allowed credit. It's not my fault, sir, but my instructions."

"Have a dozen with me," said Dave.

"Bless your life, sir, a dozen ain't any use to Mr. Gan Waga, sir. He wants a barrel," said the man. "Oysters are dear and scarce, and he'd bust a five-pound note for you. It can't be done, sir. I daren't stick my knife in a shell till you put down the cash."

"Then I call yo' a pudden-faced old misery," said Gan Waga. "Yo' not niceness to know."

The present of a choice cigar took the sting out of Gan Waga's allusion to the oysterman's personal appearance, and then Val came into the restaurant.

"Let him have as many oysters as he wants," said Val. "Give the glutton a bushel, if he can swallow them."

David Rees followed his chum to a table marked "reserved." The table was laid for three guests.

"Prince Ching Lung ought to be along in a few minutes," said Val. "You'll like the prince, for he's a brick. I expect you're wondering about the Eskimo and his oysters. Gan has bags of money, but they daren't let him have any himself, for he'd sling pound-notes about like dirt. Of course, any mortal thing he likes he can have, only the prince had to stop the tradespeople here giving him stuff on tick. And here's the prince."

Ching Lung rather liked the look of Master David Ap Rees. Dave was a well-grown boy, with dark, wavy hair and brown eyes. The prince knew Calcroft School, and they were soon chatting about it.

"I've no complaints about old Calcroft," said Dave, "but I can't help envying Val, the lucky bargee. No more early prep and swotting up Latin and Greek, and no Pycroft to jump on your collar ten times a day."

"I've not finished swotting yet, and don't you think it, old son," said Val. "I get my share of it. I say, it's a pity you've brought such rotten weather with you. I fairly cheered when my uncle wrote and said you could come."

"I'll bet you didn't cheer any harder than I did," said Dave. "I thought I was in for a row, though I couldn't think what I'd done when Pycroft sent for me and told me. The old boy was awfully nice, as nice as if he thought he'd got rid of me for keeps. He forked me out a whole tenner, which I suppose my governor had sent along, and I gave some of our special cronies a slap-up feed. Of course, I used to read 'em your letters, and we all longed to be in your lucky boots. And here I am for a bit, anyhow."

When lunch was over Val paid Gan Waga's bill for oysters. The Eskimo wanted another couple of dozen.

"You can have 'em, you fat glutton, but if you do, you'll have to swim, for we're not going to wait for you," said Val. "Phew! What a swallow you've got. Twenty-eight shillings worth. Why, you'd break the Bank of England. Are you coming now, or will you swim it?"

Ching Lung's car was waiting outside. Spudge, the

prince's servant, was at the wheel with the man who was to take the car back to the garage seated beside him. They drove slowly down to the slipway through the mist and drizzle. At the slipway a launch was waiting for them, the crew clad in glistening oilskins and sou'westers. They saluted smartly.

"It's a pity there's this rotten fog, for the harbour is as pretty as a picture on a bright day," said Val, taking the tiller. "All clear there? Back out then. Keep your eyes open, Gan, and give a chi-ike if you see anything I'm likely to barge into, for it looks thick out there."

Val piloted them safely through the ghostly shipping, and came alongside of the yacht christened the Lord of the Deep in a seamanlike fashion.

"Neat, that, Dave, though I says it myself as didn't ought," he said. "You get it in the neck here if you scrape off a bit of paint. You've only to scratch it, and our bo'sun and steersman grouse at you like mad. A sort of drawing-room ship this is."

The deck was blanketed in fog, but it was fairly bright and cheerful below with the electric lights burning. Val carried his chum off to his cabin, and Master David Ap Rees discovered that his box had arrived before him. After hanging up his hat and overcoat, Ching Lung strolled into the saloon, where Rupert Thurston was writing a letter.

"Well, what's the Welsh youngster like, old man?" asked Thurston.

"Just an ordinary sort of youngster," answered Ching Lung. "Quite a nice chap, but I didn't notice anything special about him. I suppose there is, or the chief wouldn't have picked on him. Rather a wise move, I think. A boy wants a boy for a companion. When they get going they ought to liven up things. There's a fog rolling up thick enough to cut in slices with a knife."

"No chance of getting away to-night, then," said Thurston.

He stood up as Val Hilton and his guest came in, followed by Felix, the ginger cat with the black tail.

"This is young Taffy David Ap Rees, Mr. Thurston," said Val, with a grin. "Inteed whateffer, yes, look you. He was my best chum at Calcroft the two terms I was there."

"I'm very pleased to meet you, David," said Rupert Thurston, holding out his hand.

"The same here, sir," said David. "And see here," he added to Val, "if you give me any more of that inteed-what-effer-look-you stuff, I'll paste you a beauty under the ear!"

"And then you'll wake up in hospital," said Val, with a grin. "Come and have a trot round."

— — —

CHAPTER 2.
That Busy Day!

MR. BARRY O'ROONEY came down the alley-way when a person clad in pyjamas emerged from a cabin with a backward rush.

"Aisy, bedad—aisy!" said Barry O'Rooney, staggering. "Sure ut's unkoind of you to bash your head just where Oi've put my breakfast!"

"Sorry, old thing!" gasped the person in the pyjamas. "He caught me with one foot off the ground. Watch me smash him flat!"

Barry O'Rooney made room. Out of the cabin came Val Hilton, also clad in go-to-bed attire, and wearing boxing-gloves, like his chum David Ap Rees. They sparred up to each other, and hit out hard and often. Mr. O'Rooney became quite excited.

"Bedad, don't bend that lift elbow, but kape ut sthraight, Masther Val!" he cried. "Head well back, Masther Rees, for av you thry to butt in wid ut down, you'll be sthopping a fourpenny wan. Upper-cut him! For the sake of Moike why didn't you upper-cut him when you got the chance? Arrah, a beauty! Follow ut up, follow ut up! Good bhoy! You've got him groggy! Swat him!"

In his excitement, for he loved nothing better than a sparring match or a fight, Barry O'Rooney danced round the combatants, offering both of them advice in a most impartial way. The youngsters were very busy, but not too busy to exchange winks. He was just behind Dave Rees, who seemed to be sagging at the knees and very short of breath when Barry told Val that he had got his opponent groggy, and advised him to rush in and finish it.

Val did rush in, and he did hit. Like a flash the Welsh boy dropped, the blow grazing his hair, and Barry O'Rooney stopped it.

"Murther and gridirons!" roared Barry, retreating and clutching his features. "Who towld you to do that? Ouch! Phwat a daisy!"

"Awfully sorry, Mr. O'Rooney!" grinned Val. "But who told you to put your face there? I hope I haven't hurt you much!"

Barry O'Rooney blinked, gave his head a shake, and rubbed his finger along his front teeth.

"Hurt, is ut?" he said. "Sure, ut would take more than a feather-flick like that to hurt me! But, bedad, you must kape that lift arm sthraight! Ut's a bad sthyle, and you must get out of ut. Ut makes me cry to see a sthyle loike that, ut brings tears to my oies."

Wiping the tears out of his eyes with a large red handkerchief, Barry O'Rooney continued his interrupted journey to the booby-hutch.

"Ha, ha, ha! I guess that swipe was enough to bring tears to anybody's eyes," chuckled David.

"I didn't think he was so close up," said Val. "I only meant just to give him a pat when I winked to you to duck. It won't damage him much, for he's jolly tough. But it was funny about my rotten style bringing tears to his eyes, not my punch with the mitten. Anyhow, he's a good sort, and I wish he'd kept his face an inch or two further back. And now for a warm bath and brekker whateffer, look you."

David aimed a blow at Val's back, but only hit the cabin door, which Val had kicked to behind him. Dave tried to unfasten the tapes of the left glove with his teeth, but failed; he was equally unsuccessful with the right one. Val's door was locked, and as Dave could hear faint splashing sounds, he concluded that his chum was in his bath.

"Bother the things!" he muttered. "And, of course, not a soul about when they're wanted. Hi, Gan! Come along here, you old fossil!"

Gan Waga, his head shining with oil, and his plump face glowing with health, turned and waddled back.

"Not so muchness of yo' fatness fossils, old strawberry ices!" he said. "What yo' want, hunk?"

"Just untie that glove," said Dave. "Be quick about it, like a good chap, or breakfast will be on before I'm dressed!"

"For goodness inteed look yo' whateffer certainly yes, my old cheese!" said Gan Waga.

"Who taught you that rubbish?" asked Dave. "I don't care who taught you, but if you say it again, I'll biff you!"

"Then yo' takes the silly old glove offs yo'selfs, my merry lad," grinned the Eskimo, and waddled away.

Dave knew they were only pulling his leg, and that it was an absurd thing to get ruffled about. With great difficulty he got the key out of the lock of his cabin. The key fitted Val's door, and at last Dave got in and went through to the bath-room. He pounced on his unsuspecting chum, and forced Val's head under water and held it there.

"Wha—spa—what the—have you gone—spa—gone potty?" spluttered Val, when he was permitted to rise and gasp for breath. "You silly juggins, you've made me swallow about a gallon of soapy water!"

"Unfasten that!" said Dave, extending the dripping glove. "You never in your life heard me say 'Whateffer,' or 'inteed,' or 'look you!' I come from Wales, and I'm proud of it, but we don't talk that silly lingo. Now you've been putting Gan Waga up to it!"

"Don't you believe it, old son," said Val. "There's not much you can put that Eskimo up to. And what does it matter? Look you—— Keep off, Dave, or I'll flop you with the sponge! Ow! You beast! For goodness inteed whateffer—— Leggo! Whoosh!"

Mr. Thomas Prout, steersman of the Lord of the Deep, heard sounds of strife as he was passing the open door of Midshipman Hilton's cabin with Mr. Benjamin Maddock, the bo'sun. They went in to investigate, and were just in time to see Master David Ap Rees disappear into the bath headlong, with the midshipman's naked arm locked round his neck. A sort of tidal wave followed that flopped and surged over the white linoleum and reached the expensive carpet in the cabin, and through the spray a pair of pyjama-clad legs kicked furiously.

"By honey, Ben, these are pretty doings!" said the steersman.

"Souse me, Tom, but they are pretty doings!" growled the bo'sun. "Come out of that!"

The bo'sun grasped Dave by the neck and one ankle, and lifted him, dripping and half choked, out of the bath. Val sat up, coughing and blinking.

"For a sight less than this, by honey, I've seen men keel-hauled," said the steersman, "keelhauled and chucked to the sharks!"

"And a lot too good for 'em, souse me!" growled the bo'sun. "If it was left to me, Tom, I'd boil 'em in tar and cook 'em slowly!"

Then they stole heavily out, and Val and Dave looked at each other and grinned.

"Quite a decent bit of a rag that, only a trifle too sloppy," said Dave. "If I hadn't slipped on the soap you wouldn't have pulled me in. I suppose we'd better swab up the mess.

I'll leave these pyjamas here, for I don't want to soak my cabin, and borrow your dressing-gown. This seems to be a jolly sort of life, Val. Considering it isn't breakfast-time yet, we've crowded quite a lot of stuff into it."

"The dressing-gown is in the wardrobe, look you——" began Midshipman Hilton.

Val ducked into the bath as the pyjama jacket and trousers, pressed into hard, wet balls, were hurled at him. The fog had vanished, and the sun was shining again. They were waiting for the mail which had been delayed by the fog, and the harbour postman brought it at last.

"Now we'll soon sling our mud-hook, Dave," said Val. "My job's on the bridge, but I expect Mr. Prout will let you come up when we're clear of the harbour. I can't tell you where we're going, for I don't know myself. Go and ask O'Rooney how his face feels, and if he's dried his tears."

"I don't think I'd better," said Dave. "If you want to know, and as you did it, go and ask him yourself."

"No time, old thing," answered Val, and made a dash for the bridge.

Ching Lung had opened the mail-bag. It was not a very heavy mail, and one of the stewards soon distributed the letters.

There was one for David Ap Rees, Esquire, and the prince rang for his servant, Spudge, and told him to find David Ap Rees, Esquire, and hand him over his property. Spudge saluted and vanished.

Outside Porthampton the wind that had blown the fog away was hitting up against the tide and making things lively. Spudge discovered David sheltering abaft the funnel. Spudge, with all the buttons on his uniform polished until they twinkled, touched his cap.

"Ho, yossir," he said. "A letter for you, sir, look you!"

Dave took the letter and gave Spudge a glare.

"Who told you to say that?" he demanded. "What fat-head told you to say 'Look you'?"

Spudge could not possibly have blushed, for he was the wrong colour. His face was as impassive and expressionless as a lump of mahogany.

"Oh, nossir. Gracious goodness, nobody inteed whateffer!" he replied, and faded away.

"Before very long one chap is going to have two ears and one nose in a sling, and that's Mister Valentine Hilton!" muttered Dave, as he tore open the envelope. "A chap can't stand this sort of rot even from his best pal. The next guy who starts it gets punched."

Dave read his letter, and took a walk round the deck, braving the wind and the spray. The yacht had run into a lusty sou'-wester. He caught a glimpse of Val walking up and down the bridge with his hands in the side-pockets of his reefer jacket, and his gold-braided yachting-cap on the back of his head, as much at home there as an admiral who had braved a thousand gales. Val hailed him.

"Get your sea-legs quick, old man!" he shouted, with one hand to his mouth. "We're in for a dusting, whateffer, look you!"

"I don't know anything about look you, but I can imagine how you'll look when I've pasted you, my lad," answered Dave. "And you won't look nice, either. Wait till I get you off that bridge. They'll want a new middy on this barge, for they'll never be able to repair you."

"The best thing for it," cried Val, "is a quart of hot pea-soup, look you, with half a pound of melted butter in it. That's what cured me the first time I had it. Directly you feel a pain under your pinafore, whateffer, and start to turn green about the gills, inteed, go down to the gully, look you, and ask the chef for some boiling hot pea-soup with lots of melted butter, good gracious, yes!"

Dave had made up his mind not to be seasick. The sky had clouded, and it was as black as ink ahead. He retired to a deck-chair behind the funnel just as a squall of rain and hail struck the yacht. Prince Ching Lung, with the collar of his macintosh turned up over his ears, sat down in the vacant chair beside him.

"If you're not used to this sort of thing, Dave, and curl up," said the prince, "it may comfort you to know that the sickest kid I ever saw aboard a ship was young Val Hilton on his first journey. As I told him then, it's nothing to be ashamed of. Some get it, and some don't. If you start feeling muzzy, take my tip and scuttle below. They'll play some trick on you if you don't."

"I'll watch it, sir," said Dave, with a laugh. "I don't mind their tricks, I like them, and I shall get my own back."

Dave took another walk round, but it was not so easy. He lurched forward against the wind, keeping his head down against the gale, and when he turned he was blown aft in little staggering runs. He sat down in the deck-chair again, and got a sudden whiff of smoke from the funnel that nearly upset him. He clutched the arms of the deck-chair, clenched his teeth, and shut his eyes, and felt like nothing on earth.

Gan Waga, the Eskimo, looked round the corner. He grinned and squatted down in front of David, and Spudge came and squatted down beside him. On the deck Spudge placed four slices of dry toast, and with a wooden spoon Gan Waga proceeded to cover the toast with a warm, sloppy, yellow substance which he scooped out of an aluminium saucepan.

Spudge seized one of the slices, and Gan Waga a second one, and they bit hard and munched. Dave opened his eyes.

"Have a few, old beans," said the Eskimo, pointing to the two remaining slices. "M'yum! Most butterfuls, look yo'. Welsh rabbits."

"Ho, yossir," said Spudge. "Most lovely. Welsh rabbits, whateffer, inteed."

Dave shuddered, but he made one heroic effort. Though his knees were giving way, he managed to pick up the two Welsh rarebits. With the business-side, which was the cheese side, to the front, he pushed one of the dainties into the face of Gan Waga and plastered the other down on the hair of Spudge, to the enormous joy of Mr. Barry O'Rooney; and then, as there was no help for it, he staggered to the rail, luckily on the leeward side, and paid a landsman's tribute to Father Neptune.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Barry O'Rooney, holding his sides. "Good luck to the bhoy! Bedad, you two

(*Continued overleaf.*)

TUCK HAMPERS AND MONEY PRIZES AWARDED FOR WIT.

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4

EALING SCORES!

STRANGE—BUT TRUE!

Warder (to magistrate): "The prisoner has escaped, sir." Magistrate: "Shameful! Shameful! Weren't all the exits guarded?" Warder: "Yes, sir; but he escaped by an entrance!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Eric Gaskell, 4, Julien Road, Ealing, W.5.

CUT UP!

Ethel: "My teacher is awfully mean!" Mother: "Hush! You mustn't say that, dear." Ethel: "Well, she is! What do you think? She borrowed the strap off my bag to beat me with!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Jack Jackomas, 31, David Street, Pt. Pirie, S. Australia.

THAT BOTTLED HIM?

Car Owner: "How did you manage to puncture the tyre so badly?" Chauffeur: "Ran over a bottle, sir." Owner: "Didn't you see it in time?" Chauffeur: "No, sir; the man had it in his pocket!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. Hughes, Hughenden, Urmston.

ARTFUL SCOTTY!

A Scotsman was out late at night, having lost his train home. Beckoning a taxi-driver, he inquired what the fare to Brixton would be. "Seven-and-sixpence, sir," answered the driver. The Scotsman, thinking the fare too high, began to argue. "Look here, then, sir," said the man at the wheel, "if you'll be a sport, I'll toss you double or nothing." A coin was tossed up, and the Scotsman lost. "Just my luck!" he growled, moving off. "I shall have to walk it now!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss M. Rose, 13, Wood Hill, Leicester.

SOON KNIGHTED!

Schoolmaster: "What is your name, my boy?" New Boy: "'Erbert 'Iggins!" Schoolmaster: "Can't you say, 'sir'?" New Boy: "Sir 'Erbert 'Iggins!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss Maud M. Spink, 423, Shoreham Street, Sheffield.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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deevils asked for ut and you got ut foine! Sure, lave it, Spudge, for you look nearly handsome wid that nice crop of goulden hair. Ha, ha, ha! Phwat a loife! Don't scrape ut off, Spudge, for the sake of Moike! Lave ut, and lather on we'll bait a mouse-thrap wid you."

Spudge gave a howl and fled, but Gan Waga did not seem to mind. He sent the toast skimming overboard, and peeled the cheese from his features and ate it. Gan Waga was not the person to waste good food even if it had met with a slight mishap.

"Bedad, av that soight isn't enough to make the funnel saysick," said Barry O'Rooney, shuddering. "Arrah, ye disgusthing haythen!"

"Yo' go and bake yo'self hardness," said Gan Waga. "Ifs it had been on yo' ugliful faces, it would have poisoned the cat, look yo'. Who eatings it, yo' or me, hunk? Go and chases yo'self off the maps."

Barry O'Rooney helped Dave down to his cabin, took off his boots for him, and put him to bed. Then came Val.

"Sit up, Dave, old man," he said. "Here's a dose the prince has sent. Get it down, and you'll be as right as ninepence in about ten minutes. I've had some, so I know what it feels like. Most of the time I wanted the old yacht to sink and get it over. Don't sip the thing, but swallow it down at one go."

The effect of the dose was almost magical. Ten minutes later, though his hair was very limp and his colour had a tinge of green in it, Master David Ap Rees was out of bed and putting on his boots. As Gan Waga's grinning face appeared round the edge of the door, Dave made a snatch at a pillow.

"No, yo' don't, fo' I gotted my fingers crossed, old beans," said the Eskimo. "I not thinks Spudge gotted that cheese out of his hair yet, Daves, and I not think yo' so sickness, or I not done it. Only a little jokes, and yo' gotted the best laughs. Yo' not bears no maliciousness, hunk, whateffer?"

"It was abominable," said Val, with a grin.

"Yo' wrongness, old dears, it was Welsh rabbits, and it was deliciousness, look you," said the Eskimo. "I sorry Dave wasted so much on Spudge's hair. Spudge's lot came from the bottom of the saucepan and was hotness, and he afraid it will turn him bald. All serene, hunk?"

"All serene," said Dave. "Of course, I don't bear malice, Gan, but if I make you squeal one of these days, it will be some squeal."

"And bear this in mind, too, Fatness," said Val, "that if we go for you, you won't be able to hide behind Prince Ching Lung like you do when you've japed Maddock, Prout, and Barry O'Rooney, and they're after your blood. We shall get you in spite of the prince."

Gan Waga lighted a cigar.

"I not very much afraidness," he said, with a chuckle; "but p'r'aps I betterer be on yo' side. Yo' likes me on yo' sides, hunk?"

"No!" shouted Val and Dave with one voice.

The Eskimo's little beady eyes closed tightly as he opened his mouth to laugh.

"Good gracious, inteed, look yo', fancy that now whateffer!" he said. "Ho, ho, ho, ho-o-oo! Yo' make me smiles, dear boys. Don't yo' fires that pillow, Dave, fo' I still gotted my fingers crossed. Ha, ha, ha, ha-a-aa! So yo' not wants me, hunk. Dears, dears! Yo' be sorry."

"Oh, get out!" yelled Dave, and threw the pillow.

Gan Waga dodged it, and it went spinning into the alleyway. Dave had not finished lacing up his boots, so Val went to retrieve the pillow. It came to meet him, and then burst wide open, and the air was filled with snowstorm of feathers, and when Val retreated half blinded into the cabin he looked like a snowman.

"Ho, ho, ho-o-oo!" laughed the voice of Gan Waga. "Gracious goodness, inteed, look yo' whateffer! Ha, ha, ha, ha-a-aa!"

Dave echoed the Eskimo's laugh as he watched Val scraping the feathers out of his ears, eyes, and mouth.

"You look as if you ought to be in a cage, sitting on a perch and whistling, old man," he said. "Gee, what a mess! He must have cut a slit in that before he barged it back at us. I think it would be safer to have him on our side!"

Before Val could clear the fluff out of his mouth to say a few things he was bursting to say, the bo'sun paused on the threshold.

"Nice doings, gentlemen—nice doings, souse me!" growled Mr. Benjamin Maddock. "Is this a yacht, or a poulterer's shop after they've plucked the geese for Christmas? What you call shipshape and tidy, souse me! And who do you reckon is going to swab that up, sir?"

"It was that beast Gan Waga, Mr. Prout," said Val. "We did heave the pillow at him first, but he needn't have slashed his knife through it before he slung it back. Try and get hold of young Spudge, Dave. If I'm charged for that pillow, I'll jolly well get it back out of Gan Waga."

"You'll be charged, right enough, sir," said the bo'sun. "The storekeeper will watch that, souse me!"

Presently, with the aid of Spudge, dustpans, brushes, and a carpet-sweeper, Midshipman Hilton and Master David Ap Rees started to clear up the horrible mess Gan Waga had made.

"I don't know what you think about it, chaps," said Dave, as he chased the feathers under the bed, "but this seems to be our busy day. I've been going it all the time, and if anybody will bring me along Gan Waga's funeral card, I'll give him a fiver for it!"

CHAPTER 3.
Gan Waga Takes the Cake!

VAL borrowed the cookery-book from the chef. It was a beautiful cookery-book, with coloured photographs of good things that made Val and Dave feel quite hungry to look at. And Dave made the cake they picked out of the pictures.

There were full directions in the cookery-book for mixing, ornamenting, and baking this particular cake; but Dave did not follow the instructions very carefully. As a matter of fact, he did not follow them at all. The cake—that is the solid portion of it—was constructed in the carpenter's shop. Mr. Joe Toggle, the carpenter, lean and bony, but the very nicest of carpenters afloat or ashore, helped Dave with glue and cardboard and skilled advice. And when Master David Ap Rees had finished his masterpiece it looked more like a small hatbox than anything good or nourishing to eat.

"Well, that's that, Mr. Rees," said Joe. "What are you going to do with her now? If you bake her, she'll bust. Do you eat her raw?"

"I'm not thinking of eating her myself, 'cos she's a sort of present for a friend," grinned Dave. "Hush! Not a word, Mr. Joe! I'm going to take her to the artist to be decorated."

"And I suppose the ingredients are quite harmless and wholesome, sir?" asked Joe.

"Abso-bally-lutely!" said Dick. "I asked that particularly. Don't go and spoil this stunt, for we owe him one!"

Joe knocked the shavings out of his plane and nodded, and, wrapping his cake in a sheet of brown-paper, Dave made for the galley.

The chef greeted him with a bow and a smile, and locked the door. Before Dave's admiring eyes he spread an icing of white sugar over the hatbox affair, and decorated the top with preserved fruits of many colours.

"And what is eet zat you wish I shall write round it, sare?" asked the chef.

"'This cake was pinched by Gan Waga, the world's worst thief,'" said Dave. "Shove it right round the thing in red."

The chef sniggered, mixed more sugar and colouring, and, using a kind of squirt as a pen, he proceeded to write this cruel libel round the cake. As a matter of fact, he would gladly have written something nastier about the Eskimo if Val and Dave had thought of anything nastier, for Gan Waga certainly did borrow a few things in the eatable line from the galley when nobody was looking. And what jarred the chef was that it was useless to lodge any complaints about it, but was merely told to look after his stuff better.

"You like it, sare—yes?" asked the chef. "Ah, zat Eskimo is ze terraire of my life! M'sieu Prout, he come into my galley, but not a thing he touch, not even a sandvich, without my permeesion. Name of ten zousand blue pigs! I am told to throw ze Eskimo from my galley if he come in. Zat is good, zat is sensible. But how am I to be always in my galley, or always my assistants? Impossible! He came, he rob, and he gone. To ze prince I complain, to M'sieur Prout I complain, to M'sieur Hilton I complain, to M'sieur Maddock I complain. Anybody else who steal, get ze court-martial and ze sack, but Gan Waga, no. Oh, non, non, nevaire zat fat robbaire!"

"Being a bit of a stranger, chef, I can't tell you why," said Dave; "only, as you seem to have a chance now and then of slinging him out hard on his face, don't miss those chances. Gee! You've made a fine job of that cake! If he could only read he wouldn't pinch it for sour apples! When will it be ready to carve?"

"Eet will be ready ven the sugar is dry," said the chef. "Eet will be ready in much sooner time than is possible to require him."

Dave paid a visit to the glue-pot, and presently Mr. Barry O'Rooney and Mr. Benjamin Maddock sauntered into the galley to look at the cake.

"Bedad, that's a moighty thrue saying, Ben," said Barry O'Rooney, as he read the inscription. "Ut's moighty thrue and ut's moighty unthrue at the same toime, the blubber-boiler being the blubber-boiler! A sthrange worrld! Av Oi

Gan Waga pulled out his knife and dug into the cake. Something went "plop!" and Gan Waga gave a yell as the top leapt off the cake and hit him under the chin. He rolled backwards, his face, and hair filled with some liquid—he knew not what. "Thief! Miserable thief!" roared a chorus of voices, as several electric lamps were flashed on. (*See page* 27.)

had his money would Oi stale a cake? Bedad, Oi'd write a cheque for a bunnery and have done wid ut!"

"If you had his money, souse me, the first cheque you'd write would be for a farm," said Maddock.

"Wrong again, swate pal of moine," said Barry O'Rooney. "Av Oi was a millionaire and Oi was sartin that Oi could plant you in it quick, the first cheque Oi'd write would be for a cemetary. And, bedad, Oi'd chuck in your tombsthone free!"

Dave thought this very generous on the part of Mr. Barry O'Rooney, for a man must be very fond of his friend when he is willing and anxious to buy a whole cemetery for him. The bo'sun seemed to be amused, too, for he gave one of his slow grins. Dave's was a wide one.

"Eet is so mysterious," said the chef. "Eet is a month or three veeks I roast a pheasant. I lock up, and in ze morning he is gone."

"Cats or rats, I expect, chef," said Dave.

"Sure, Oi've not seen a rat or hearrd the squeak of wan since Misther Hilton brought that ould cat of his aboarrd!" said Barry O'Rooney. "Felix is the bhoy for rats. Well, Oi must get on deck. Oi didn't have your ould pheasant, chef, and av you don't belave ut, you can search me!"

The yacht was making slow headway against heavy seas, but Master David Ap Rees was quite ready for his dinner. He had to change for that, and don a clean collar and dinner-jacket. Thurston and Ching Lung always put on evening-dress for this meal, and no slacking was allowed, with one exception, and that was Gan Waga, who turned up in pyjamas and bare-footed, and sat on the floor.

Val and Dave having declined a second helping of ice, Ching Lung handed the dish down to Gan Waga, and the head-steward brought in coffee.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, to Rupert Thurston, "but, thinking you had finished dinner, the electrician is outside. There is something wrong with the lights in the smaller saloon, sir. He wishes to know if you will require the saloon to-night. If you do not need it, he says it will be much easier for him to put matters right by daylight."

Across the dinner-table Midshipman Hilton and Master David Ap Rees exchanged winks.

"Oh, tell him to do it in the morning!" said Rupert Thurston. "You don't want the smaller saloon, do you, Ching?"

"I don't go in there once in a blue moon," answered the prince.

"Oh, yo' go easiness, Chingy!" said Gan Waga. "I keeps my stuffs in the old ottomans in theres. Tell him to stick the lightness on."

"You eat your bun," said the prince. "Keep out of it for once. Besides, if you want a light to go to the ottoman where you stack your rubbish, haven't you got a flash-lamp or a candle? And, besides, you can see in the dark!"

"I nots see well enough in the darks to find something I wants in all that junks, Chingy," said Gan Waga. "I gotted one taller candle, but p'r'aps I want to eats him!"

"Eat it or burn it, just as you like, old man, it's all the same to me! The electrician has packed up and gone, so you'll have to use your candle, if a flash-lamp won't do. And, for the sake of Mike Casey, don't wipe your fingers on your hair!"

"When I wipes them in yo' hair, my belovedest old Chingy, yo' gotted plenty of times to grouse," said Gan Waga. "Yo' can grouses as hard as yo' likes then, look yo', whateffer yes, inteed. And if I had a faces like Val's, I'd wipe it on the door-scraper, look yo'."

"A nice polite sort of bounder you are," said Val. "Perhaps you'd like to say something about Dave's face?"

"No, no, old beans!" said the Eskimo. "There are some things it betterer not to talk abouts. Strike matches on them, if you likes, but never talk abouts them. Dears, dears! I had such a butterfuls dreams the other nights, Ching," he added, as he waddled towards the door. "When I woke upness and found it wasn't trueness, I nearly cried. I dreamed I was with Dave and old Captain Scobber. And I dreamed I struck a match on Dave's face and set Scobber's whiskers on fire with it. Dears, dears! And it was only a dream!"

Dave joined heartily in the roar of laughter that followed Gan Waga's exit.

"I'm afraid you've over-educated him, Chingy," said Rupert Thurston. "He's getting too smart with his tongue."

"Don't blame me, old man. I think he learns it down in the Glue-Pot, where they're always trying to pull each *other's legs. And the more they like each other, the nastier* they try to be. It's a curious sort of twist they've got that puzzles outsiders."

"How does Gan pinch things out of the galley when the show's locked up, Val?" asked Dave.

"How do you know he does?"

"I heard the chef say he'd missed a pheasant about a month back, and as the rats and cats didn't have it, I guessed it was Gan."

"He can't get anything unless it's left on the table," said Val. "He got me a chicken and a loaf of bread one night. He's got a bow and one of those arrows with a lot of notches in the point. There's a ventilating window in the door, and he ties a string to the arrow, and if the chef leaves anything eatable he can get a clear shot at in range, it belongs to Gan Waga. So you may be sure he had that pheasant."

Gan Waga, quite unconscious that he had been plotted against, waddled down to the Glue-Pot, accompanied by Felix the cat, who met him on the way. He glanced into the galley. On the table, all alone in its glory, stood the cake with its crown of preserved fruit. The chef rarely troubled to make cakes, for grown-up men as a rule do not care for them very much. So it was rather a novelty.

"It must be some baby's birthday," thought Gan Waga.

He did not go in, for the chef was moving about, and the Eskimo was tired of being chased out with a carving-knife.

"That a most loveliness cakes yo' made, chef, old bean," he said from the doorway. "Who yo' makes that fo', hunk?"

"Go 'vay," said the chef, and banged the door. "If you come here, I murdaire you."

When he reached the Glue-Pot, his reception was chilly. Barry O'Rooney and Maddock in fact, ignored him.

"Well, I suppose, souse me," said Maddock, "these chaps have their privileges. Every chef is supposed to be boss of his own kitchen, like a skipper is boss of his own ship. But I can't see why a chef should be allowed to use up his employer's time and materials and fuel and stuff to bake a cake for his own birthday, and write on it in pink sugar 'Wishing my beloved Jules Alphonse Victor many happy returns of his birthday.' It don't seem to me, Barry, that the chef owns that cake any more than we do."

"Av course he doesn't, bhoy," said Barry O'Rooney. "And av Oi loiked cake, which Oi don't very much, Oi'd sthep roight into the galley and cut meself a big hunk of ut. Ut's a handsome cake, Oi allow, but ut's a bit of sauce on the chef's parrt. Lashings of eggs and pounds of butther, he must have used. Oi tell you, av Oi was fond of cake, Oi'd take ut away from the blatherskite for his impudence."

"Souse me, I wouldn't go as far as to steal it," said the bo'sun. "I might put my fist to his nose and tell him to saw me off a lump."

"Phwat d'ye mane—stale ut? Who pinched the sthuff ut's made of? And talking about cakes, bhoy, my ould aunt Bridget O'Brannigan, bedad, she'd got a hand for a cake like a fairy. Oi remember wan noight at Ballybunion Castle, when my Uncle Dennis——"

"Hang your Uncle Dennis!" growled the bo'sun. "Souse me, I've heard about your Uncle Dennis till I'm fed up with him and sick to death."

"Oi wish you were, bhoy," said Barry O'Rooney fervently. "How Oi wish you were, darlint."

The bo'sun went out and presently Barry O'Rooney followed him. As if attracted by a magnet, Gan Waga went back to the galley. Through the window in the door he *could see that gorgeous cake. Whether the cake happened* to be the chef's legal property or not, though O'Rooney had raised the doubt, did not trouble the Eskimo. What troubled him was that even if the chef did not lock the cake away before he went to bed, there was no hope of obtaining it. It was far too heavy in weight and soft in substance for the arrow to take a hold in it.

"The arrow only knock it full of holses," Gan thought. "Dears, dears! It too sadfuls. I think I could eats it every bits."

The Eskimo sighed and turned away. He mounted to the deck and lighted a cigar, and, waiting in the saloon, and beginning to think that the whole thing had misfired, Val Hilton and Dave Ap Rees played chess. And then suddenly Spudge appeared.

"Gone back to the galley, ho, yossir," said Spudge.

"Where are the others?" asked Val quickly.

"They're waiting, ho, yossir," said Ching Lung's servant.

In an instant Val and Dave were outside the grand saloon of the yacht and making for the smaller one, and Gan Waga was padding down the alleyway in his bare feet, thinking of the cake, and wondering if he tied some fish-hooks to his arrow he could yank a few hefty mouthfuls off it.

It would spoil the beauty of the cake, but Gan Waga was not particular about that. He made for the smaller saloon to obtain his bow and arrow, and the fish-hooks, though if he had gone straight on to the galley he would have saved himself the trouble of visiting the saloon.

The place was intensely dark, for the blinds had been pulled across the portholes. Those who lay in wait there heard him trying the electric-light switches with no result. Gan Waga struck a match and opened the lid of the ottoman. He had to strike several matches before he discovered what he wanted. Presently he fished out a tallow candle, stuck it in an old tin candlestick, and by its smelly and smoky light, he did some more searching.

Dave felt a frantic desire to sneeze, but managed to conquer it. The light was very feeble, and as the Eskimo squatted down on the floor with the tin candlestick in front of him, they could see his plump hands at work, but could not make out what he was doing. Gan was tying a big bunch of fish-hooks to the point of the arrow. By shooting the arrow over the top of the cake, and pulling it back, he fancied he could get most of the chef's cake in lumps at a time, provided that nobody came along and interfered.

The Eskimo left the candlestick on the floor. He had a shock when he saw a light shining through the little window, for he thought that the chef had not gone to bed. Only one electric bulb was burning, but the cake was there, and the light was shining on it, making it look more wonderful and desirable than ever. It seemed a dreadful pity to yank hunks out of it with a bundle of fish-hooks, but the Eskimo was more concerned about the flavour of the cake than the good looks.

"Oh, murders!" he groaned. "Now I doned, now I whacked. Oh, the bad olde nastinesses of the chaps!"

The little window was tightly fastened on the inside, and it was far too dangerous to break the glass. The wreckage of the cake might be put down to rats, but rats don't break plate-glass windows. Gan Waga gave a mournful glance at the bewitching cake and then to his astonishment and joy

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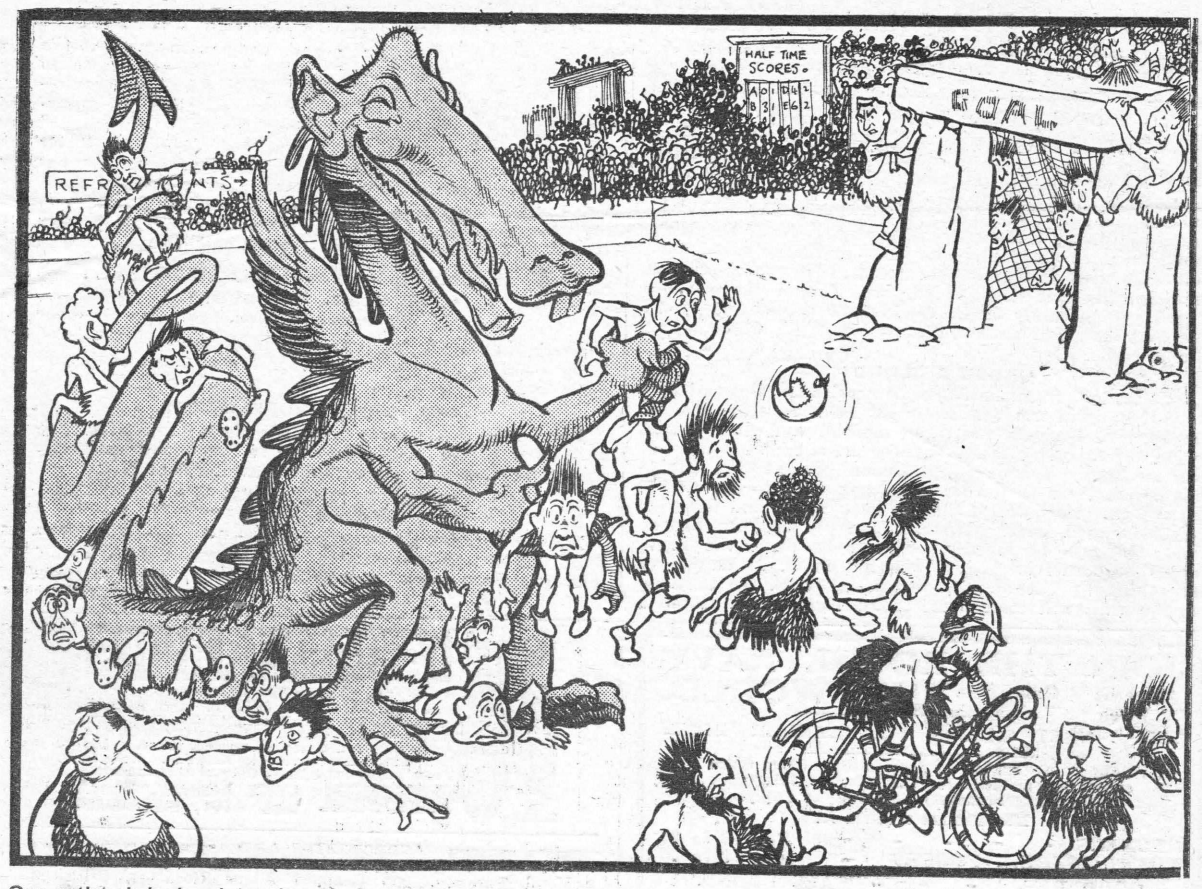
NN

FOOTBALL IN THE STONE AGE!

(TO BE TAKEN—WITH A GRAIN OF SALT!)



Our artist, bringing into play his imaginative powers, pictures how the Man-Eating Ooojahkapivvy solves the off-side problem by eating the full backs!

he discovered what he ought to have discovered before, that the door of the galley was ajar. For an instant he grew suspicious, but only for an instant. On hands and knees at the other end of the alleyway, Val, Dave and Spudge were peering at him.

"Wow! He's only just rumbled that the door is open!" grinned Val. "Now he's gone in, and I jolly well hope he isn't greedy enough to dig his teeth into that lovely lump of confectionery before he brings it back. What-ho! We'll give you busting pillows! Scuttle, chaps! Here comes our little fat wandering boy, and he's got the goods, look you. Inteed to goodness whateffer he has snatched the cake."

"Oh don't be so funny," said Dave. "You've about worn that whateffer business threadbare. Give it a rest."

"Well, show a light, then, for that rotten candle doesn't make darkness visible, and I don't want to fall over anybody's feet."

"Has he got it, sir?" asked the bo'sun's voice in a hoarse whisper.

"He's got it right enough," said Val, "and I hope he'll like the flavour of it. Sh! Hush! The fat little thief is arriving."

Gan Waga padded in and shut the door. Throwing the bow and arrow behind the ottoman, he plopped down on the floor with the looted cake between his knees, and began to giggle. Taking up the candle, he examined the cake, his little eyes twinkling, and his white teeth flashing. Then he picked off one of the preserved cherries and tasted it. It was a very nice cherry indeed.

"Ho, ho, hoo!" he chuckled. "Oh, butterfuls! Oh, lovely, oh, grandness! The old chef kick up a jolly old rows in the mornings, but I not cares. Why he not locks the silly doors. M'yum! Oh, grandness! I s'pose I betterer eats the lots, fo' if I leaves any abouts and somebody finds it, they'll have the cheek to say I pinched it. Ho, ho, ho, hoo! Look you whateffer. He, he, hee! Oh, splendiferous!"

Gan Waga pulled out his knife and dug it into the cake. Something went plop, and Gan Waga gave a yell as the top leapt off the cake and hit him on the chin. He rolled backwards, his eyes filled with some liquid, and his face and hair wet with it.

"Thief! Miserable thief!" roared a chorus of voices.

The light from six electric flash-lamps were turned on the prostrate Eskimo. He did not look at all nice, for his face was a brilliant orange colour. As he sat up gasping, Val switched on the electric light, which had hitherto refused to work, and picking up the pasteboard cake, Dave banged it down on the Eskimo's head. It fitted him like a crown, and the announcement that the cake had been stolen by the world's worst thief stood out vividly in red sugar against the white background. And pointing at him as he sat green-faced and blinking, Mr. Benjamin Maddock, Mr. Barry O'Rooney, the chef, Spudge, Val and Dave Ap Rees told him the truth again.

"Thief!" they yelled. "Miserable thief!"

Then they seized the Eskimo with strong hands and marched him along to the grand saloon. Val opened the door, and they pushed him in, and at the sight of him, Rupert Thurston and Ching Lung sprang out of their chairs.

"Well," grinned the prince, when he had read the inscription on the Eskimo's strange hat. "I think they've got your number at last, Gan."

THE END.

(Now look out for "Lost in the Jungle!" next Wednesday's grand story of Gan Waga & Co.)

YOUR EDITOR CHATS WITH HIS READERS!

Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

DOES WATER HARM THE HAIR?

THIS query is constantly cropping up in my mail-bag, and as it appears to interest so many of my chums, I'll answer it in this chat. My last correspondent to write upon this subject, says that his hair is dry, and that, to make it "obedient" to his brush and comb, he plasters it pretty thoroughly with water. Now, that's the wrong thing to do in his case. Dry or brittle hair should be treated with an application of oil. If my correspondent persists in his water treatment he will stand a likely chance of going prematurely bald. But, on the other hand, if the hair contains a fair amount of "natural" oil, water has no ill effect upon it.

UNDER A CLOUD!

A "Gemito" from the North of Scotland writes and tells me that he is in trouble. From his letter I gather that he has been in business for three months, and during that period several petty thefts have occurred at his firm. He tells me that suspicion is cast upon him for the simple reason that these thefts did not occur prior to his arrival at the firm. He declares that he is innocent, and from his straightforward, manly letter, I am prepared to believe him. He asks for advice. Should he leave the firm? Should he accuse anybody? No, my chum, do neither of these things! Just sit tight and wait events. In the long run the guilt will come home to the right party. Keep a stiff upper lip in the meantime, and say as little as possible upon the subject. Remember, "he who excuses himself accuses himself." I'm sure things will come right, my chum, if you will only let them. Write to me again and let me know how things turn out.

TWENTY TOPPING TABLE FOOTBALL GAMES!

This is the offer our grand companion paper, the "Magnet," is making every week. There's very little to do to win one of these splendid prizes, just a paragraph—not longer than three hundred words—dealing with anything interesting, seen or heard, on the footer field. And these games—Gee, boys, they're unique! Miniature footer boots are worn on the fingers and the players move about the "table" just as they would on a proper footer field. I've played a game myself, and found it highly entertaining and exciting. If you are interested you'll get a copy of this week's "Magnet" and see the conditions therein.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME!

"THE NIGHT RAIDERS!"
By Martin Clifford.

That's the sequel to the grand school story you have just read, featuring Marie Rivers, her friend Joan of former days, and the "Toff."

"ZOOLOGICAL" SUPPLEMENT.

Tom Merry & Co. have taken the above subject for their next issue of the "News." They've handled it extremely well, too! Don't on any account miss it, chums!

"LOST IN THE JUNGLE!"
By Sidney Drew.

No. 2 of this grand new series of Gan Waga stories will be even better received than its predecessor, I'll be bound. The title alone gives you a good idea of the treat in store.

YOUR EDITOR.