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EVERY
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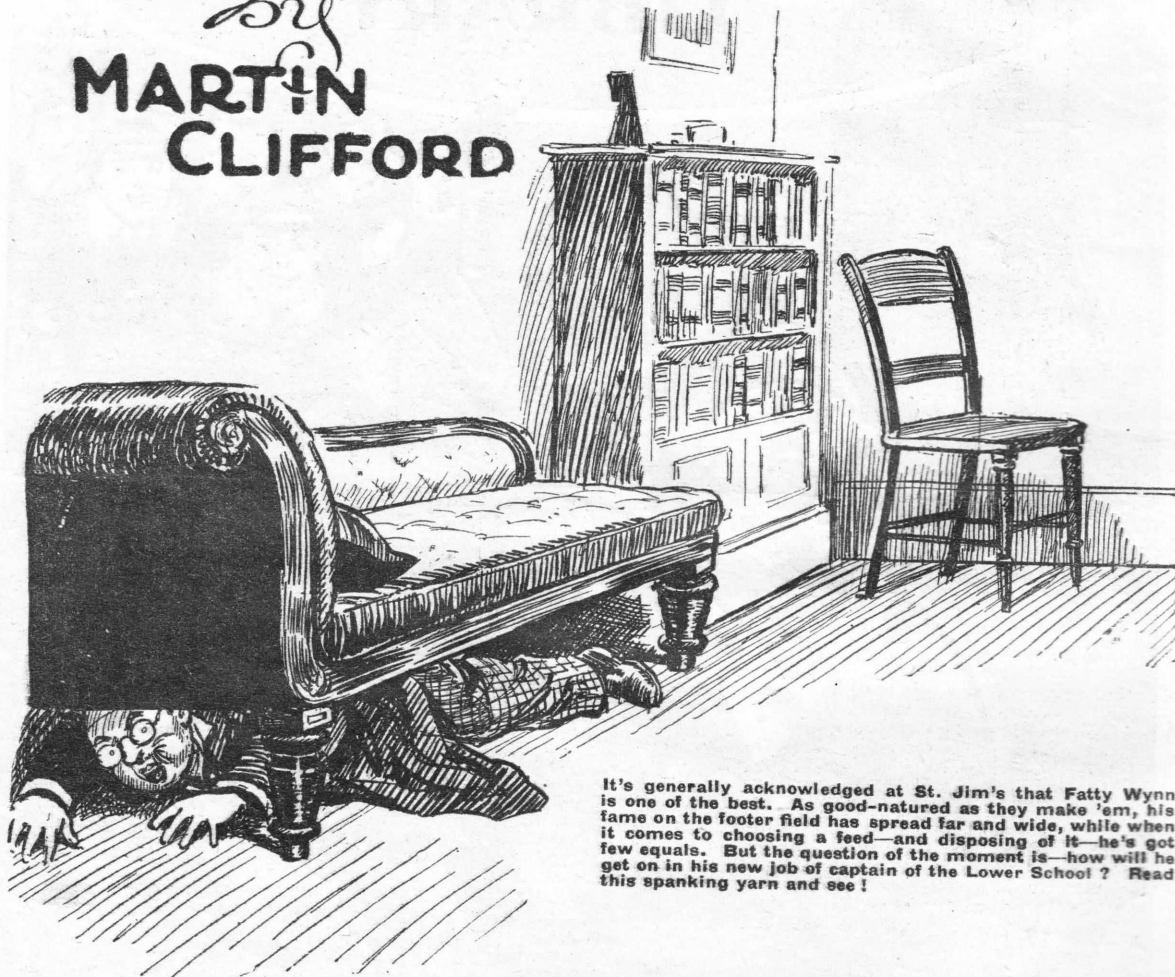
**ON THE TRAIL OF
A SPOOFER!**

*(A "moving" incident from this week's grand
yarn of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.)*

A STIRRING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.—

NO GOOD

by
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD**



It's generally acknowledged at St. Jim's that Fatty Wynn is one of the best. As good-natured as they make 'em, his fame on the footer field has spread far and wide, while when it comes to choosing a feed—and disposing of it—he's got few equals. But the question of the moment is—how will he get on in his new job of captain of the Lower School? Read this spanking yarn and see!

CHAPTER 1.

What's the Game?

"**T**HEY'VE got something on!" said Tom Merry. "No doubt about that!" assented Manners. "Not a scrap of doubt!" agreed Monty Lowther. "And it's something up against us!" went on Tom Merry, shaking his head. "When those New House worms go about with their heads together, like a lot of cackling hens, you can bet it means trouble."

"Blake says Fatty Wynn was passing rotes round to the New House chaps in the Form-room this morning," said Manners. "It looks no end fishy."

"No end!" agreed Tom Merry grimly. "I wish I knew—Hallo! Here come the rotters now! Wonder what they want?"

The Terrible Three soon knew.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn came strolling over from the New House side of the quad, with cheerful grins on their youthful faces. The Terrible Three eyed them very suspiciously as they came to a halt before them.

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"Well, what d'you New House wasters want?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Dear me!" remarked George Figgins blandly. "Dear little Tommy can talk quite well, can't he, you chaps? But what are the little men doing out without their nurseries?"

"And their prams?" added Kerr severely.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Fatty Wynn.

"Funny, aren't you?" said Tom Merry, with a glare.

"If you've come over here looking for thick ears—"

"Not at all, old infant!" smiled Figgins. "This is what we've come for!"

With that Figgins calmly knocked Tom Merry's cap off. At the same moment two other caps went sailing, as Lowther and Manners received the attentions of Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

Then the cheery New House trio bolted across the quad, yelling with laughter.

It was now quite clear what Figgins & Co. had come over for—it was merely to knock their rivals' caps off.

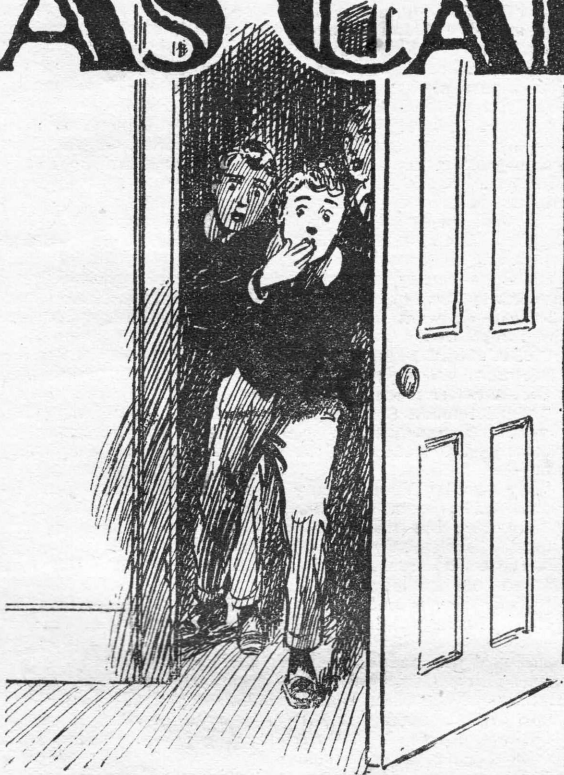
The Terrible Three fairly shook with wrath.

They snatched up their caps, crammed them on their heads, and went in pursuit at a great rate.

But by that time Figgins & Co. had vanished into the New House, and the Terrible Three gave it up and re-

—WITH FATTY WYNN AS JUNIOR SKIPPER OF ST. JIM'S!

AS CAPTAIN!



traced their steps hastily. It was always dangerous to linger near the enemy's quarters.

"The—the cheeky rotters!" gasped Tom Merry, putting his cap straight. "What duffers we were not to watch 'em! Never mind! We'll make 'em sit up yet! Look here, we've simply got to find out what they've got on!"

"But how?"

"That's the question," admitted Tom Merry, frowning thoughtfully. "But those New House worms are getting much too cheeky for my liking. Why, even Fatty Wynn's got frightfully uppish! Blessed if I can understand him! This morning he actually ordered me— Oh!"

Light seemed to break in upon Tom Merry.

"Well, what?"

"I've hit it!" said Tom Merry, with a deep chuckle. "It's Fatty's first day as junior skipper, of course; he starts his giddy week of office to-day."

"Phew! I'd forgotten that!"

"Same here!"

And, like their leader, both Lowther and Manners chuckled deeply. Apparently the idea of Fatty Wynn being junior captain of St. Jim's struck them as very funny.

"That's it!" grinned Tom Merry. "I think I can guess what they've got on now. It isn't against us. As Fatty Wynn seems to be the prime mover, then you can bet it's a giddy feed!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"A feed to celebrate the fact that Fatty's junior skipper," chuckled Tom Merry. "Fatty thinks about little else but feeds and grub. Depend upon it he's standing a feed to celebrate!"

"Just what he would do!" grinned Lowther. "And he hasn't asked us to it."

"That's the sad point I was about to mention," said Tom Merry, shaking his head thoughtfully. "We really can't allow those New House wasters to overlook us in this shocking manner. Of course, it may not be a feed. But whatever it is, I think it's up to us to look into the matter."

"Yes, rather!"

"If it's a feed, we've got to find out where and when. If it's only a jape against us, then we've got to find out

their plans so as to be on our giddy guard," said Tom. "Forewarned is forearmed, you— What the thump—"

Tom Merry was interrupted.

Just then a wild howl sounded from across the quadrangle. They were just in time to see a fat form roll down the New House steps and arrive at the bottom with a bump and another howl.

"Trimble!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What— Oh, those bounders have booted him out!"

It was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. He scrambled up hastily, as Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn came down the steps— apparently to continue the good work with their boots.

But Trimble didn't wait. Howling for aid, he dodged them and came scudding across the quad at a remarkable speed considering his bulk and weight.

"Ow!" he panted, stopping before the Terrible Three. "Oh! Yow! Those awful beasts! Ow! I say, you fellows, come and lick 'em for me! They've kicked me all along the passage, down the stairs, and out of the House. Then they—ow!—rolled me down the steps! Wow!"

"Good!" said Lowther. "That ought to bring some of your fat down, Baggy!"

"Ow! Look here," hooted Trimble, "ain't you going to lick 'em? Going to allow a School House chap to be treated like this! Just because I went to congratulate Fatty Wynn—the awful beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to cackle about!" snorted Baggy Trimble indignantly. "If this is all the sympathy a chap gets for backing his House up—"

"Is it backing a chap's House up to go raiding another House for grub?" inquired Lowther.

"I didn't go there raiding!" grunted Trimble. "I went there to find out what was on—scouting, you know."

"Thought you said you went there to congratulate Fatty Wynn?" said Manners.

"Eh? Oh, that's what I told them, but the beasts wouldn't believe me!" said Trimble, with a sniff. "The fact is, I've already found out what's on over at the New House."

"What is it—the roof?"

"It's a feed!" said Trimble, lowering his voice mysteriously. "A tremendous feed, I believe—on a blessed wholesale scale. I happened to hear Fatty Wynn ordering some stuff in the tuck-shop just after school—heaps and heaps of stuff."

"Is that so?" said Tom Merry, giving his chums meaning looks. "Go on, old lard-tub. Where's the feed to be, and when?"

"That's what I want to know," said Trimble, with a grunt. "That's what I went to the New House for—hoping to find out, so's I could tell you chaps."

"Yes, I can see you doing that!" grinned Lowther.

"Well, that was my idea, anyway. You see," explained Trimble, his eyes gleaming, "if I found out where the feed was, you chaps could raid it, couldn't you? Didn't those New House cads raid your feed only the other day—fairly did you down!" added Baggy, with a grin.

"They did, right enough!" assented Tom Merry grimly. "But did you find out anything, Baggy?"

"No—didn't get the chance!" grunted Trimble dismally. "The beasts spotted me, and kicked me out. Look here, ain't you going to mop 'em up for me—treating a School House chap like this?"

"Not much, old lard-tub!" laughed Tom Merry.

"Yah! Funks!" snorted Trimble. "Fancy funking New House worms! Yah! After me— Ow!"

Trimble departed hastily as Lowther made a stride towards him and raised his boot.

"Well, that settles it!" said Tom Merry, as Trimble vanished, shouting back disdainful remarks. "It is a feed, as I thought! Dear old Baggy has his uses after all. Look here, this is a job for you, Manners."

"Me?" said Manners.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming reflectively. "You and Redfern are photographic maniacs, aren't you?"

"Look here—"

"Ahem! I mean photographic enthusiasts," amended Tom hastily. "You often go over to the giddy New House

to talk photography with Reddy, don't you? Well, why not trot over after dinner and try to pump Reddy?"

"Yes, I can see Redfern being pumped," sniffed Manners. "Still, I'll risk it, if you like, he added, after a moment's hesitation. "It's safe enough if you've got a good excuse for being there. Yes, I'll have a go."

"Good!" said Tom Merry with satisfaction. "After all, old chap, if your game is spotted and you do get ragged, it'll be in a good cause. We've simply got to get square with those New House worms for raiding our feed the other day. After dinner, then, and—Hallo, there goes the dinner bell now. Good!"

And Tom Merry led the way indoors for dinner, both he and Lowther looking quite cheery and hopeful now. But Manners did not feel either cheery or hopeful. Visiting the New House was always a trifle risky, and he didn't look forward to the possibility of being ragged—even in a good cause!

CHAPTER 2.

Fatty Wynn Lets It Out!

"GOOD old Fatty!" said George Figgins. "Hear, hear!" said Kerr with a chuckle. "Blessed if I'm not glad now that Fatty has got the job of skipper," chuckled Figgins. "If he goes on standing extensive feeds like this he'll make a jolly successful junior captain. I will say that."

"Well, I mean to do my best," replied Fatty Wynn modestly. "There's nothing like a rattling good feed to make chaps happy and efficient, you know. Look at me; I never play footer unless I've had a good feed just before the match. Chaps say you shouldn't feed up before a game. But they're wrong. There's nothing like laying a good foundation—stoking up the fires well, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "It's not a laughing matter," said Fatty, eyeing his laughing chums rather reproachfully. "I'm awfully serious, you know. As for these feeds—well, this is only the beginning. I can't go on standing them, of course. But I mean to start a great scheme for a series of extensive feeds—all the chaps contribute so much every week; a sort of club."

"Well, you've started well, anyway," chuckled Kerr. "It was quite a good wheeze of yours to write to all your giddy relations to tell 'em the good news that you'd been made skipper, Fatty. How much did it bring in?"

"Six quid odd!" said Fatty Wynn with satisfaction. "The pater weighed in with a couple of quid; an uncle with another two, and the rest came from various aunts."

"Did you tell 'em you'd only got the job of skipper for a week?" asked Kerr.

Fatty Wynn coloured.

"Well, nunno!" he confessed. "Still, it all amounts to the same thing. You see, I mean to make such a success of the job this week that I shall be made permanent skipper."

"That's what the other temporary skippers said—Grundy, and Gussy, and Skimmy, and Mellish," grinned Figgins.

"Oh, but those chaps were duds!" said Fatty, shaking his head. "Everybody expected them to make a muck of things, and they did. I'm going to make a great success of my trial week, Figgy. You know what Railton said; he said that the chap who proved himself the best man during his week of office could have the job permanent. Well, that's my chance. I'm going to prove myself the best man."

Figgins and Kerr exchanged grins. Like most of the juniors at St. Jim's, they looked upon Mr. Railton's scheme as a great joke.

Actually, the position was a most peculiar one. Owing to various criticisms which he had felt to be unjust, Tom Merry had resigned the post of junior skipper, and out of sympathy for Tom, practically all the fellows in the Lower School who could have taken on the job successfully had refused to put up for the post.

Not a little nettled, the Housemaster had thereupon announced a startling scheme—that he would choose six names from the list of candidates sent in, each of the six to have a week's trial as junior captain.

Mr. Railton acted thus under the belief that there were plenty of sound fellows in the Lower School who would be only too glad to apply for the vacant post. And so there were. Unfortunately for his scheme, however, they were practically all keen supporters of Tom Merry, and unanimous in their opinion that he was the only man for the job. As a result, the only fellows who sent in their names were Grundy, Mellish, Skimpole, and Tompkins—four hopeless duds—and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Fatty Wynn. The latter, though far from being duffers, were scarcely likely to make successful captains.

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The Housemaster had felt obliged to keep to his word, however. So Grundy, Mellish, Skimpole, and D'Arcy had already had their turn and—as generally expected—had made a mess of things. Fatty Wynn's term of office had just begun, and it remained to be seen what sort of a job he would make of it.

"Well, let's hope you do prove the best man, Fatty," said Figgins hopefully. "It's time the New House had a look in. We mean to back you up for all we're worth, anyway."

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr heartily. "Why should the New House always have to take a back seat just because we're the smallest House? Look at the footer—"

"That's just it!" said Fatty eagerly. "I mean to alter all that. We've got just as good footballers in the New House—better, in fact! Why should the team be nearly filled with School House worms all the time? We can make a better team solely of New House men any time!"

"Ahem! I—I won't go so far as to say that," said Figgins, shaking his head. "Still, it's time we had more of a look-in. But that's not all, by a long way, Fatty. This week those cheeky Grammarians have simply got to be put in their place. You've got to prove that a New House man can do what Tom Merry can't—put the kybosh once and for all over Gordon Gay and his men."

"That's it!" agreed Kerr, nodding. "Tom Merry's a good man, but we've got to show that a New House man makes a better leader."

"Well, I mean to do my best," said Fatty Wynn. "But never mind that just now, you fellows. The most important matter at the moment is the feed. I'm off to the tuckshop now—"

"My hat! You've only just had dinner, you fat cormorant!" gasped Figgins.

"I know; but this cold weather makes a chap awfully hungry!" said Fatty, a trifle pathetically. "I'm just going to have a little snack. I also want to order some coffee, as it's too cold for lemonade and ginger-beer."

"Well, that's so," admitted Kerr. "Buzz off, then, Fatty! Mind no School House worms get wind of the feast."

Fatty Wynn nodded and left the study. Out in the passage he almost collided with a School House junior. It was Manners of the Shell, and Manners stopped, his eyes gleaming a little as he recognised the new junior skipper.

"Cheerio, Fatty!" he exclaimed genially. "How's the job of skipper going, old chap?"

"All right!" said Fatty, eyeing Manners rather suspiciously. "I haven't got into my stride yet. When I do I mean to make things hum. But what are you doing over here, you School House dummy?"

"Only come to bring old Reddy these films," said Manners airily, drawing a packet from his pocket. "Just a friendly visit, Fatty. I say, I hear you're celebrating with a feed?"

"Oh, and who told you that?" said Fatty Wynn, frowning.

Manners grinned. He felt he was in luck in catching Fatty Wynn alone like this. "Pumping" Redfern was a very different matter from doing the same to the good-natured and simple-minded Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, a little bird told me!" he chuckled. "It's a jolly good idea to give a feed on your first day of office, Fatty."

That was Manners' little way of trying to discover when the feed was to be held; and the unsuspecting Fatty fell into the trap.

"Well, it is a good wheeze!" he admitted, with a modest grin. "I mean to start my week well, you know."

"Ripping!" said Manners cordially. "You might have asked us School House chaps, though. After all—"

"It's a New House feed, you see!" said Fatty, colouring a little. "Besides—"

"Too bad, Fatty!" said Manners, shaking his head reproachfully. "I'm surprised at you leaving us out. Especially as there's plenty of room for a crowd in the—the gym—"

"The gym!" said Fatty, staring. "Who said—"

"I—I mean the—the woodshed!" hastily amended Manners, seeing he had made a wrong shot.

"Woodshed! Don't talk rot!" said Fatty Wynn incautiously. "Why, even our chaps couldn't squeeze in there! That's why Figgy suggested old Pepper's—" Fatty suddenly paused, seeming to become aware—rather late—that he was saying more than was wise. "Look here," he went on warmly, "you buzz off, you School House worm! It's nothing to do with you, anyway; you School House rotters are out of it—see? Clear out of the New House while you're safe!"

"Certainly, old fat man!" chuckled Manners, his respectful cordiality vanishing now he had found out all he wanted to know. "My dear lump of greasy blubber, I wouldn't be found dead in this measly casual ward of a House! You can bet I don't stay here a moment longer than I can help for self-respect's sake!"

"Why, you—you cheeky rotter——" spluttered Fatty Wynn.

"As for a New House duffer like you being junior skipper," continued Manners loftily. "Why, all you're fit to skipper is a tin of sardines, old chap! It hurts us frightfully over in the School House to think we've got to be skippered by a fat freak with the brains of a bunny and a face like a bladder of lard!"

"Why, you—you——"
 "It's rough luck enough for us School House chaps having to associate at all with you New House lunatics," said Manners. "Still, you're all harmless, and that's a com-

nearly nabbed me, too, when I was ass enough to pull Fatty Wynn's leg!"

"Go on, old chap! Did you find out where——"
 "Yes. They're holding the feed to-day—in Pepper's barn."

"In Pepper's barn?" said Tom Merry eagerly. "You're sure?"

"I think so—in fact, it must be!" gasped Manners. "Fatty said so—or, at least, he got as far as saying 'Pepper's,' and then he spotted he was giving the game away and froze. But it must be."

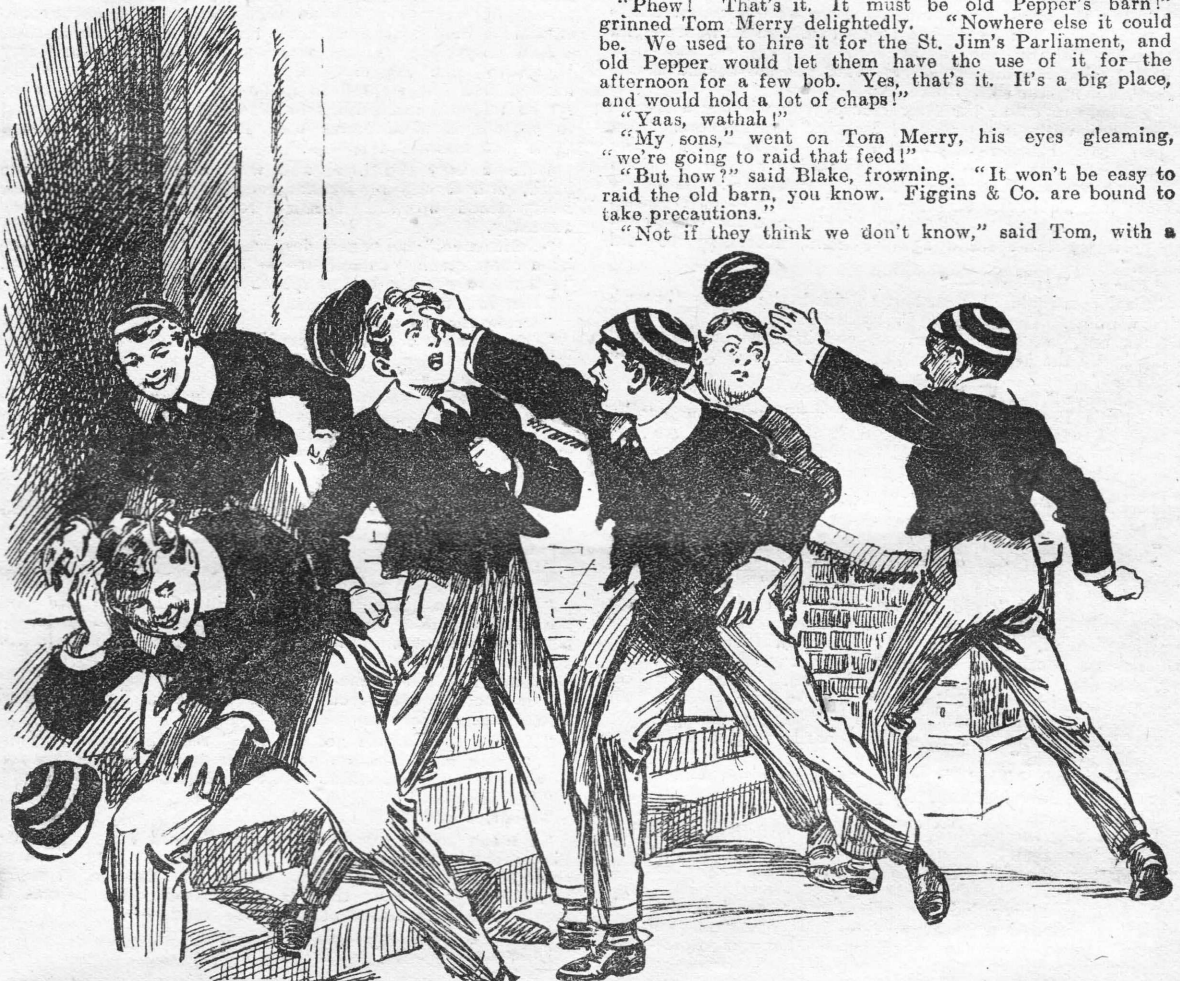
And Manners described his lucky meeting with Fatty Wynn in the New House.

"Phew! That's it. It must be old Pepper's barn!" grinned Tom Merry delightedly. "Nowhere else it could be. We used to hire it for the St. Jim's Parliament, and old Pepper would let them have the use of it for the afternoon for a few bob. Yes, that's it. It's a big place, and would hold a lot of chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "My sons," went on Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming, "we're going to raid that feed!"

"But how?" said Blake, frowning. "It won't be easy to raid the old barn, you know. Figgins & Co. are bound to take precautions."

"Not if they think we don't know," said Tom, with a



"Well, what d'you New House wasters want?" demanded Tom Merry. "If you've come over here looking for thick ears——"
 "Not at all, old infant!" smiled Figgins. "This is what we've come over for!" With that Figgins calmly knocked Tom Merry's cap off. At the same moment two other caps went sailing, as Manners and Lowther received the attentions of Kerr and Fatty Wynn. (See Chapter 1.)

fort. As for the feed—well, thank goodness you've had the sense not to insult us by inviting us. That's all, old chap!"

With that Manners started to walk away cheerily. He gave a jump the next moment as the door of Figgins' study opened and Figgins emerged, followed by Kerr.

Fatty gave a spluttering yell.
 "Stop him! Collar the rotter, Figgy!" he bawled wrathfully. "Stop the cheeky rotter—quick!"

Realising his danger, Manners made a jump past Figgins before that youth could grasp what was happening, and bolted along the passage at top speed.

A flying leap from the landing at the top of the stairs, and he was astride the banisters and fairly whizzing to the lower floor.

Within five seconds the School House junior was out in the quad and safe from pursuit.

Over on the School House side of the quadrangle six juniors were strolling. They were Tom Merry and Lowther, and Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth. The chums of the School House were waiting for Manners, and they surrounded him as he dashed up.

"What happened?" demanded Tom Merry eagerly. "Did you discover anything?"

"Yes. I managed it all right!" gasped Manners. "They

chuckle. "Though Fatty Wynn may realise he's given the game away, and he may tell Figgy. Most likely he's told him already. So that means we'll have to use strategy."

"No doubt about that!" said Blake, a trifle glumly. "I'm blessed if I can see how it's to be done—not without getting the whole School House lot on the job."

"But I do," smiled Tom Merry.
 "You—you've got a wheeze?"

"I think so," said Tom calmly. "I've not been wasting time, you see. While you duffers have been just gassing I've been thinking."

"What about me?" snorted Manners. "Haven't I——"
 "Yes, you've done your whack all serene!" grinned Tom.

"Anyway, I knew they'd be having the feed in some quiet place—I rather fancied it would be the gym. So I've worked a plan out accordingly. It'll suit Pepper's barn just as well as the gym—better, in fact."

"Bai Jove! Pway tell us what it is, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, eyeing Tom Merry curiously.

"I noticed you whispering to Glyn at dinner," said Blake. "Have you got him on the job, Tommy?"
 Tom Merry nodded and chuckled.

"You've hit it!" he admitted. "With Glyn's aid, and a

bit of luck, we're going to collar that feed without even a scrap. Now, let's trot inside and see if Glyn's got the smoke bombs ready."

"Smoke bombs?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes, old chap. I left Dane and Noble busy helping Glyn to manufacture some in Glyn's den—and a fine niff they were making. Luckily the gas-masks are all ready for the job."

"Gas masks?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes; Glyn's own giddy invention!" chuckled Tom, enjoying his chums' mystification. "His latest invention, in fact. He showed 'em to me yesterday, and that's what gave me the idea. So I tackled Glyn at dinner, and he's making smoke bombs as fast as he can, and Kangaroo and Dane are helping him for once."

"But what the dickens do we want gas masks and smoke bombs for?" stuttered Blake.

"To help us collar the New House grub without a terrific scrap, and without the risk of failure," smiled Tom. "My idea's this. I knew they'd hold the feed in the gym, or some place like that—in fact, I based my plan on them using the gym. Well, the wheeze is to pitch in the smoke bombs just as they're starting to feed. They're jolly powerful, I believe, and they'll drive Figgins and his men out—they simply can't stand against them, according to old Glyn."

"Phew! But how—"

"Easily enough. I meant us to chuck the bombs through the window. Then when Figgy and his men had been driven out, two or three of us, wearing gas masks, could dash in by the back door, collar the grub, and vanish with it. See?"

"Bai Jove!"

"As it's Pepper's barn, though," went on Tom coolly, "it'll be easier still. There's a broken window we can chuck the bombs through, and there's the store-room underneath where we can hide, and also that little door in the store-room where we can scoot away with the grub. See the wheeze?"

"My hat! Yes, rather!"

"Great!"

"Rippin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "But how are you to get at the gwub—"

"Easily enough," said Tom. "Don't you remember when Cutts and his pals were using the store-room for smoking parties? Well, didn't we play ghost on them by lifting those loose floorboards and dropping through? That's how we're going to get the grub, old bean. When they bolt out of the giddy front door, we slip up through the floor and collar the grub, and then we slip back again. If they don't know about the loose floorboards they'll think it's a giddy miracle."

"Bai Jove! That is weally a wippin' scheme, Tom Mewwy!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Hear, hear!"

It was a grinning delighted chorus, and Tom smiled.

"Right-ho, then! Now, let's go and see how those chaps are getting on with the bombs. Just time before classes. Come on!"

And Tom Merry led his grinning chums indoors. It certainly sounded a great scheme, and the chums of the School House were in high, good humour now—even Manners was grinning as he made his way to the nearest bath-room. But it remained to be seen whether the scheme would be a success or not.

CHAPTER 3.

The Interrupted Feed!

"GENTLEMEN!"

"Bravo! Go it, Fatty!"

"Gentlemen!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen!"

"That's the style, Fatty! Go it!"

"Only cut it short!" called out Owen. "We're peckish!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of voices and laughter in Pepper's barn. That somewhat gloomy building looked quite festive for once. Evidently the New House juniors had been busy long before the time for the feed. The dingy walls were hung with paper garlands, while on the trestle tables—hired for the occasion, like the barn, from old Pepper—was actually a vase of flowers. True they were merely artificial flowers, and had also been hired for the occasion. But they, with the garlands, gave quite a cheery air to the old barn.

But there was more on the tables than flowers—much more. There were tablecloths—also hired ones—and on them was laid a perfect feast of good things—meat-pies, sausage-rolls, ham sandwiches, two big rabbit-pies, and

numerous plates holding piles of jam-tarts, cream-horns, cream-buns, chocolate biscuits—a veritable feast of good things, in fact. The two trestle tables, placed end to end, fairly groaned under the load. There were also jugs of steaming coffee, provided by Mr. Pepper, whose cottage was at the end of the meadow.

At one end of the trestle tables was Fatty Wynn, the fat and good-natured founder of the feast, and at the other end was Figgins, his lean, freckled features full of cheerfulness.

All had gone well with the New House celebrators.

They had prepared the barn before dinner, and had carted most of the foodstuffs there since, making their way thence by various routes so that they should not arouse suspicions in the minds of their rivals of the School House.

Now they were waiting, somewhat impatiently, for Fatty Wynn to open the proceedings with his speech. Fatty himself had not wanted to make his speech—far from it. As he told all and sundry he was hungry, and he wanted to put his chin to better use. But Figgins had insisted upon him making a speech.

With a very red face, and with a sausage-roll in one hand, and a cup of steaming coffee in the other hand, Fatty stood up and beamed round upon the cheery assembly.

"Gentlemen," he began desperately, "for goodness' sake let a chap speak, you fellows—" he broke off pathetically. "I want to get the rotten speech over. I'm hungry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order for the chair!"

"Order for our new skipper!"

"Gentlemen—"

"Go it, Fatty!"

"Gentlemen," gasped Fatty Wynn, going crimson in his effort to make himself heard—"gentlemen, and fellow New House chaps, we are gathered together on this suspish—I mean auspicious occasion—"

"Good for you, Fatty!"

"Go it!"

"Stop interrupting, you silly asses!" roared Figgins wrathfully. "Let Fatty get on with the washing!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn got going again.

"Gentlemen," he proceeded triumphantly, "we are gathered together on this auspicious occasion in order to celebrate the appointment of a New House man as junior skipper of St. Jim's."

"Hurrah! Three cheers for Fatty!"

The cheers were given with a will, and Fatty beamed like a full moon.

"As the chap who's got the job," resumed Fatty Wynn, "I'm jolly glad to know you chaps mean to back me up. That means I'm bound to make a success of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I mean to do my best, anyway," said Fatty, spilling his coffee to right and left in his excitement. "I mean to show the school what a New House man can do. I mean to do my job better than it's ever been done before. I mean to start a series of extensive feeds—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Fatty!"

"Hurrah!"

"That's most important," said Fatty, with great seriousness. "Then there's the footer. I mean to see that the New House gets a good look in. In fact, I see no reason why New House shouldn't take over the footer altogether."

"Hear, hear!"

It was a roar.

"Then there's those cheeky Grammarians," went on Fatty Wynn. "Only last week that rotter, Gordon Gay, jammed a fruit-tart down my neck in the village tuckshop."

"Shame—shame!"

"Down with the Grammarians!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter!" said Fatty Wynn, blinking round him indignantly. "That sort of thing's going to be stopped. Under my leadership we're going to put the kybosh once and for all over those cheeky Grammarian rotters!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll back you up, Fatty!"

"Especially if you give feeds like this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the ball, Fatty!"

"Tom Merry's tried to do it and failed, and so have Grundy and D'Arcy and the other skippers," said Fatty Wynn. "I don't mean to fail. I'm going to lead you chaps to victory over the rotters this time. And if I'm made permanent skipper, which is pretty certain, I can tell you, I mean to make things hum. I mean to—"

Bang!

It was a terrific explosion, and Fatty's great speech ended abruptly there and then. For that was the identical moment when Tom Merry, crouching with his chums down in the store-room beneath, decided it was time for them to get busy.

Which they did.

That bang was followed by another deafening report, and another.

And accompanying the explosion came clouds of black, pungent smoke which swirled round the barn, and billowed round the startled heads of the would-be feasters.

They sprang to their feet with howls of alarm. The sudden jerk sent the coffee cups on the table crashing over, and yells arose as their steaming contents splashed to right and left.

"What the thump—"

"Oh, my hat!"

Bang, bang, bang!

Three more terrific explosions followed, and the astounded New House fellows staggered about, half blinded and half suffocated by the swirling, fearful-smelling smoke.

"Quick! It's someone outside chucking things through the window!" howled Figgins, coughing and choking and

spluttering. "It's—atishoo!—those—grooogh!—School House worms, I bet!"

"Ow! Oh, my hat! Grooogh!"

"Stick it out!" bawled Figgins. "Stick—grooogh!—it out! It's— Oh, great pip! Atishoo! What—"

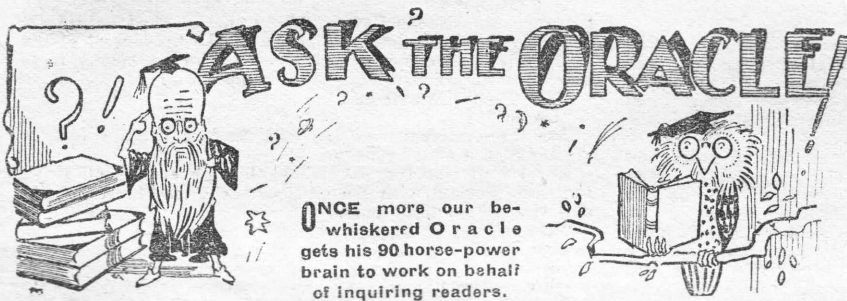
Bang, bang, bang!

Three more explosions came as three dark, round objects whizzed through the windows and exploded on the floor. But the New House fellows did not see them—it was impossible to see one another for the clouds of black smoke. They struggled and fought over the table and fallen chairs and boxes, making desperate efforts to reach the closed door. Even Figgins saw—mentally, of course—that it was impossible to "stick it out."

The smoke was getting worse and worse, and it was impossible to see a yard across the barn. Even the broken window was hidden behind the thick pall of black, acrid smoke.

Amid an uproar of yells and howls the New House juniors fought and strove to reach the door. It flew open at last, and amid a billow of smoke the juniors tumbled out in the open air, gasping and choking, and coughing and sneezing.

(Continued on next page.)



ONCE more our be-whiskered Oracle gets his 90 horse-power brain to work on behalf of inquiring readers.

hung up to make the wires more easily seen and avoided. Let us hope the birds are truly grateful to the kindly sportsmen for saving them from the wires so that later they may receive a charge of buckshot in a more sporting manner.

Q. What is gamboge?

A. Gum-resin from Cambodian and Siamese trees used as yellow pigment.

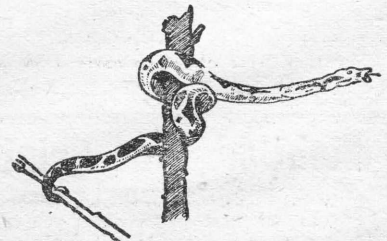
Q. What is the Ku Klux Klan?

A. I am afraid, Cecil Weekes, that you erred when you wrote in your examination paper at school to the effect that this was a kind of washing soap. Perhaps you were thinking of Lux—or, more likely, of next Saturday's football game. But as your master has not seen fit to lighten your mental darkness, I am happy to oblige.

The Ku Klux Klan was a notorious secret society in the southern States of America. For long it held absolute sway in many districts, and was responsible for the lynching of several negroes. This secret society which took the law into its own hands in so drastic a fashion, has now been stamped out as such, but it exists still in a healthier form and under another name.

Q. Which is the largest serpent in the world?

A. The great boa, Arthur S. It is a native of South America, and has been known to swallow an ox after crushing it.



I shouldn't like to be caught in the coils of this giant boa-constrictor, would you?

Q. Where is it not safe to sneeze?

A. In Assyria. One sneeze is taken as a sign of extreme bad luck, and any traveller setting out on a journey through this Eastern land, who has the misfortune to sneeze, should immediately follow his first effort with a second. By this means he will neutralise the bad luck, and may induce his camp followers to remain with him.

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Q. What is a guilder?

A. A reader who signs himself "L. N. S." has written to ask me what is a "gilder," as he spells it, as he has heard the word in connection with the poem about the Pied Piper. The reason that my chum was unable to find the word in the dictionaries he looked through was because it is spelt with a "u," as in the question above. A guilder is a Dutch silver coin worth about 1s. 8d., and the name is a corruption of the word "gulden." Originally, in the Netherlands, a guilder was a gold coin, but this is now obsolete.

Q. If Jack's father is John's father, what relation is Jack to John?

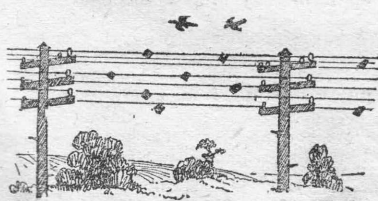
A. Grandson. Think it out, boys, and then try it on your pals!

Q. How many miles of air routes are regularly used in Europe?

A. In all there are 37,500 miles over which there are regular aeroplane services. Of these Germany has 14,500 miles; France, 8,800 miles; and Great Britain, 1,090 miles. The United States has 30,000 miles, which is almost as much as the whole of Europe together.

Q. What is a hipe?

A. The word "hipe" is really a verb, Johnny Doe, of Shrewsbury. It is a wrestling term which signifies a throw made in a particular manner. Hipe



You may have seen them—these metal tabs on telephone wires, put there to warn birds in flight of their danger.

also appears to be the regimental sergeants' name for rifle, and in the Army the order "Slope arms!" often is made to sound like "Slope hipe!" which acts as a sharper word of command.

Q. Where may one see the haggis in the Zoo?

A. I regret to tell you, Nellie Wise, of Sumpton-over-Lyme, that when you come to London you will not have the pleasure of seeing this curiosity in the Zoological Gardens. And here let me confess that though having had my teeth into one on a New Year's Eve long ago, I had but the foggiest notion what it was. So for your sake, Nellie, I sought out a young friend of mine named Jock MacFechnie, and asked him the question. With a look of unutterable contempt on his freckled face, he spoke as follows: "Sae d'ye nae ken what a haggis is, ye saft sassenach? Weel, Ah'll tell ye the noo. 'Tis a kind o' pudden, ye ken. 'Tis sheep's heart, lungs, and liver mixed wi' suet and oatmeal and boiled in the maw, or stomach, o' a sheep. If ye'll come awa' hame wi' me, Ah'll get me mither tae boil yin for ye for a treat." To which I answered: "Thanks, Jock, my boy, but I'd sooner have a soft-boiled egg!"

Q. What is a doolie?

A. A simple form of Indian litter used as an Army ambulance.

Q. Why are metal tabs sometimes put along telegraph wires?

A. This interesting question was sent in by young Andre Picolo, who, in spite of his name, comes from Yorkshire. The tabs, Andre, are often to be seen on telegraph wires in those parts of Great Britain where game is preserved. During the shooting season, pheasants and partridges often fly very wildly through the air in their anxiety to seek safety. In doing so they are likely to dash into any telegraph wires about the countryside and injure or kill themselves. So the metal tabs are

They staggered about, gasping for breath, drawing in deep gulps of fresh air as if for a wager. Then, through red-rimmed, smarting eyes they blinked about them, expecting to see a swarm of laughing School House fellows.

But there was not a soul to be seen.

And then, scarcely a minute after the last fellow had tumbled from the barn, the big heavy door slammed to. It seemed to move of its own accord as if by magic, and as it slammed shut there sounded the shooting of a bolt.

In startled amazement Figgins & Co. stood blinking at the closed door through streaming eyes.

CHAPTER 4.

Not According to Programme!

DONE it?" "Yes!" gasped Tom Merry. "In you go, Glyn! My hat! Hark to 'em!"

As he gasped out the words Tom Merry slipped inside the back door of the dingy store-room under Pepper's Barn, and Bernard Glyn followed him in, with a chuckle. Then Blake closed the door quietly.

"Quick's the word!" gasped Tom. "If they tumble to the game we're done. Get your gas-mask on, Glyn. Oh, good! You've got yours on, Blake."

Blake had his gas-mask on, and a weird object he looked in it. Swiftly Glyn helped Tom on with his, and then Glyn slipped his own on. They were somewhat similar to the ones used during the War, though Bernard Glyn claimed they were much better; being the inventor of them, the schoolboy scientist naturally would.

They certainly were easily and quickly adjusted, and within two or three seconds the three were ready. Tom Merry hurriedly jumped up on a box and raised the two loose floor-boards in the flooring of the room above.

So far all was going swimmingly with Tom Merry's plan. While the rest of the School House fellows waited in hiding in the woods some distance away, Tom Merry, Glyn, and Blake had cautiously approached the barn from the rear, scouting by hedges and ditches in order to reach it unseen.

It was easy enough to get into the store-room underneath the barn itself without being seen from the ratty cart-track on which the barn fronted. For the building was a somewhat quaint structure, the tumbledown front door being level with the cart-track, whilst the ground at the side sloped down steeply into the meadow behind, the floor at the back being several feet above the level of the ground. The space below was bricked in, with a small window at the side and a low door at the rear. And as a thick hedge bordered the cart-track right up to the walls of the barn, it was impossible to see into the meadow without looking over.

Moreover, another hedge ran at right angles, joining the lane a few yards away from the barn, and it was along this Tom Merry & Co. had approached it.

They had soon discovered that Figgy & Co. had not yet arrived, so they had time to make preparations. Then, through the little window they had seen the New House fellows arriving, loaded up with bags and parcels, and they had listened to the merry chatter that came from above their heads, the clatter of cups and saucers, and the cheery sounds of preparations for the feast.

Then had followed Fatty Wynn's much-interrupted speech, in the midst of which Tom Merry had given the whispered word to act. Followed by Bernard Glyn, and armed with the smoke-bombs, he had slipped quickly up the sloping bank and carefully pitched the bombs through the broken window at the side of the barn above.

Now they were about to carry through the second part of the plan.

They wasted no time about it. The success of the plan depended greatly on speed—and luck!

In the barn the smoke had cleared somewhat, and through the goggles of his gas-mask Tom Merry glimpsed the swarm of coughing, sneezing New House fellows outside.

Only a glimpse he got, for scarcely had he clambered through the hole in the floor than he stumbled through the swirling smoke to the door and slammed it shut, pushing home the big bolt on the inside.

Then the three got busy.

They each carried pillow-slips, and at top speed they started to fill them up, cramming tarts and cakes and everything eatable they could lay their hands on pell-mell into the bags.

It was not easy work in the smoky gloom, but they managed the job somehow, and then at a nod from Tom Merry they dropped back into the store-room beneath. Hastily lowering his bulky pillow-slip to the floor, Tom Merry replaced the loose boards.

"Done it!" he chuckled, removing his mask and drawing in a deep breath of air. "Phew! Those giddy masks of yours aren't pleasant, Glyn. Grooogh! Well, now we'll be off. And look out, for goodness' sake!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry shouldered his burden of good things, and, slipping out of the low doorway, he glanced cautiously around. A peep round the corner of the brick wall of the half subterranean store-house showed him no enemy faces above the high hedge, and he gave the word:

"All serene! Come on!"

"Good!"

The three raiders chuckled and made a bee-line for the shelter of the near-by hedge.

Reaching a gap they scrambled through and set off along the ditch bottom with the yells of the New House fellows still ringing in their ears.

"We managed that very neatly, chaps!" gasped Tom Merry, as they tumbled along at a good speed considering their burdens. "But we've no time to lose. Figgy may tumble to the game at any moment, and if he does we'll have them swarming after us like hornets!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Here we are, then!" said Tom Merry, pausing at last at a spot where the deep ditch was full of dead bracken and ferns. "No good running risks by trying to get clear with the stuff now. We'll hide it here and come back for it later when the coast's clear."

"Good wheeze!"

Working swiftly, the School House trio of plotters laid the bulky pillow-slips on a bed of dry leaves, covering them over carefully with ferns and bracken. Then, with deep chuckles, they hurried away, still keeping to the bottom of the ditch and making for the woods some little distance away.

And as they went three heads suddenly appeared over the hedge behind which the School House fellows had been hurrying along, and all three wore Grammar School caps.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said one of the three blankly. "What the dickens d'you make of that, Gay?"

Gordon Gay—for it was that cheery youth—gave a deep chuckle.

"Goodness knows!" he said, staring after the School House fellows, who had just vanished from sight. "They've been up to something—robbing old Pepper's hen-roost most likely. Now, what was in those giddy bags? And why have they hidden them there? This wants looking into, my infants."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Frank Monk and Carboy together. "Then here goes!" grinned Gay.

He struggled through a gap in the hedge and approached the pile of heaped-up ferns and brambles. His grinning chums followed swiftly, and together they started to remove the rubbish. The bulky pillow-slips were soon brought to light, and Gay gave a long whistle as he opened one and looked inside.

"Grub!" he gasped, his eyes gleaming. "Well, this is a bit of luck, and no mistake, chaps!"

"But what the thump have they hidden the stuff here for?" demanded Monk.

"Goodness knows! Ask me another!" grinned Gordon Gay cheerfully. "It was a jolly good job you spotted 'em coming along that ditch, Monkey! Phew! There's enough grub in these three pillow-slips to feed a giddy army, chaps!"

"Some of it's rather mucked up," said Carboy, looking into his pillow-slip and sniffing suspiciously, "and some of it niffs rather—smells like chemicals or something!"

"Some of these cream-buns have soot or something on them, too," said Frank Monk, drawing one out and eyeing it. "What the dickens—"

"Oh, go on—grouse!" snorted Gordon Gay witheringly. "My hat! Afraid of a bit of dust! Anyway, this is where

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we fairly score over those St. Jim's bounders. Looks to me as if they've raided the grub from someone and hidden it here to fetch later. That's it."

"Better clear out with it now, then!" grinned Carboy. "Hold on! I know a better wheeze than that," said Gay suddenly, as the sound of wheels reached their ears. "That sounds like the baker coming back with his cart from old Pepper's cottage—been-delivering bread there, I suppose."

Gay stepped cautiously out of the ditch and looked towards the winding lane which bordered the end of the field they were in. Sure enough, a baker's cart was rattling over the gritty, ruddy surface of the lane.

In a flash Gay was scudding along the ditch towards it, taking advantage of every bit of cover. He reached the lane a few yards ahead of the cart, and his chums saw him stop the driver and speak to him.

A minute later Gay came scrambling back, and he was carrying a clean flour-sack.

"Just about hold the lot!" he chuckled, opening it out swiftly. "In with the stuff, chaps!"

"But why—"

"Just to give those chaps a little surprise when they



CHAPTER 5.
Dished, Diddled, and Done!
WITH eyes nearly starting from their heads, Figgins and his dumbfounded followers stood and stared at the closed door of the barn.

It was most mysterious. So it seemed at that moment to the New House fellows, as they stood outside Pepper's Barn wiping their smarting eyes. They were still dazed and bewildered, and none of them was in a state to think clearly.

But George Figgins, at all events, was quite certain of one thing—and that was that their rivals of the School House were somehow responsible for the amazing state of affairs.

"Well, I—I'm blown!" he managed to gasp out at last. "I—I— But it must be those School House worms!" he added, with a furious snort. "Come on! The rotters must have been hidden in the barn or something! Those dashed



The disguised Fatty Wynn nearly fell down in his startled dismay as the real Herr Guggenberg came into the hallway of the Grammar School. The German master stopped short and blinked at the hapless Fatty. "Vat—vat does dis mean?" he stuttered. (See Chapter 6.)

come back for the grub!" chuckled Gay. "And we're going in the cart, in case we happen to be spotted and followed. Come on! Sharp's the word!"

"Oh!"

Monk and Carboy understood then. In a matter of seconds the pillow-slips were discharging their contents into the flour-sack one by one. It was rough usage for most of the foodstuff, but the Grammarians did not seem to mind.

"Raiders can't be choosers!" remarked Gay, with a chuckle. "Well, that's that! Now cut off with that sack, Franky! You, Carboy, can help-me stuff these pillow-slips with dead leaves and bracken. My hat, I wish we could stay to see those chaps' chivvies when they come back for their grub! Perhaps we'd better not risk it and wait, though."

"Ha, ha! Rather not!"

And Gay & Co. did not wait. The pillow-slips were packed with rubbish from the hedge bottom, and a scribbled note was put in one of them. Then, covering them over as they had found them, the two Grammarians chuckled and hurried along after Frank Monk, who was struggling along with the sack.

They were just in time to help him hand the sack up to the grinning driver of the baker's cart. Then Gay & Co. jumped into the cart, and a moment later it was rattling again over the ruddy lane, while the three Grammarians chuckled deep chuckles of glee. Once again they had scored over their deadly rivals, and it looked as if the Saints were fated to do no better under the leadership of Fatty Wynn than they had done under any of his predecessors.

things were smoke-bombs, and they were made by that rotter, Glyn, I bet!"

"Phew! That's it!" panted Kerr, rubbing his eyes dazedly. "But how—"

"Come on!" roared Figgins.

He made a sudden rush at the door and tore at the latch. But his furious tugging had no effect. The door remained fast.

"I heard the dashed bolt go home!" said Redfern, with a groan. "Those rotters must be inside, though how they've got in without our seeing them beats me hollow! What about the window?"

"Too small! A blessed fag couldn't squeeze through it!" snapped Figgins, almost tearing his hair in his wrath and helplessness. "Oh, my hat! Even now they may be scoffing!"

"But the smoke—it's still coming out!" said Kerr, indicating the smoke still issuing through cracks and crannies. "This beats the band, Figgy! They couldn't—"

"I've got it!" howled Figgins suddenly. "That dashed store-room under the barn! Don't you remember? There's some planks loose in the floor, and you can get up into the barn from there! Quick! We'll collar the rotters yet!"

There was a roar as the New House fellows grasped what Figgins meant, but their long-legged leader was already charging through the hedge by the side of the barn. Heedless of scratches, he forced his way through, half-expecting to see a swarm of School House fellows in the meadow beyond.

But not a soul was in sight, and without pausing Figgy

half-slid, half-leaped down the sloping bank. Then he rushed round to the back of the cellar.

After him went the crowd of fellows in a yelling swarm. The open door was suspicious in itself, and Figgins gritted his teeth and rushed inside the low, dingy apartment. His eyes fell on the upturned box beneath the loose floorboards at once, and his suspicions were confirmed. The next moment he had sent the floorboards flying upwards and was clambering through into the barn above.

The air was almost clear by this time, and Figgins glared about the barn. At sight of the depleted tables he gave a howl of wrath and utter dismay.

"Done!" he howled. "Dished and done! They've gone, and the blessed grub's gone, too! Oh, great pip!"

He rushed to the door, withdrew the bolt, and flung the door wide. But daylight did not make matters any better. The crockery was still there, and so were the tablecloths, stained and running with spilt coffee. Here and there, scattered over the cloths, were a few squashed buns and tarts—that was all, excepting knives and forks and the flowers.

The New House fellows crowded into the barn, and their faces were pictures as they gazed at the tables that a few minutes before had been laden with good things.

"Done in the eye!"

"Oh, the—the rotters!"

Fatty Wynn almost wept.

"All the grub gone!" he wailed. "Figg, old man, for goodness' sake do something! All that ripping grub gone! Oh dear! This is awful!"

Figgins nearly tore his hair with rage.

"Oh, the rotters!" he spluttered. "I see it all now. They got Glyn to make those beastly bombs, and after chucking 'em through the broken window they waited until we'd been driven out, and then they slipped through that rotten hole, collared the grub, and bolted with it."

"That's it! Oh, the cads!"

"But we're not done yet!" roared Figgins. "We're going after them, and with a bit of luck we'll catch 'em up and get the grub back again. There can't be many of them, and they can't have got very far yet. We'll soon pick up their trail! Come on!"

Figgins' words roused the New House fellows to instant action, and they followed him as he made a jump for the door of the barn. In about two seconds they had scrambled down the sloping bank outside and dashed into the meadow.

In the long grass the trail of the School House raiders was easily picked up, and Figgins led the way, with gleaming eyes.

In single file the angry and hungry New House fellows followed the trail, Fatty Wynn filling the air with his dismal lamentations. Figgins was a clever scout, and the merest duffer at tracking could hardly have missed the trail Tom Merry & Co. had left.

As they came into the field where Tom Merry had hidden the pillow-slips full of foodstuffs, Figgins saw the baker's cart just vanishing along the lane in the distance. Little dreaming that it carried with it both Gordon Gay & Co. and the raided feed, the New House leader did not give it a second glance, but turned his attention to his tracking.

The next moment he reached the pile of bracken and ferns that almost filled the ditch at that spot. Figgins paused, his eyes suddenly taking on a suspicious gleam.

"Here, hold on!" he snapped. "This looks a bit suspicious, chaps! Shift that heap of rubbish!"

The New House fellows crowded round him, and stared. Figgins gave a snort and started to drag away the bracken and ferns. The next moment he gave a yell of triumph as the pillow-slips were revealed.

"Got it!" he yelled. "I thought as much! The rotters have hidden it here, not daring to take it away yet. They guessed we'd follow, and they weren't risking us capturing them with the stuff."

"Hurrah!" shouted Fatty Wynn in great excitement and glee. "Good old Figgy—I knew you'd save the situation!"

"It's the grub right enough!" said Figgins, grasping one of the pillow-slips and beaming in great relief round at the crowd. "My hat! We've diddled the rotters, after all. Bring it—oh, my hat! Quick. Back up, chaps! Here they come!"

Figgins' gleeful voice changed abruptly to a wild yell of warning. He had happened to look round just then, and it was well he did so. For, racing across the meadows at top speed from the direction of the woods was a swarm of juniors, and it did not need very good eyesight for Figgins to recognise them as School House fellows.

And they were—being none other than Tom Merry and his band of School House men. And what was bringing them racing across the fields now was easy to understand.

On reaching the shelter of the woods, Tom Merry & Co. had reported their success to the crowd waiting there in hungry anticipation. Then they had kept observation on the spot where they had hidden the feed—or, at least, they

had watched the approach to it from the direction of the barn, for the spot itself was in a hollow and invisible to them at that distance.

Though they had failed to see Gordon Gay & Co.'s disappearance with their unlooked-for haul, they had easily picked out the New House crowd trailing across the fields towards the deep ditch. Then they had heard that triumphant howl of George Figgins.

It was more than enough for Tom Merry.

He guessed at once what had happened. Figgins had found the grub, after all! He had been a trifle keener at tracking than they had anticipated.

The thought of losing the feed after all the trouble they had taken brought the School House juniors out of their place of concealment at once. Though knowing they were in the minority, they were grimly determined to make a fight for it. So they left the shelter of the trees and came charging at top speed across the meadow, ready to fight to the last gasp to recover the feed—if Figgins & Co. had found it.

And that was soon clear when they sighted the crowd round the ditch.

"Oh, what awful luck!" gasped Tom Merry, as he pounded along grimly. "Never mind! We're not done yet, chaps! Get ready for a scrap!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go it!"

The School House fellows tore on grimly, and the New House jumped from the ditch to meet them.

"Back up, chaps!" roared Figgins, taking charge at once, despite Fatty Wynn's position of skipper. "Come on, you School House worms! We'll teach you to raid our grub, you rotters!"

"On the ball, School House!"

"Yah! New House for ever!"

"Down 'em, School House!"

"Yaas, wathah! Leave Figgay to me, deah boys!"

The School House fellows arrived with a rush.

The next moment a fierce battle was in progress. The sight of the pillow-slips still lying in the ditch was more than enough for Tom Merry & Co.

Although outnumbered by at least a dozen, the St. Jim's juniors went to work with a will, and the sheer force of their attack sent the defenders staggering back, many of them rolling into the ditch behind them.

Tom Merry, ignoring Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's request for Figgins to be left to him, had closed with the New House leader, and the two rolled over into the deep ditch, struggling mightily. But Gussy soon found an opponent worthy of his steel in Dick Redfern, and they also rolled in the ditch, locked in a deadly embrace.

Backwards and forwards the battle swayed amidst an uproar of yells, howls, and cheers, and significant thumps. At least a dozen pairs were soon rolling in the ditch, which, luckily, was dry.

Numbers soon told, however, despite Tom Merry & Co.'s stout fight, and one by one the School House fellows were overcome. Tom Merry's turn came at last when Owen came to Figgy's aid and sat on his chest while Figgins held him down.

"Give in, you School House worm!" panted Figgins, his eyes dancing with triumph, though his nose bore marks of the fight. "You're licked to the wide! No good going on—you can see that!"

Tom Merry glanced round as best he could, and he groaned as he saw how the fight had gone.

"Ow!" he panted. "All right, Figgy, you rotter! If it had been a man to man scrap, though, we'd have licked you. You're jolly nearly two to one, and it's nothing to crow about. Give in, you chaps, it's no good!"

"You'd better!" chuckled Figgins, dabbing at his nose. "You've nearly busted my nose, and it's no good going on, my pippin."

"Make it pax, then!" gasped Tom.

"Yes, old dear!"

"And—you'll let us join in the feed?" asked Herries hopefully.

"No fear!" said Figgy, laughing derisively. "Not likely! You can come and watch us feed, though—if you promise to behave yourselves. How the thump did you get to know about the feed, anyway?" he added, with a sudden frown. "Somebody must have let it out, and if we've a traitor in the giddy camp—"

"Ask your giddy skipper!" grinned Tom Merry, tenderly feeling a rapidly colouring eye. "It was Fatty Wynn told Manners."

"What?"

It was a howl.

Fatty Wynn, who was just turning his attention to one of the pillow-slips, his features beaming again now, suddenly looked up and coloured.

"Oh, really, Figgy, I didn't!" he stuttered. "Manner knew—"

"I didn't!" yelled Manners. "I was only rumping you, you silly chump! You fell into the trap nicely and told me all I wanted to know."

"Oh!" gasped Fatty.

Figgins glared at his chum.

"Well, you—you burbling owl!" he hooted. "So we've you to thank for this! It's all through you that we've been nearly suffocated by that rotter's smoke and nearly lost the blessed feed! And look at my nose!"

"Well, we've got the grub back, haven't we?" stammered Fatty, opening the pillow-slip and taking a peep inside. "After all— Oh, crumbs! What— Who—"

"What's the matter now?"

"Matter!" shrieked Fatty Wynn frantically. "There's no grub in here—it's all bracken and ferns and stuff! Look!"

He dragged out handful after handful of the rubbish, and Figgins fairly blinked and blinked. At the same moment Kerr gave a yell as he tipped the contents of one of the other pillow-slips on to the grass.

A stream of bracken and dead ferns was scattered out.

There was a howl of amazement and dismay from the juniors of both Houses. There was no doubt about it. Not a scrap of food was in any of the three bags—not a single jam-tart; only rubbish—and a note!

Figgins snatched up the scrap of paper. Tom Merry looked on as if unable to credit the evidence of his own eyes.

As he read the brief note, George Figgins gave a roar.

"Done!" he articulated, dancing with rage. "It's that rotter Gordon Gay. He's collared the grub!"

"Wha-at?" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Look at it!" choked Figgins, shoving the note before Tom Merry's staring eyes. "Read it!"

Tom read it. It was short and to the point. It just read: "Thanks for the grub!" And it was signed: "Gordon Gay."

Tom Merry fairly goggled at it as he read it out aloud. There was a combined yell of wrath from both New House and School House.

"But—but how— What— When—"

"You shoved our grub in these pillow-slips, didn't you?" hooted Figgins.

"Of course we did!" gasped Blake. "The grub was safe in them when we hid the dashed things under that rubbish. How on earth—"

"The fearful bounders must have spotted us hide them!" stuttered Tom Merry. "They must have been hanging round and seen us come here. Oh, the rotters!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"This is all your doing!" choked Figgins, glaring at Tom Merry & Co. furiously. "Oh, you—you—"

"It's the fault of that fat dummy in the first place!" snorted Redfern, glowering at the hapless and dismayed Fatty Wynn. "If you hadn't told these School House wasters—"

"Yes, rather!"

"Fatty, you awful ass—"

"You frightful idiot!"

"You burbling babbler—"

"Oh, I say!" protested Fatty tearfully.

"Bump him!" yelled Jimson excitedly. "Teach the fathead to be more careful!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bump the fat ass!"

"Here, hold on!" said Figgins hastily. "You can't—"

But the New House fellows could—and did. They were bitterly disappointed and fearfully hungry. That deliciously-smelling coffee and the sight of the appetising grub had made them ravenous.

And now it was gone—the feed was gone from their vision like a beautiful dream.

And though they were furious with the School House fellows, they felt still more furious at the thought that it was Fatty Wynn himself who had given the game away and brought about such a sad state of affairs.

Unheeding the protesting Figgy, and the still more protesting Fatty Wynn, they grabbed the founder of the feast, and they bumped him soundly.

Fatty Wynn's wild howls of anguish rang over the misty fields.

The School House fellows could not help grinning. "This is how you're going to lead us, is it?" hooted French, as they lifted Fatty for a final bump. "Letting those School House worms and the rotten Grammarians do us down! Nice leader you are—I don't think!"

"Yarrooooo! Leggo!" shrieked Fatty. "Rescue, Figgy! Oh, my hat! Leggo! How could I help—"

Bump!

"For goodness' sake let him go!" yelled Figgins, getting near enough at last. "We're wasting valuable time, you footling idiots! Let's go out after those Grammarians, you duffers! They can't have got far, and we may catch 'em yet!"

"Phew! That's so!" said Redfern.

"Spread out and search the fields!" bawled Figgins.

"We'll catch the rotters if we have to search till dark! You School House sweeps have jolly well got to help, too! It's your fault!"

"We'll help, all serene!" said Tom Merry, who was just as disappointed and angry as were the New House fellows. "We did you duffers down, and you can't deny it! But we're not allowing those Grammar School rotters to get away with the feed!"

"Wathah not! We'll help you twack down the wottahs, Figgy!"

"We'll help you search, anyway," said Blake glumly.

"Though, if I know that bouncer Gay, it will be too late now."

And Blake proved to be right there. For an hour and more the search went on, even in the depths of the woods, and even approaching the precincts of the Grammar School. But it was useless. Gordon Gay had gone, and with him had gone the great feed. With dismal faces, and with feelings too deep for words, the St. Jim's fellows abandoned the search at last and trailed homewards to St. Jim's in the deepening dusk. Gordon Gay had scored once again, and the most unhappy fellow in all St. Jim's that evening was Fatty Wynn of the New House. His first day as skipper of the Lower School and leader against the Grammarians could not, by any manner of means, be called a success.

CHAPTER 6.

Fatty Plays a Lone Hand!

"BUT look here, Fatty—" "Rats! I'm doing it, Figgy!" "But you'll only get collared!" "Bound to be!" said Kerr, with a grin. "You're not much of a hand at impersonating, Fatty—you know you're not!"

(Continued on next page.)

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"And you're such a blundering idiot, you know," said Figgins kindly.

"If you call your skipper a blundering idiot, Figgins, I—"

"Well, you know you are, Fatty!" urged Figgins. "You're an awfully good chap, Fatty, but you're not deep enough for a job of that kind. Drop the silly idea, there's a good chap!"

Fatty Wynn spluttered. He was red in the face with indignation.

In the ordinary way, Fatty was the meekest and most easy-going fellow one could imagine. He had always followed Figgy's lead without question, and he had never dreamed of thinking out plans and schemes on his own account. He had always left such matters to Figgins, or Kerr. Fatty was a fellow always ready to allow others to take the lead, and always willing to follow where they led.

But now a great change had come over Fatty Wynn.

Since he had taken over the job of junior skipper he had become quite self-assertive and ambitious. Fatty was very proud of being in a position of authority. Certainly his first day had not been quite a success, and Fatty realised that his "stock" had fallen considerably in consequence of the fiasco of the great celebration feast.

But that was all the more reason why Fatty should do something to raise it again. He had announced that he intended to lead the St. Jim's juniors to victory against the Grammarians. He had bragged right and left that he intended to put the kybosh on Gordon Gay & Co. once and for all time.

Instead of doing so, the Grammarians had scored heavily, and, justly or unjustly, all the fellows in the New House, at all events, blamed him for it—o pretended they did, which was the same thing to the innocent and guileless Fatty.

Something must be done, and Fatty was determined to do that something quickly. And he had thought out a great scheme—a deep, dark plot that appealed to him, if to nobody else.

"I tell you I'm doing it, Figgy!" he announced. "Look here! I'm skipper, ain't I? I've always followed your lead, and it's up to you to follow mine now. You promised to back me up for all you were worth."

"Well, we're willing enough to do that," said Figgins. "But we're not willing to see you come a fearful cropper, Fatty. You're bound to be spotted and ragged bald-headed. It's like buzzing into a giddy lion's den for you to go over to the Grammar School on such a game!"

"That's it!" said Kerr. "We're saving you from yourself, Fatty. Chuck it, old chap!"

"Rats! I'm doing it!" said Fatty, with unusual determination.

"Well, let Kerr do the impersonating, if your blessed plan must be carried out!" said Figgy. "He's no duffer at the job, and might bring it off all right."

"Rats! I'm doing it!" said Fatty doggedly. "I've got to raise my—my prestige again. The fellows have ragged me over yesterday enough. I'm going to show 'em and the silly School House worms as well, just what I can do."

"But—"

"It should be easy enough!" resumed Fatty defiantly. "I'm just about the build of Herr Guggenberg, their German master, ain't I? And I can easily imitate his broken English. Didn't Kerr impersonate our own German master last term?"

"And came a cropper over it, too!" said Kerr, with a rueful grin.

"Well, I'll jolly well watch I don't!" said Fatty confidently. "You fellows can help me make-up—Kerr's no end of a clever chap at that!"

"I jolly well won't, for one!" said Figgins.

"And I won't!" laughed Kerr. "Chuck the silly idea, Fatty, there's a sensible chap! Gay's just a bit too wide for you, and you'd be bound to be spotted at once!"

"Bound to!" agreed Figgins, with a chuckle. "I'll admit you're fat and podgy, like Herr Guggenberg—"

"I'm plump and well-covered, if that's what you mean!" said Fatty, with dignity. "Just the chap for the job, in fact."

"If you could act, and if you could imitate voices, and if you had the gumption of a bunny," said Figgy kindly. "But you haven't, old chap! Take my tip and drop the idea, old fellow."

"Rats! You fellows go and eat coke!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly.

And he left the study in quite a huff. It was such an unusual thing for him to do that Kerr looked at Figgins concernedly.

"Poor old Fatty!" he said. "I don't like to turn his scheme down like this, Figgy, but—but—"

"It's out of the giddy question," chuckled Figgy. "He couldn't possibly make a success of a job like that. Getting

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outside a rabbit-pie is more in Fatty's line—he's a genius when it comes to a job like that. But impersonating—Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins roared at the very thought of it. Kerr frowned.

"I hope the awful duffer doesn't really mean to try it on, though," he said hesitatingly. "If he does—"

"My dear chap, he wouldn't dream of tackling it without our help!" said Figgy, with a laugh. "Has he ever done anything on his own? What rot! He'll have forgotten his giddy scheme by the time dinner's over, and—Hallo, there goes the bell now. Good!"

And Figgins and Kerr left the study, and made their way after Fatty Wynn to the dining-hall.

Fatty Wynn did not mention his scheme again to his chums. He was morose and silent when he joined them after dinner. But his chums did not mind. They told themselves that he would soon get over it. It was not like the good-natured and easy-going Fatty to sulk for long.

They took it for granted that Fatty had given up all idea of his wonderful scheme, and that he was still "waxy" because they had refused to back him up in it.

But they were wrong there—very much wrong, in fact. For Fatty Wynn had no intention of giving up his scheme at all. He only realised that if his chums knew he intended to stick it, they would try to prevent him somehow.

So Fatty kept his intentions to himself. And the moment afternoon lessons ended that day he vanished mysteriously, nor did his chums miss him until it was time for tea. By that time Fatty was hurrying through the woods towards the Grammar School, and he carried a big bulky bag, which he had smuggled out by way of the playing fields.

In a clearing in the woods Fatty halted, and got busy with a mirror, a wig, false eyebrows, a false moustache, and a supply of grease-paints. He had also brought a change of clothing.

His chums would have been startled indeed could they have seen the result of his labours.

At first glance he now appeared to be a middle-aged, podgy little gentleman in a rather loud check-suit, and with a ruddy, plump face, heavy eyebrows, and a heavy moustache, and wearing gold-rimmed eyeglasses.

At a second glance he appeared just what he was—a chubby-faced, podgy youth, clumsily made-up to represent a middle-aged gentleman. That was all.

But Fatty Wynn had quite a good opinion of his acting abilities and also his skill at making-up. Moreover, in his pocket-mirror it was impossible for him to get a good view of himself.

After looking himself over as best he could, Fatty seemed quite satisfied, and, after hiding his own clothes in the bushes, he started out for the Grammar School full of confidence in himself and his scheme.

Actually, he looked a really weird and wonderful figure, and it was perhaps no wonder that several fellows who happened to be lounging round the Grammar School gates some minutes later sat up and took notice, so to speak, as they sighted him.

Three of the group were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Carboy; and Gordon Gay shaded his eyes and gazed at the approaching form somewhat blankly.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated. "What the dickens is this coming?"

"Looks like dear old Guggenberg!" said Carboy. "But—"

"It's some silly ass got up to look like him!" gasped Frank Monk. "Phew! I wonder—"

"So do I!" exclaimed Gay, a gleeful grin spreading over his face. "My hat! I do believe it is; it's one of those St. Jim's duffers!"

"Coming here to play a jape on us!" chuckled Monk.

"That's it, for a pension!" said Gay, suddenly straightening his features again. "For goodness' sake don't let him spot we've tumbled to his little game! I do believe—yes, it's that pal of Figgy's—Fatty Wynn!"

"What a lark! You're right, Gay, old man! Shush! Here he comes!"

Fatty Wynn came rolling up, blinking about him in the queer way Herr Guggenberg had. He really did that very well, and even Gordon Gay felt a slight doubt for the moment. But on a closer inspection he had no doubts at all, and he chuckled inwardly.

He raised his cap politely. His chums did likewise, keeping straight faces and ready to follow Gay's lead.

Fatty Wynn halted and frowned upon them.

"Vot for you lounge about here mit yourselves, leetle poys?" he said severely. "You vos lazy, good-for-nothings slackers hanging about der gates! You should be making sports mit yourselves, instead of lounging about der gates!"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Gay.

"Go indoors at vunce!" ordered Fatty Wynn, frowning

terrifically. "I vos teach you not to slack in dis manner, mein poy! Go to your studies and I will come dere and cane you all most severely, mit meinsel! Ja!"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"You—you won't let us off this once, sir?" begged Gay, winking at his chums.

"Nein; I vill nod, mein young friend! Go dis very instant, mit yourselves!"

"Oh, dear! Yes, sir!"

Gordon Gay detached himself from the gate pillar and started across the quad, followed by his solemn-faced chums. Fatty Wynn, still blinking about him, brought up the rear.

There were quite a number of fellows hanging about the quadrangle, and they seemed to become interested in the procession in a remarkably short space of time. They followed in a grinning crowd as Gay led the way to the school steps.

Fatty Wynn noted this, and he felt just a trifle uneasy. Even Fatty felt that it wasn't usual for Herr Guggenberg to cause such a sensation as this. He began to wonder if his

make-up, after all, had flaws in it—if there was something unusual about his appearance.

But there was no drawing back now, and he had to go on.

A moment later he had mounted the entrance steps, and found himself in the hallway, the swarm of grinning, chuckling Grammarians crowding in at the door behind him.

It was just at this point when something happened which Fatty had not anticipated. Any other fellow might have done so—would, in fact, certainly have done so. It was the obvious thing that might easily have happened, and Fatty really should have anticipated the risk of it happening.

But he had not done so.

For just then Herr Guggenberg—the real, genuine article, as it were, came along the passage on Fatty's left into the hallway.

Fatty Wynn nearly fell down in his sudden, startled dismay.

It really was most awkward.

From the crowd came a chorus of deep chuckles. The real German master stopped short and blinked and gaped at the hapless Fatty.

"Vat—vat does dis mean?" he stuttered. "Vat— Who, Gay, who is dis person?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Fatty Wynn did not answer the question. Herr Guggenberg was known to be a very irritable gentleman, and Fatty was terrified. It was really the most awful bad luck! But Fatty did not linger to answer or debate upon his next move.

He just glared desperately about him, and then bolted for it.

There was only one way open for him, and he took it with a wild rush. Behind him was the crowd, and on his left was the angry and scandalised German master. So Fatty went straight ahead, reached the stairs in a few wild leaps, and fairly flew up them.

Fatty had only been inside the Grammar School a few times, and then it had been to visit Gordon Gay's study. And he made a bee-line for that doubtful sanctuary now.

Luckily he only met a couple of fags en route, and, sending them spinning to right and left, he sped towards the Fourth Form passage, and bolted into Gay's study like a frightened rabbit.

Nobody was in the room, and, closing the door swiftly, Fatty glanced about him for a hiding-place. There was only one—the couch. Fatty dived and squirmed under this, and hoped for the best.

A moment later the sound of hurried footsteps, mingled with laughter and excited voices, passed the door of the study and gradually died away. Evidently the pursuers did not guess he had taken refuge in a junior study.

For some long minutes Fatty lay palpitating under the

couch; and then, after what seemed a lifetime, he heard footsteps and voices again. They halted outside the door of the study he was in, and then, to his alarm, entered.

Who they were Fatty could only guess, for he dared not look round. But he soon knew that it was Gordon Gay & Co. He lay in his cramped quarters, scarcely daring to breathe, little dreaming that one of his check trouser legs showed clearly from under the couch.

As he glanced round the study Gordon Gay spotted it at once. He gave his chums a prodigious wink, and silently pointed to it. Frank Monk and Carboy grinned.

"Well, that was about the queerest thing out, you fellows!" he remarked in an excited tone. "What the thump d'you make of it? Fancy somebody masquerading as old Guggenberg! I wonder who on earth it could be?"

"Cracksman after the Head's plate, perhaps?" suggested Frank Monk solemnly.

"More likely a spy," said Carboy.

"I don't think it could have been either!" said Gay, shaking his head. "In my view, it was just a jape—one of those chaps from St. Jim's most likely. He meant to jape us and rag our studies!"

"Phew! That's it!"

"Of course. Why didn't we think of it before?"

"We wouldn't have let the boulder get away so easily if we had, I admit," said Gordon Gay. "Anyway, he's done no harm, thank goodness! Blow the cheeky ass, anyway! And now what about the birthday feed tomorrow? Better be settling all details."

"Yes, rather!"

"It was a ripping idea of yours, Franky, to have the feed on the island," said Gay. "We couldn't very well give a feed to twenty fellows in the study, and an alfresco feed's far nicer."

"Much nicer—just the weather for it," said Franky.

"Well, it's a trifle cold, perhaps, but if it's sunny like it's been to-day it'll be ripping!" said Gay. "We'll take two boats, and we'll row the stuff over early—lucky it's a half hol. I vote we get there about three."

"Splendid!"

"But not a word to anyone, mind!" said Gay warningly. "We mustn't take the risk of our plans getting out. We don't want our feed collared like we collared theirs yesterday."

"Rather not!"

"Pity, really, we didn't keep some of the grub for tomorrow," said Gay regretfully. "Still, we must be prepared to spend a few quids on a chap's birthday."

"Oh, quite!"

"We'll have it in the old ruins, of course. A spirit-stove and a kettle we shall want—though I vote we have a fire going, too."

"Good idea!"

"But, remember, the most important thing is that we keep it quiet because of those St. Jim's worms! My hat! If they knew—"

"They don't know, though!" laughed Frank Monk. "But we'd better leave a guard by the river in any case—a sentinel to see nobody approaches the giddy island."

"Rot! No need for that!" scoffed Gay. "Why the thump should we when nobody knows our plans, fathead? Safe as houses, Franky! My hat! With all that grub we'll have the time of our lives!"

"Yes, rather!"

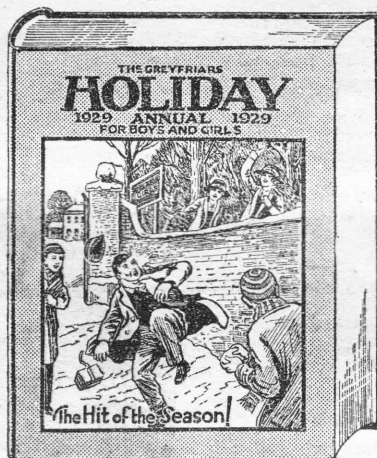
"Well, that's about all," said Gay carelessly. "Now, what about going down to the village? Come on—sharp!"

Gay left the study with his chums, closing the door carelessly after him. Fatty Wynn gave a deep breath of relief, and then he scrambled cautiously out from under the couch, breathing heavily, but with his eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Mum-my hat!" he gasped. "So—so they're holding a birthday feast on the island, are they? Phew! Wait till

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Figgy hears that! Well, I haven't wasted my time after all. Rather not!"

Almost trembling with excitement, Fatty crept to the door and blinked out cautiously. He had yet to get out of the enemy's camp, and that was likely to be no easy matter.

But he had to take the risk—there was no help for it. In any case, Fatty was fairly shaking with eagerness to get back and report his great news to Figgins.

Like the prophet of old, he looked this way and that way, and seeing no man he scudded away along the passage on tiptoe. Not a soul was about, apparently, and, reaching the stairs safely, Fatty hastened down them.

At the end of the passage beyond the stairs three or four fellows were standing chatting; but Fatty had been seen now, and he went through them like a knife through butter, sending them sprawling to right and left, with wrathful yells.

Two seconds later Fatty was out in the quad, scudding for dear life for the gateway. Near the gates he caught a glimpse of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Carboy. They were wheeling their bikes, and they gave a shout as they sighted him.

Fatty gasped, put on speed, and dashed through the gateway into the lane. Then he flew.

But the thought of the three Grammarians' bikes made him leave the lane hurriedly, and, diving through the hedge, he set off across the field beyond, making a beeline for the woods.

He very soon reached them, and he gave a gasp of relief as a swift glance back showed no sign of Gordon Gay & Co. This surprised Fatty, for he knew any one of the three could easily have outdistanced him. It almost seemed as if they wanted him to get away—though that possibility never entered Fatty's mind.

Five minutes later Fatty had changed back into his own clothes, had removed his disguise, and was hastening towards St. Jim's with his bag of "props." And in another ten minutes he was bursting violently into Figgins' study with his great news.

CHAPTER 7.

A Split in the Camp!

"**W**HA-AT?" yelled Figgins. "You've been to the Grammar School after all, Fatty?"

"Yes, old man! I've just come back!"

"You—you've actually been there alone?"

"Certainly!" said Fatty, breathing heavily after his run.

"As—as old Guggenberg?" yelled Kerr.

"Of course!" snorted Fatty, eyeing his chums somewhat indignantly. "Didn't I tell you I meant to do it? Well, I went."

"And you turned up at the Grammar School as their German master?" gasped Kerr, scarcely able to believe it.

"Don't I keep telling you I did?"

"Well, you frabjous dummy!"

"You burbling chump!"

"And you've made a muck of things, of course!" stutered Figgins wrathfully. "Given 'em something else to crow over!"

"No, I haven't!" snorted Fatty Wynn. "But I've got some news that'll make you fairly sit up, Figgy. I didn't go for nothing, after all. I was unlucky in one way, but not in another."

"But were you spotted?"

"Ahem! I—I think they must have seen I was disguised," admitted Fatty reluctantly. "But it was luck that really did me in the eye. I'd got as far as the Grammar School hallway, and was taking Gay and his pals in to cane 'em, when that beast Guggenberg himself turned up—met the rotter face to face, you know! Rotten luck, wasn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr.

"Rotten luck!" spluttered Figgins, who was far too apprehensive to see the funny side. "But tell us, you ass, you didn't let us down; they didn't collar you and spot who you were?"

"No, I'm jolly sure they didn't!" said Fatty. "Though Gay did suggest that it might be a St. Jim's chap right enough. If he'd known it was me he'd have said so, wouldn't he?"

"Well, I suppose he jolly well would," admitted Figgins. "But tell us all about it, for goodness' sake! Of all the asses—"

"Oh, really, Figgy—"

"Go on—let's have the yarn!" snorted Figgy.

And Fatty told them of his great adventure.

"Well," said Fatty, as he finished, his eyes fixed eagerly on Figgy's lean features. "What d'you think about that? Worth going for, wasn't it, even if my plan of ragging their studies didn't come off?"

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Figgins looked at Fatty Wynn, and then he looked at Kerr.

"What d'you make of it, Kerr?" he demanded, frowning. "I—I don't quite like the sound of it myself, you know. You know what awful spoofers those chaps are."

"Yes, it does sound rather queer," admitted Kerr. "It's natural enough to hold a feed on the island, of course. The weather isn't at all bad for a picnic. But—but—"

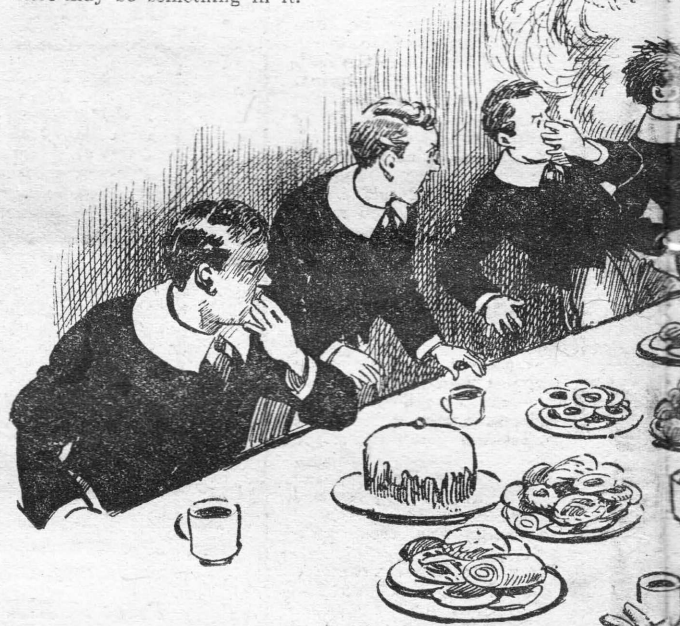
"That's just how I feel about it," said Figgy. "Look here, Fatty, you're absolutely certain they didn't spot you under that giddy couch?"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Fatty, not a little disappointed at the lack of enthusiasm of his suspicious chums. "Dash it all, d'you think I'm a fool?" he went on indignantly. "Am I a fellow to be taken in easily by that rotter Gay?"

"Ahem! Well, you are rather dense and just a bit innocent," said Figgy kindly and frankly. "I don't mean to be unkind, but a baby could take you in, you know."

"You cheeky rotters—" spluttered Fatty Wynn.

"No need to get waxy, old man," said Figgins soothingly. "Still, if you're quite certain they didn't spot you there may be something in it."



"Gentlemen and fellow New House chaps!" said Fatty Wynn, beaming round upon the assembly. "We are gathered together on this auspicious occasion in order to celebrate the appointment of a New House man as junior skipper of St. Jim's." "Hurrah!" "Go it!" "I mean to make things hum!" went on Fatty. "I mean to—Bang, bang, bang! Three startling explosions sounded in the barn, and they were followed by clouds of black, pungent smoke which swirled and billowed round the heads of the New House fellows. "What the thump—" "Oh, my hat!" "Yaroooooh!" (See Chapter 3.)

"I can't see why it shouldn't be genuine enough," said Kerr. "In any case, I can't imagine those chaps allowing Fatty to get away if they did know he was there, or clearing off on their bikes and leaving him to do as he liked in their study. It doesn't seem possible to me. Yes, I think Fatty's really got hold of an interesting bit of news this time."

Fatty Wynn brightened up wonderfully at that. But before he could speak, the door flew open, and Redfern rushed in, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Figgy here? Oh, good! Just the man I'm looking for. I say, I've got news, you chaps!"

"Is Queen Anne dead?" inquired Figgy.

"Don't be an ass! Look here," said Reddy hurriedly. "I've just been in the village tuckshop—"

"So've I—heaps of times, old chap."

"You silly dummy!" hooted Redfern wrathfully. "Can't you listen to a chap who's got news? I've heard that those Grammar School wasters are having a birthday feed to-morrow."

"What?" yelled Figgy and Kerr together.

"Fact!" said Redfern, pleased that Figgins was interested

at last. "I've just raced back on my bike like billy-ho to tell you. I was sitting behind that screen in the corner of Mrs. Murphy's when the bounders came in—Gay, Monkey, and Carboy. They didn't spot me; in fact, they never looked round. They ordered a whole heap of grub to go with some stuff they'd already ordered. Fact!"

"Phew! Great!"
 "But that's not all!" went on Reddy, rather surprised at the way Figgins & Co. were taking the news. "It's going to be a giddy open-air affair; I distinctly heard Gay say he hoped it would be fine, and I heard Monkey mention the word ruins. Well, that means either the castle ruins on



Wayland Hill, the Monk's Cell in Rylcombe Wood, or the ruins on the island; hardly be there, though."

"Good!" said Figgy, with a deep chuckle. "But this is all stale news, Reddy, old man. And it's to be at the ruins on the island if you want to know."

"Then—then you knew about it?" gasped Reddy, in disappointed tones.

"Yes, old chap!" chuckled Figgy. "Fatty's just brought the glad tidings a few minutes ago. We were suspicious about it then, but now you've confirmed it. Good man, Reddy! Hold on, though! How long ago since they entered Mrs. Murphy's?"

"Scarcely ten minutes," said Redfern, staring.
 "And it's about a quarter of an hour since you saw them, Fatty?"

"Yes!" said Fatty eagerly.
 "Good! Then they couldn't have spotted you going in the shop, I suppose. How long were you in there, Reddy?"

"Oh, a good five to eight minutes, I should think, before they came!"

"That settles it, then," said Figgy, with a gleeful grin. "We're on to this like a giddy bow-wow on a bone, Fatty. We'll show the rotters that they're not the only chaps who

can raid grub. My hat, though! Did you say they'd be about twenty strong, Fatty?"

"Yes; but—"
 "Phew! Then we'll be up against something," said Figgins, shaking his head reflectively. "We couldn't raise twenty in the New House; not chaps who can hold their own in a big scrap, anyway."

"That's so," admitted Kerr, frowning. "Why not get some School House chaps in, though? After all, this is a matter of St. Jim's against the Grammarians."

"I'd rather we did it on our own, but—well, I was thinking of that, and I'm afraid we'll have to," said Figgins. "We'd just get Tom Merry and his two pals, and Blake's lot. They'll be enough."

"Too many!" said Fatty. "Supposing the grub won't go round when we've raided it, Figgy?"
 "We'll have to risk that, old chap!" chuckled Figgins. "Well, is that a go—shall we let in those School House worms?"

"Looks as if we'll have to."
 "Right! Come on, then, and we'll get it fixed up right away!" said Figgins. "Cheer up, Fatty; we'll see you get your fill."

"Oh, really, Figgy. I hope I'm not greedy—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"As junior skipper I suppose it ought to be left to you to deal with," chuckled Figgins. "But perhaps I'd better take the lead."

"Much better!" grinned Kerr and Redfern together.
 Without further ado the New House juniors crossed over to the School House, Figgins explaining what Fatty had discovered to the astonished Redfern as they went. They found Blake & Co. having tea with the Terrible Three in the latter's study, and they jumped up with warlike looks as Figgins strode in with his grinning chums behind him.

"Pax!" called Figgins cheerfully. "This is a friendly visit, my little fellows—"

"You cheeky rotter! If you want to go out on your necks—"

"Little men, then," amended Figgins. "Hold on—no offence meant, you chaps; only my fun. I say, we've got a good thing on, and we want you fellows to come in with us."

"Oh, do you?" exclaimed Tom Merry, eyeing Figgins grimly. "And what have you got on?"

"He's got a mask on, if you ask me!" said Lowther, shaking his head. "That can't possibly be his face!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You dry up, you funny ass!" snorted Figgins. "Now, Tommy, old chap, we've got news that'll interest you. It's not a House matter, and that's why we want you fellows in it. It's something up against those beastly Grammarians."

"Oh!" said Tom, looking interested. "You want us to put 'em in their places for you, eh? Right! You can leave it to us, my infants!"

Tom's chums chuckled, while the New House fellows looked at Figgins. Figgy controlled himself with an effort.

"We've heard that those Grammar School cads are holding a big alfresco feast on the island to-morrow afternoon," he said impressively. "Now, what about it? Are you game to help us raid the bounders?"

"Let's hear all about it first," said Tom, though his eyes were gleaming. "Sounds good!"

Helped by Fatty Wynn and Redfern, Figgy told how and what they had heard.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, when he had finished. "Weally, that is vewy good news, Figgay! You can count us in, deah boys!"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake, looking at Tom Merry. "What about it, Tommy?"

Tom Merry shook his head rather slowly.
 "I don't quite like it," he said. "Gay's rather a crafty card, you know. He let Fatty get away a trifle too easily for my liking."

"Rot! It's clear enough! There's no spoof about it, fathead!" said Redfern.

"That's pretty clear," said Figgins, eyeing Tom Merry in some astonishment. "Does that mean you won't join us?"

"Well, I don't know," said Tom, frowning reflectively. "You see, I know Gay better than you chaps do."

"Rot!"

"Who's going to lead the raid, anyway?" asked Tom grimly.

"Oh, well, I suppose Fatty ought to," said Figgins, eyeing his fat chum doubtfully. "Still, he'll let me lead—"

"Oh, really, Figgy, I jolly well won't!" snorted Fatty, with unusual heat. "Am I junior skipper or not? It's my job, of course, and I mean to lead St. Jim's to victory."

"H'm! Well, if Tom Merry agrees—" began Figgins.

"But Tom Merry doesn't agree," said Tom blandly. "I

don't mind following Fatty's lead when it comes to the feed part, but in a matter requiring brains and leadership—no jolly fear!"

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I weally think you fellows had better let me lead. Yaas, wathah!"

"You dry up, Gussy!" said Tom kindly. "In any case, I don't quite fancy the game, Figgy. Count me out, anyway!"

"And me!" grinned Lowther, following his chum's lead at once. "When I want to commit suicide by gorging I'll follow Fatty's lead, but not until then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say, Lowther, you cad——" began Fatty warmly; but Figgins interrupted him.

"You leave Fatty alone!" he snorted angrily. "What about you, Blake? Are you as funky as these Shell-fish?"

"Yes, old chap—only more so!" chuckled Blake.

"Well, you—your rotten funks!" hooted Figgins.

"I thought you'd come on a friendly visit," said Tom pleasantly. "If you want thick ears, call us funks again and——"

"So you are! Funks!" shouted Figgins wrathfully. "Rotten funks! My hat! A chance like this, and you funk it! What—Ow!"

A cushion took Figgins in the chest, and he sat down violently on the floor.

It was enough. It usually took much less than that to start trouble between the juniors of the rival Houses at St. Jim's.

Blake had thrown the cushion, and Figgins scrambled up and went for Blake with a rush and a yell.

"Hallo! They've started!" said Lowther. "Out with the cheeky worms!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They've come to the right place if they're looking for trouble!" snapped Tom Merry. "Funks, eh? Out with them on their necks!"

"What-ho!"

It was easier said than done, for even Fatty Wynn put up a tremendous resistance. But the odds told, and one by one, struggling furiously, Figgins & Co. and Redfern were dragged to the door and flung out into the passage on top of one another.

"Hallo!" said Glyn, looking out of his study doorway. "What's the trouble? My hat! New House rotters! Lend a hand here, you chaps!"

But the hands of Glyn & Co. were not needed. Realising—rather late—that they were asking for trouble indeed, Figgins & Co. scrambled up and fairly flew, vanishing down the stairs at a great speed. A derisive roar of laughter followed them.

Arrived back at the New House, Figgins & Co. looked at each other ruefully.

"Well, that settles it!" said Figgins. "After all, I'm rather glad we aren't having those rotters to help us! We'll do it on our own, you men, and we'll just show 'em what the New House can do. And we'll collar the Gram-marians' caps as scalps and bring them back as proof."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yes, rather! Good for you, Figgy!"

At the same moment Tom Merry was saying something like that himself—only a little more—to his chums in Study No. 10.

"Let 'em do it on their own!" he grinned, mopping his nose, which had come into violent contact with Redfern's fist. "We'll keep out of it. There's something jolly fishy about it, in my view. Gay's too clever a fellow not to have collared Fatty and to have let him overhear his plans like that. It was all a bit too easy for my liking. That bit Reddy overheard was just another bit of spoof! It's a trap!"

"Well, now you mention it, I think so, too!" agreed Blake slowly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"In any case, I don't mean to follow dear old Fatty's lead, though I wouldn't mind Figgy being in charge," grinned Tom. "But, as I say—it's fishy! At the same time, there's no reason why we should keep out of it altogether."

"Oh!"

"I vote we go up river after them in force. If it is all spoof, then it's certain Gay's got a plan and means to trap them on the island somehow."

"That's pretty certain, Tommy!"

"And if it isn't spoof, and there really is a feed, then there's no reason why we shouldn't chip in and help Figgy then—whether he wants us to or not. And as we'll go in force we'll have some of that giddy feed."

"Phew! Good egg!"

"But we'll make sure it isn't spoof first," said Tom. "We'll keep it dark and sneak up river after them. And if it proves to be a trap and they fall into it—as they're

bound to—then we'll chip in. It'll be a score over Gay and his lot, and it'll be a score over the New House duffers, too, if we save their giddy bacon. We'll be able to crow about it for terms!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat! That's the wheeze!"

"Good! Then that's settled," said Tom. "Now we'll finish tea."

And while Tom Merry & Co. finished tea they discussed plans for the morrow. Tom Merry meant to kill two birds with one stone—if he could!

CHAPTER 8.

Gordon Gay & Co.'s Terms!

READY, you fellows?"

"Ready, ay, ready!"

"Good! Then come on! We'll take it turns to row!" said Fatty Wynn, "or, at least, you fellows can! As captain and leader of the expedition, I've got to think our plan of action out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the thump are you cackling about?" snorted Fatty Wynn. "As Figgy says, we've got a stiff job on, and we'll have to employ strategy, I expect! You fellows leave that to me."

"We'll leave the gassing to you, you fat porpoise!" snorted Figgins. "Put your backs into it, chaps! You all right in that other dashed boat?"

Redfern, who was in charge of the second boat, chuckled.

"Right as rain."

"Then off we go!"

The two boats, with ten New House fellows in each, moved off upstream in the golden October sunshine. It was really an ideal afternoon. The sunshine glimmered on the waters of the Rhyl, and though it was none too warm, it was ideal for rowing.

Figgins was not in a cheerful frame of mind, and he showed it. He would have felt much happier had he been in charge of the expedition. He would also have felt much more comfortable had Tom Merry and some of his stalwart men been with them.

But they were not, and Figgins & Co. had to make the best of things by getting together a score from the New House—many of them, unfortunately, none too useful in a scrap. The New House was much the smaller of the two Houses at St. Jim's, and it was not easy to get twenty good men and true together out of it.

Moreover, Fatty Wynn had insisted upon his right to lead the expedition despite the advice and pleadings of Figgy and Kerr. Fatty was ambitious, and he meant to make a bid for fame by leading his men to victory against the foe. And Figgins had been obliged to give in and let him take the lead.

The boats, roomy as they were, had not been built to carry ten fellows, and they were rather cramped. But they made good speed for all that. A bend in the river brought the island into sight at last, and Fatty Wynn called a halt.

"Into the bank, chaps!" he said. "Figgy, you and I'll scout round a bit."

"Right-ho!" grunted Figgins obediently.

Actually, it had been Figgins's idea to do that, and he felt that Fatty was getting the credit for his strategy. The boats were pulled in, and, jumping out, Fatty and Figgy hastened away, scouting through the trees until they were opposite the island.

"Two-forty-five!" said Figgins, glancing at his watch. "We're none too soon, Fatty. If I'd let you hang about in the tuckshop much longer, we should have missed seeing 'em go over perhaps."

"Plenty of time!" sniffed Fatty. "Gay said three o'clock!"

The two New House Scouts settled down in the undergrowth at the water's edge to watch.

It seemed a long wait, but just as Figgins was beginning to wonder whether the whole thing was spoof after all, cheery voices and laughter came ringing across the water, and a boat rounded the corner of the island almost opposite where the two Saints were hidden. It came from upstream, and they easily recognised the six fellows in it.

They were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, Carboy, Mont Blanc, the French junior, and the two Wootton brothers.

"But I thought you said twenty!" snorted Figgins, though he was delighted to see only six. "Hold on! I'll scout higher up, and see if I can see another boat coming."

He hurried away, returning some moments later.

"Not another boat on the river," he said, his eyes gleaming. "Oh, good! You must have been mistaken, Fatty."

"But—but I'm certain Gay said twenty!"

"Never mind—all the better! We'll handle that lot easily!" grinned Figgy. "Let's get back. No need even for caution now! We've got 'em, and they're bound to have the grub in the boat. Oh, good!"

They hastened back to the boat without troubling to watch the Grammarians again. Soon the two boats were afloat and making towards the island.

"No need to go round to where they've landed!" grinned Figgins, trying to see if he could see any signs of their quarry on the island yet. "All the better if we take 'em by surprise! Excuse me tendering advice, skipper!"

There was a chuckle, and Fatty Wynn blushed. With the second boat following they crept towards the island, their oars scarcely making a splash on the rippling water. The keel of the leading boat bumped against the bank at last, and as it did so Figgins leaped out, and the rest followed him. Then Figgy tethered the boat to the nearest tree-trunk.

Redfern did likewise to his boat when his men had disembarked.

"Carefully now!" warned Figgins, unconsciously taking the lead again. "Don't make a sound if you can help it. We'll make a bee-line straight for the ruins, as they're bound to be there by this. We'll scout round first, and then we'll go for 'em when the time comes."

"Oh, really, Figgy, you know, who's leading this expedition?"

"Oh, sorry, skipper!" said Figgy humbly. "I'll take a back seat, then!"

There was another chuckle. Fatty Wynn flushed and snorted.

"No need to cackle!" said the new skipper. "Now, you fellows, follow me! There's only six of them, after all, and there's no need for a lot of fuss. I'm jolly hungry, and the sooner we get on the job the better. Come on!"

"Hold on!" said Figgy hastily. "What about someone staying behind to look after the giddy boats?"

"What rot! They couldn't see us from the other side of the blessed island, could they?" snorted Fatty. "Only six of 'em, too! You're getting nervy, Figgy. I must say I'm surprised at you."

"You silly chump!"

"Dry up, and come on!" said Fatty scornfully. "I'm jolly hungry, and I know these fellows must be, too. No need for anybody to keep guard. Rot! Come on!"

"Oh, all right!" grinned Figgy.

In the ordinary way Figgins was the last fellow in the world to take chances. But he was exasperated now; moreover, he felt pretty certain that they had not been seen approaching the island.

He tramped after Fatty and the rest of the New House juniors.

The party plunged into the almost bare trees, and started off for the ruins, which were in the centre of the little island. They had not gone very far when something happened that made Figgins realise instantly, and with fearful conviction, that he had made a sad mistake in letting the well-meaning but thoughtless Fatty have his own way.

It was nothing less than a yell of almost hysterical laughter which came from the river behind them. And with a thrill of horror Figgy recognised the well-known voices of Gordon Gay & Co.

The party stopped and looked at each other in great alarm.

"Gay and his pals!" howled Figgins. "Oh, my hat! That means we're done—diddled and dished! What the dickens—"

Without stopping to finish Figgins turned and tore back the way he had come, and the rest of the New House fellows followed in a startled crowd.

They stopped at the water's edge with yells of dismay and wrath.

Their boats were not where they had left them. They were out almost in midstream, and they were tethered behind a large skiff in which were Gordon Gay & Co. And those cheery youths were yelling with laughter. Their laughter increased as the startled New House juniors appeared on the bank of the island.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "I—I thought as much! They've done us—done us brown!"

"They've got our dashed boats, Figgy!" stuttered Fatty Wynn.

"Of course they have!" snorted Figgins, ready to kick himself, as he began to understand. "And, what's more, I believe it's all spoofer from beginning to end. Oh, the awful rotters! I don't believe there is a birthday party at all!"

"Figgy, Oh, I say—"

"Oh, dry up, you footling owl!" hooted Figgins wrathfully. "This is what comes of following your silly lead, you fat duffer! Gay, you rotter, bring our dashed boats back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A derisive howl of laughter came over the water. Gay and Carboy began to slowly paddle their boat nearer, the St. Jim's boats being towed behind it.

"Cheerio, Figgy!" he called. "Where's Merry to-day? Hasn't he joined you, old chap?"

"Never mind Merry!" howled Figgins, almost beside himself with wrath and dismay. "Bring our dashed boats back, you rotters!"

"Not yet, old chap! Is Fatty Wynn there? Oh, there you are, Fatty! Well, did you get home safely, old top, without those whiskers letting you down? What price Herr Guggenberg, old chap?"

"Oh!" gasped Fatty. "You—you know all the time, then?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course we knew, you silly fat chump!" chortled Gordon Gay. "And we knew you were under the couch in our study, and that little conversation was all for your benefit, old chap!"

"Oh! Oh, you awful spoofer!" gasped Fatty.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Gordon Gay, tears of merriment streaming down his cheeks. "My hat! I seemed a bit too steep to think that even you'd be spoofered quite so easily as that. As for Figgy being taken in—well, it only shows what a lot of footling lunatics there are at St. Jim's."

"Then—then there ain't a birthday feed at all!" shrieked Fatty Wynn tearfully. "Oh, you awful fibbers!"

"Oh, yes, there is—or was!" corrected Gay cheerfully. "It was Monk's birthday yesterday, and we had the feed

yesterday—in our study. The rest was just for your benefit, old chap! You must have swallowed it beautifully. What price St. Jim's now?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what's this game mean?" yelled Figgins furiously. "What have you taken our boats for, you awful rotters? You can't maroon us here!"

"Can't we?" asked Gay sweetly. "It all depends on yourselves! I'm going to make a little bargain with you, dear old innocent little ducks. Either you sign a giddy declaration that the Grammar School is top dog, and that St. Jim's is a mouldy old show full of duds and dufers, and that we've licked you to a frazzle, and that you can't hold a candle to us in sports or japes, or we'll leave you stranded there. Well, what's the verdict? Take your giddy time about it. We're not in a hurry!"

"Oh, you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's juniors stared across the water in dumb consternation, and then they stared at Figgins. In that moment of doubt and dismay, Fatty Wynn was forgotten. As of old, the New House juniors looked to the long and lanky George Figgins.

Figgins spluttered with the terrific rage that gripped him. To think that they had fallen so easily, so simply, into the trap their rivals had laid for them.

"I—I won't!" he yelled. "You awful rotters! We jolly well won't sign your rotten declaration! Go and eat coke! I'm blowed if I will, anyway!"

But, defiantly as he spoke, Figgins knew that, unless a miracle happened, he would have to do so. The waters of the Rhyll were wide at that spot, and the current swift. Even in summer there were few seniors who would have attempted the swim. But in October it was less inviting still. No junior would have dared attempt it.

Gordon Gay took out his watch.

"I'll give you three minutes," he said sweetly. "I rather fancy you will sign the declaration. You're done, and you know it. You know from experience also that I'm a fellow of my word. Promise to sign the declaration, or we'll clear out and leave you to it. Hear us smile."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Grammarians did smile—loudly, and with a will. Their triumphant laughter rang out across the water, and echoed through the silent woods.

Figgins groaned in anguish of spirit.

CHAPTER 9.

School House to the Rescue!

"Go on—laugh, you beauties!" murmured Tom Merry. The laughter of the Grammarians reached the ears of two juniors who were crouching, well hidden in the undergrowth on the far bank of the river. The two were Tom Merry and Blake, and they gazed across the water with grins on their faces.

The School House juniors had waited until Figgy & Co.

had started out, and then they had cautiously followed—at a safe distance.

Round the bend in the river they had halted, and Tom Merry and Blake, leaving their boat, had gone on ahead to scout, just as Fatty Wynn and Figgins had done.

The sight of the Grammarians out on the rippling river had puzzled them somewhat until Figgins and his men had dashed out of the trees on the island.

Then they recognised the two boats in tow as St. Jim's craft, and understood the hilarity of the Grammarians.

Tom Merry had then grasped the situation—or he believed he had.

"Go on—laugh, you beauties!" he repeated. "I thought that was it, Blake. The rotters have rarroned Figgy and his men, and they mean to force a declaration out of them that the Grammar School is top dog."

"The—the cheeky rotters!" gasped Blake. "We can't allow that, Tommy!"

"Rather not!" said Tom grimly. "New House and School House stand together shoulder to shoulder: when it comes to being up against outsiders—especially the giddy Grammarians. Still, I think I see where we can score over both our giddy rivals here."

"Oh, good!"

"So I was right," mused Tom, with a chuckle. "That yarn about a birthday feed was all spoof, of course. It was just a trap, and those innocent New House kids fell into it nicely. We'll pull their giddy legs no end over this, Blake."

"Yes, rather! But what's to be done now, Tommy?"

"Hold tight for a bit," said Tom. "I can't see anything for Figgy to do but give in. Let's see what happens before we move."

They waited, their eyes fixed upon the crowd of raving New House fellows on the grassy bank of the island and the boatload of chortling Grammarians. They could hear Gay and Figgins arguing—the latter heatedly, and the former laughingly. Again and again Gay took his boat nearer to the bank, as if Figgins had agreed to his demands, but just as quickly he sculled back again out of reach of the fuming New House men.

"Figgy's fairly in a cleft stick!" chuckled Tom Merry. "He'll have to give way, though. Then we step in, Blake."

"Hadh't we better step in first and scotch Gay's game?" asked Blake, in some alarm. "If Gay does get that declaration it'll be frightful—"

"He won't keep it if he does get it!" chuckled Tom coolly. "We're twelve to six, remember, for it's pretty certain no more Grammarians are at hand. Hallo! That means Figgy's given in."

A loud, derisive cheer came over the water. It came from Gordon Gay's chums in the Grammarian boat. At the same moment Figgins was seen to write something in a notebook Gay pitched to him across the water. In turn each of the New House fellows wrote in it.

Then all but Figgins withdrew back from the river some distance, while Gay edged his boat in and held it steady whilst Figgins jumped aboard.

"What the dickens—" ejaculated Blake.

"Can't you see?" said Tom Merry. "They're bringing Figgins over here so that he can take the boats back. They dhren't let 'em have their boats until they get clear. By the time Figgy does get back again they'll be well away upstream towards the Grammar School."

"Phew! That's it!"

"Quick!" snapped Tom. "I see how to do it! Fetch our chaps here—smartly! Tell 'em to pull like billy-ho, so as to cut off the Grammarians' escape when their giddy boat touches the shore here."

"Good wheeze!"

Blake vanished, and Tom heard him crashing through the undergrowth. Tom waited as the Grammarian boat was rowed steadily across the river, with the Grammarians and Figgins aboard, and the two St. Jim's boats towed behind. It soon reached the bank, scarcely twenty yards from where Tom hid. As it did so there sounded the sudden click of rowlocks, and the splashing of oars. Then two other boats came swiftly round the bend.

"Oh, look out!" yelled Gordon Gay.

But his warning came too late—much too late. The boats fairly hissed over the water and easily cut off any hope of escape. In the foremost boat were Blake, Lowther, Manners, D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby; while Levison, Talbot, Clive, Dane, and Noble were in the second.

It was a fair catch for Tom Merry & Co., and Gordon Gay groaned.

"Give in, you cripples!" sang out Tom Merry cheerily, emerging suddenly from cover. "Give in, or our chaps will sling you into the river."

"Yaas, wathah! We're weady, deah boys!"

Blake's boat bumped against the Grammarian boat, edging in between the three.

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"Oh, all right!" grunted Gordon Gay. "Oh, my hat! What d'you want us to do, Merry, you rotter?"

"Hand me that notebook first, old chap!"

"Here, hand it to me!" gasped Figgins.

"Not much! You're dead in this act, Figgy!" said Tom. "Now, Gay, old chap—sharp's the word!"

Gordon Gay, standing up in the swaying boat and hedged in by the enemy, saw that it was useless to refuse. With a growl he took the notebook from his pocket and handed it to Tom Merry as the boat grounded.

"Now, jump ashore, all six of you!" ordered Tom. "Any hanky-panky and you'll get it hot!"

The boats had all touched the shore now, and soon the six Grammarians were surrounded by grinning St. Jim's fellows. Tom Merry ordered their hands to be tied, and this was done with their own handkerchiefs. Then they were fastened together by a length of cord.

Tom Merry chuckled as he opened the notebook and read the declaration which was signed by every one of the New House fellows. It read as follows:

"We, the undersigned, hereby declare that the Rylcombe Grammar School is top school, and that St. Jim's is nothing else but a home for imbeciles. We admit humbly and contritely that we have been dishd and done by the young gentlemen from the Grammar School, and that we can't hold a candle to them in sports or anything else. We also regret ever having had the cheek to pit our puny selves against them."

Then followed the signatures of George Figgins and his defeated men.

"Phew!" said Tom, with a faint grin, as he handed it round. "The cheek of 'em. But this will come in jolly useful, chaps!"

"Hand it over!" hooted Figgins. "Let me tear the rotten thing up, for goodness' sake!"

"Not much!" said Tom. "At least, unless you admit that you've made a hopeless muck of things and that School House has scored all along the line! We don't want to rub it in, but you can't deny that we've saved your bacon this afternoon."

Figgins did not deny it. Indeed, he was ready to admit anything to get hold of that declaration again.

"Well, I do admit it this time," he said quite humbly. "It's all that fat ass Fatty Wynn's fault, and we'll give him socks for this. Now, hand it over, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry handed it over, with a cheerful grin. Gordon Gay and his friends looked on with feelings too deep for words as Figgins tore the declaration into tiny scraps and scattered them viciously over the gleaming river.

"And that's that!" said Tom cheerfully. "Now we'll leave you to rescue your pals and to deal with these Grammarian beauties, Figgy. I think School House have scored this time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And, amidst great rejoicings, Tom Merry and his chums boarded their boats and pulled back downstream. It would be a long time before they allowed the New House to forget how they had saved them from the humiliating experience of having let the school down.

And Figgins knew it only too well. He glowered at the apprehensive Gordon Gay & Co., then boarded one of the two St. Jim's boats, and pulled across to the island. His men met him in a questioning swarm.

"Well?" gasped Fatty Wynn, as Figgins jumped ashore. "What's happened? Did Tom Merry make 'em give that rotten paper back?"

"Yes; he did! We shall never hear the last of this, though!" said Figgins, gritting his teeth. "Those School House wasters will crow for terms."

"But—but what are you going to do now, Figgy?" demanded Redfern glumly. "Those Grammar School boudners—"

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do!" said Figgins, in deadly accents. "I'm going to rag Fatty Wynn bald-headed for being such an awful ass as to let us in for this. Then we're going to give it to Gay and his pals. They're tied up across the river there. If you chaps will lend a hand—"

The chaps were only too willing to lend a hand—all, that is, with the single exception of Fatty Wynn. That hapless youth howled as he was grasped on all sides. but he howled in vain. When his disloyal men had finished with him Fatty was yelling for mercy, and he felt as if he had been through an earthquake.

So did Gordon Gay & Co. when the irate New House fellows crossed the river some minutes later and dealt with them—Fatty having recovered in time to lend a hand with that performance, which he did with a will. And when Figgins & Co. boarded their boat again and started off downstream towards St. Jim's, the hapless Grammarians looked

and felt complete wrecks. Not only had they been bumped, but they had been rolled in the river mud until they resembled Christy Minstrels!

Figgy & Co. felt a trifle better—but not much. And the things they said to Fatty Wynn made that youth wish more than ever that he had left the job of leading the Saints in the war against the Grammarians severely alone.

**CHAPTER 10.
All Fatty's Fault!**

YOU chaps are ready, then?" It was Saturday afternoon when Fatty Wynn asked that question.

Since the affair on the river, Fatty had been very quiet and subdued, and his activities as junior skipper had been little heard of. In fact, they would not have been noticed had his activities not been devoted chiefly to footer. But Fatty's enthusiasm in regard to footer had not been allowed to go unnoticed.

It had caused trouble at St. Jim's.

At practice games during the week Fatty had got through his duties very well. He was an excellent footballer himself, and he knew how to place men, and get the best out of them. The trouble had started on the Friday evening when the list for Saturday's match with Rookwood had been pinned to the notice-board.

and they had openly made it known that Fatty Wynn intended to square matters during his week of office.

But even so, the School House juniors had not expected Fatty to make such drastic changes as he had. When the list went up on the Friday evening it contained the names of only three School House men—Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy of the Fourth.

The list, naturally, caused a sensation, and there was trouble in plenty for Fatty to face. But he had proved unexpectedly stubborn and determined. And even the rivals of the School House couldn't help seeing that Fatty was



With yells of wrath and dismay Figgins & Co. dashed down to the water's edge. Their boats were out almost in mid-stream and they were tethered behind Gordon Gay & Co.'s boat. Those cheery youths yelled with laughter as the New House juniors appeared on the bank of the island. "Gay, you rotter!" howled Figgins wrathfully. "Bring our dashed boats back!" "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 8.)

The School House fellows had feared that Fatty would make drastic changes as regards the placing of the New House and School House men in the team. Generally the School House had had by far the biggest place on the team list. This was only to be expected, as the New House was a smaller House with less footer talent in it. Tom Merry had always, however, done his best to select as many good men from the New House as possible.

But his efforts had never met with the approval of the New House, naturally enough. Fatty Wynn was undoubtedly the best goal-keeper in the Lower School, not even excepting Herries, who was a very good man. And Figgins, Kerr, and Redfern, could almost always rely upon a place in the team for an important match.

Those were all, however. In Tom Merry's view they were about the only New House men up to first team standard, while in the School House there were a goodly number to choose from.

This had always been a sore point with Figgins & Co.,

really honest in his belief that the men he had chosen from the New House were as good, if not better, than the School House men they had replaced.

No amount of argument would move Fatty Wynn. He had stuck to his guns, and as he was junior captain his word was law.

The list had remained, and row, after an early dinner, the team was waiting at the gates for the motor-coach to take them on the long journey to Rookwood. Usually they went by train, but Fatty Wynn had insisted upon going by coach, and he had had his way, after obtaining Mr. Railton's permission.

It was Fatty Wynn who addressed Tom Merry as he came up with Blake and D'Arcy.

"Yes, we're ready," he answered grimly. "There's time yet to stand a chance of winning the match this afternoon, Fatty. For the last time, I'll ask you to be sensible and drop your new men and shove Talbot, Levison, and the

others in. Even if you replace only Talbot and Levison, we'll stand a chance against Rookwood. There's still time to change your mind."

"I'm not changing it!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "Like your cheek to keep suggesting it, Tom Merry. I've got a good team, and we're going to win."

"Right!" said Tom Merry quietly. "I hope we shall, Fatty. But—" He paused, and then changed the subject. "What was your idea in ordering a motor-coach, Fatty? We usually go by train."

"Ahem!" Fatty coloured. "It—it's such a nice afternoon, and—"

"And in a coach you can stop for a feed somewhere," said Figgins, with a chuckle. "In an express you can't."

"Oh! So that was the idea." "Well, it's a long train-journey to Rookwood!" said Fatty warmly. "I get awfully hungry this weather, and a chap wants plenty of grub before playing footer. A jolly good idea, I think. Besides, we've got away from school earlier, and that's something."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Here's the coach now!" grinned Redfern. "My hat! That driver can't drive for nuts—nearly hit the gate-post that time."

"Looks rather a queer bouncer!" grinned Blake. "Hope he's not been overdoing it at the Green Man on his way here."

Blake spoke jokingly, but before they were many miles from St. Jim's they had good reason to wonder if Blake's suggestion was true or not. For Joe Snape—that was the driver's name—was either a very bad driver, or else he had been overdoing things at the Green Man or some other hostelery.

At least a dozen times during the first few miles they narrowly escaped either running into a ditch, or colliding with other vehicles on the road.

"This is getting a bit thick!" said Tom Merry frowning. "We'll get smashed up before we get to Rookwood, at this rate. Hallo! What's he stopping here for?"

"It's all right!" said Fatty Wynn. "I told him to stop when we got to Slowham. There's a ripping cookshop here where they sell top-hole meat pies. I'm hungry! Any of you fellows want anything to eat? If you want to play well—"

"You—you burbling chump!" gasped Figgins. "What the dickens do you want grub for now? Why, it's only half an hour or so since dinner!"

"Well, that's a long time!" said Fatty warmly. "I'm peckish again. I knew I should be! That's the cookshop over there! I'm having some grub, anyway."

He dismounted from the coach amidst a chorus of chuckles as the driver limped down rather unsteadily from his seat and also left the coach. He followed Fatty into the cookshop, but a few seconds later he came out and vanished into a dingy-looking public house across the street.

"Blessed if I like this game!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "That chap will be squiffy before long at this rate. He's bad enough now, goodness knows. Any of you fellows lent him any money? He tried to touch me for a couple of bob when we got in at St. Jim's, but I turned him down."

"I should jolly well think so!" said Figgins. "No fear! I gave him none."

"Nor I!" It was an emphatic chorus. Just then Fatty Wynn emerged from the cookshop. His face was rather shiny, and he carried a couple of meat pies in a paper bag.

He grinned up cheerfully at the juniors in the coach, and climbed aboard.

"Hallo, where's the giddy driver?" he said. "Gone into that inn!" said Figgins grimly. "Look here, Fatty, you haven't given him any money, have you?"

"Only five bob," said Fatty, staring. "It's all right. He's promised to pay me back when we get back home." "Oh, you awful idiot!" snorted Tom Merry. "Couldn't you see he's nearly squiffy already. I can see trouble ahead at this rate!"

"Yaas, wathah! You weally should have had more sense, Fatty!"

"Rot! The chap's all right!" said Fatty, though he eyed the hostelry across the road rather uneasily. "Hallo, here he comes!"

Joe Snape emerged from the public house and crossed over to them. He was wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, and he walked very unsteadily indeed. The juniors eyed him very grimly as he made several unsuccessful attempts to board the coach. But he dropped into his seat at last.

Tom Merry set his lips. "Have you asked him to stop anywhere else, Fatty?" he asked.

"Y-yes!" said Fatty Wynn. "I shall be hungry again

by the time we get into Wykham. I've told him to stop there for a few minutes. You fellows will be glad of a snack, then, I can tell you. This keen air makes a chap no end peckish!"

"You fat ass!" said Tom. "That chap's bad enough already! Tell him not to stop!"

"Oh, really, Tom Merry—"

"I jolly well will, if you won't!" snapped Figgins. "I don't intend to end up in a hospital to-day, my lad! You were a born idiot to lend that squiffy rascal money! Driver!"

Joe Snape looked round just as he was letting the clutch in.

"Yessir?" "No more stops until we reach Rookwood, please! We're in a hurry! Understand!"

"But that fat young gent says as I was to stop—" "Never mind what that fat idiot says!" said Figgins grimly. "We'll have no more stops on this trip, I think!"

The driver scowled round at the juniors. He seemed to sense why Figgy had given him fresh orders.

"Look 'ere!" he said thickly. "Why shouldn't a bloke stop at Wykham if he wants to?"

"Because we want to get on, for one thing!" said Figgins coolly. "No more stops, if you don't mind!"

The driver scowled again, but he did not answer. The next moment the journey was resumed. It was soon seen that Joe Snape's driving was getting more and more erratic. Most of the juniors were looking rather scared, and they had good cause. But they managed to reach Wykham without an accident—though more owing to luck than Joe Snape's driving.

Fatty Wynn eyed his chums glumly as they entered the village street.

"Really, Figgy, this is a bit thick, you know!" he complained pathetically. "I'm nearly famished!"

"You've not long since finished two meat-pies!" snorted Figgins. "Not to mention what you scoffed in the shop and your dinner at St. Jim's."

"Well, I'm hungry again. You can tell the driver he can stop without letting him get off, can't you? I'll just slip into that shop at the end there, and—Hallo, he's stopping himself!"

The driver stopped the coach, gave the juniors a defiant glare, and dismounted. Then he vanished through the swing doors of the Wykham Arms in the straggling village street.

"No reason why I shouldn't go now, anyway!" said Fatty Wynn.

He got off the coach before his chums thought of stopping him. Scudding along to a pastrycook's shop he disappeared inside. He was soon back with a bag of tarts in his arms. But it was four or five minutes before Joe Snape returned.

"It's a jolly good job we did start out early!" said Redfern. "And I'm beginning to wish we hadn't started out in this giddy contraption at all. Now for it! He'll be all over the giddy road after this! Look at him!"

Joe Snape was obviously very much the worse for his visit to the Wykham Arms. He managed to get into his seat with the aid of two of the footballers, and they made another start. It was really a miracle that they didn't come to grief before they left the village, and more miraculous still that they had managed to keep to the road when another five miles had been covered. By that time the nerves of the passengers in the swaying, swerving motor-coach was almost in shreds.

It was very lucky indeed that the road was a good one and fairly straight. None the less they had too much of it at last. Tom Merry called to Joe Snape.

"Stop, driver! Stop a minute!"

Joe Snape stopped the coach. "What's up?" he demanded huskily, scowling blackly at Tom Merry. "There ain't no cause to stop 'ere, as I knows of!"

"But we do!" said Tom, frankly and coolly. "We think you've done quite enough driving. We don't want to finish with a run in an ambulance to the nearest hospital. I think you'd better let me take a turn at the wheel, my man."

"Ho, does you?" snorted Joe Snape thickly. "Thinks you're bloomin' clever, don't you? Well, drivin' this 'ere coach is my job, and you ain't touchin' this 'ere wheel, nor nobody else, neither!"

"I think so!" said Tom, rising in his seat. "I ask you chaps, is this merchant going to do any more driving on this trip?"

"No fear!" "Out of that driving-seat, driver! If you don't get out we'll shift you out!"

"Ho, will you?" roared Joe Snape, in sudden rage. "Well, we'll see about that! You sit down, young 'un, or I'll chuck you off this 'ere coach, gent or no gent! I'm in charge of this 'ere bus! 'Ere, what—"

As he reached forward to let in the clutch, Redfern, who happened to be sitting next to him, caught his arm and held it.

"No you don't, my friend!" he said, smiling coolly at the furious man. "You're not driving again on this trip, as you've already been told! Here you are, Tom—Ow!"

Redfern's luckless head jerked back as Joe Snape hit

shavings of you, you little himps! Lemme gerrup, and I'll soon show you!"

"No good!" said Redfern. "We'll have to cool him down! A ducking in that ditch should sober him a bit!"

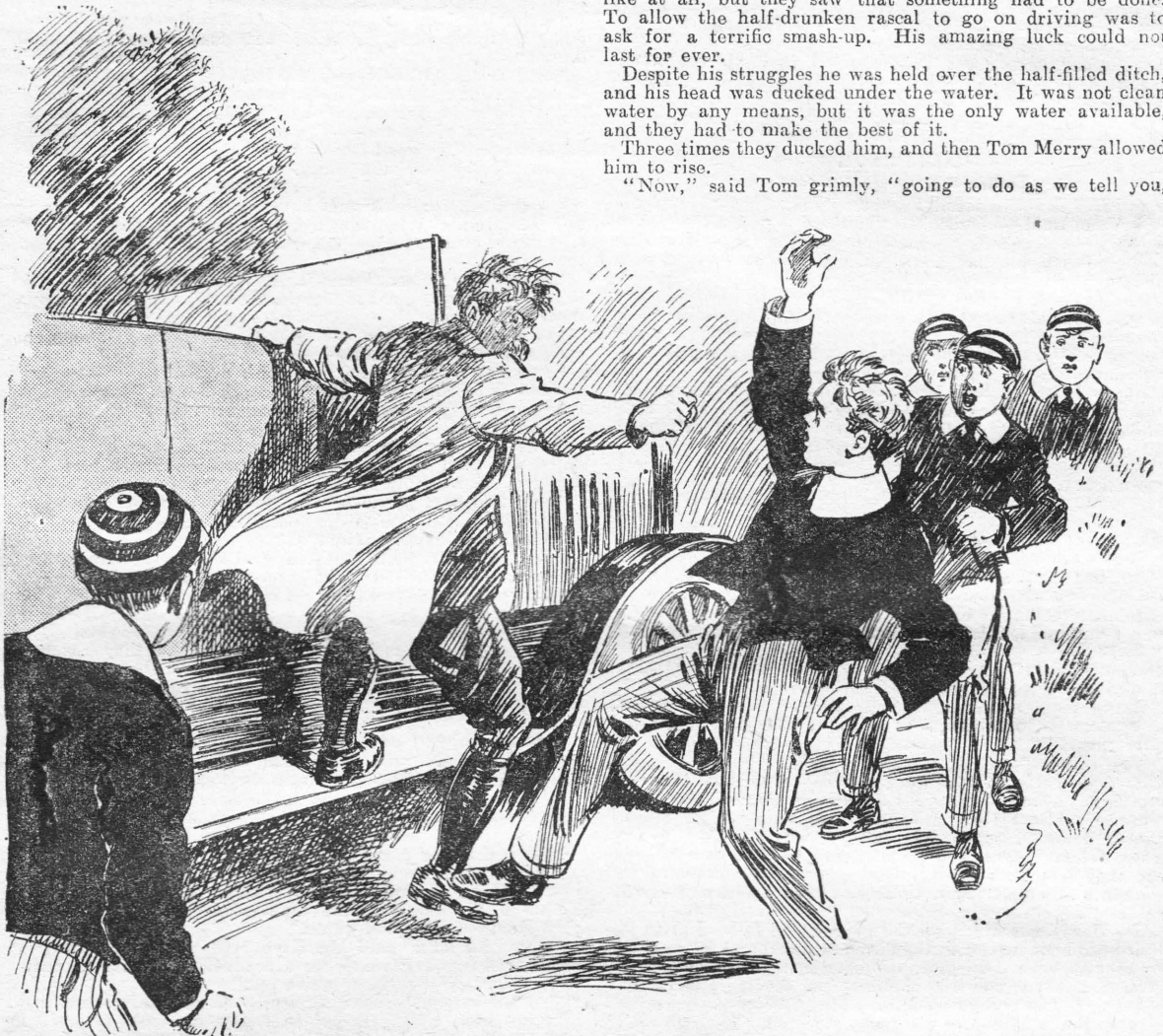
"Yaas, wathah! In with him, deah boys!"

Struggling and kicking, the tipsy driver was half-dragged, half-carried to the ditch. It was a job the juniors did not like at all, but they saw that something had to be done. To allow the half-drunken rascal to go on driving was to ask for a terrific smash-up. His amazing luck could not last for ever.

Despite his struggles he was held over the half-filled ditch, and his head was ducked under the water. It was not clean water by any means, but it was the only water available, and they had to make the best of it.

Three times they ducked him, and then Tom Merry allowed him to rise.

"Now," said Tom grimly, "going to do as we tell you,



"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry. The driver had mounted the coach with a swiftness that took the juniors aback. Tom Merry leaped for the step, but a heavy fist sent him back sprawling with a crash into the roadway. "Oh, bai Jove!" "Stop him!" (See Chapter 10.)

him a furious blow with his fist. It was a nasty jab, and it brought a yell of anger from the footballers.

"Here, none of that, you rotter!"

"Collar him—quick!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Duck his head in the ditch!" snapped Figgins, reaching over to help Arthur Augustus, who had grabbed at Joe's big fist. "That'll cool him down a bit!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh, bai Jove! You feahful wuffian!"

The next moment confusion reigned on board the motor-coach as the juniors strove to get to the aid of Redfern and D'Arcy, who were struggling to hold the raging driver. It was clear now that Joe Snape had lost his temper badly, and that there was going to be serious trouble with him.

Tom Merry jumped out of the coach and ran round to the step of the driving seat. He was quickly followed by Kerr and Owen. Between them they managed to get a grip on the struggling, roaring Joe, and they hauled him unceremoniously down into the roadway.

The rest of the fellows dropped pell-mell from the coach, and soon Joe Snape was rendered helpless, flat on his back in the road.

"Now," said Tom Merry, kneeling on Snape's chest. "Are you going to give more trouble, my man?"

"I'll smash you!" roared the driver. "I'll—I'll make

you rotter, or are we to go on ducking you until you do? If you don't—"

"Leggo!" yelled Joe furiously. "I'll smash you, you little hounds! I'll report you to your 'eadmaster, you see if I don't."

"And we'll report you to your firm for this," said Tom. "You'll get sacked, and you'll deserve it, drinking on duty like this."

"Oh!" gasped Joe, seeming to become suddenly subdued. "Ere, hold 'ard! Don't be 'ard on a bloke, young gents! I admits as I had a bit too much, being my birthday! Let a bloke alone, and I'll do what you wants."

"Get aboard the coach, then!" snapped Tom. "I'll drive and you can sit by me! But no more drink on this trip, mind!"

"Oh, all right"

The man wiped his face and hair with a dingy-looking handkerchief, and then, giving the juniors a glowering, spiteful glare that should have warned them, he mounted the coach.

He did so with a swiftness that rather took them aback, and before they had realised his intention there sounded the click of the driving clutch.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry, realising Joe Snape's intention then—too late!

Tom leaped instantly for the step, but a heavy fist sent

him back sprawling with a crash into the roadway. The next moment the motor-coach leaped forward with a jerk, and the startled juniors sprang away to right and left.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Stop him!"

They were much too late, however. Figgins made a flying leap for the back of the coach, but his foot slipped off the step, and he fell sprawling into the roadway with a thump that brought a yell of anguish from him.

The next moment the motor-coach was roaring away up the stretch of road ahead.

In stunned silence the flabbergasted footballers blinked after it.

The coach had gone! They were stranded!

CHAPTER 11.

Tom Merry & Co.'s Luck!

"AFTER it!" roared Figgins, scrambling up, covered in mud. "Quick, after it!"

But nobody attempted to go after it. The motor-coach was far away, and such a proceeding was hopeless.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "Oh, my only hat! Done in the eye, and no mistake! We're stranded—umpteen miles from anywhere."

"This is all Fatty's fault!" said Blake, glowering at that unfortunate youth. "Fatty, you ass—"

"Bump him!" yelled Lawrence furiously. "Bump the chunk of silly blubber! If he hadn't insisted upon a confounded motor-coach instead of a train this wouldn't have happened at all. Bump him!"

"That's it. Bump him hard!"

"Oh, I say, you— Yarooooop!"

Bump!

"Yar-oooooop!"

Fatty Wynn descended on the hard, muddy ground in the grasp of many furious hands.

"Oh, let Fatty alone!" said Tom Merry morosely. "No good blaming him now. This really comes of a rotten New House man being in charge. It would have been all the same, I suppose, if it had been any other New House worm!"

"Eh?"

"What's that?"

There was a roar at Tom's incautious remarks.

"Bump them now!" roared Figgins. "We'll teach the cheeky School House worms to rub it in at a time like this! Collar them!"

"Yes, rather!"

The School House trio were collared at once. Tempers were on edge, and Figgins & Co. were no more in the mood to mince matters than were the disgusted School House fellows. They struggled desperately, but the odds were too great. When Figgins and his men walked on a few seconds later they left Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy sitting in the road and wondering if there had been a series of earthquakes.

Tom Merry scrambled up the moment he felt equal to it. He did not bear malice in the circumstances, and he realised he ought to have been more diplomatic in his remarks.

"Here, hold on, you silly chumps!" he shouted after them. "Where are you going? You may have fifteen blessed miles to tramp that way before you reach a station. Let's go back the way we came—we do know how we stand in that direction."

"Go and eat coke!" was Figgins' wrathful answer. "We're going to try this dashed way! You silly School House worms can do what you jolly well like!"

"Oh, all right!" gasped Tom, glaring after the departing New House group. "Well, this is a nice mess, and no mistake! Come on! Sooner we make a start back the better. Oh, blow that silly ass Fatty! And what about our footer togs in the coach?"

"It was a pity we told that squiffy rascal we should report him," groaned Blake. "He knew it would mean the sack, and he didn't care what he did then! I wish we'd drowned him in that ditch now. Anyway, we're bound to get our things back sometime."

"No good crying over spilt milk!" said Tom, trying to speak cheerfully. "Let's put our best foot foremost. Luckily, it's quite early yet! Come on!"

They started back in the direction of Wykham.

A glance back showed that Figgins & Co. were still tramping on the other way, and soon a bend in the road hid them from view.

"Silly asses!" said Blake. "Serves them right if they have twenty giddy miles to tramp!"

For ten minutes Tom Merry & Co. strode on, and then suddenly a motor-horn sounded, and a large, open touring-car swept round from a side road into the road they were traversing.

As it did so Tom Merry gave a yell.

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"Glyn! It's Glyn! Oh, good!"

Tom, to his great astonishment, had recognised a youthful face in the car. It was Bernard Glyn of the Shell, right enough, and he was seated next to his father, who was driving.

The juniors could scarcely believe their eyes. With a sound of rapidly-applied brakes the car drew up, and Glyn leaped out and came rushing towards them, blank astonishment in his face.

"What the thump! Great pip! What are you fellows doing tramping along like this? Has your blessed bus broke down?"

"No; the giddy driver did a bolt with it," said Blake, with a rueful chuckle. "We're stranded, old top! If you'd like to be good Samaritans, and give three forlorn tramps a lift in your giddy car—"

"What-ho!" grinned Glyn. "But where are the others?"

Tom Merry told the story, and Glyn whistled as he listened.

"And Figgy and his men have gone on the other way," he ejaculated. "Why, they'll have six miles to tramp before they reach even a farm. Oh, the chumps! But what about the match?"

"It can't be helped," said Tom. "It's rough luck on the Rookwood chaps, but rougher luck on us. Still— Why, what's up, Glyn?"

For Glyn had given an almost involuntary whoop, a curious grin on his features.

"I've got an idea," he said, with a chuckle. "Why not buzz back to St. Jim's, get a team of School House chaps together, and go over to Rookwood, after all?"

"Oh!" gasped Tom. "But—but—"

"There's time even yet," grinned Glyn eagerly. "My pater will send the old bus along in time, never fear. If you are late reaching Rookwood, Jimmy Silver won't mind, especially if you phone or wire first to say you're coming later. I think it can be done, and it's quite early yet."

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"It's possible," said Blake, a grin slowly spreading over his face. "My hat! If your pater would only play up—"

"Come on!" snapped Glyn. "We're just going home. The pater ran me over to Melton with him on business. He'll do it like a shot."

Glyn hurriedly explained to Mr. Glyn as they reached the car. Glyn lived quite close to St. Jim's, though he was not a day boy, and his father knew the juniors well. Mr. Glyn grasped the situation at once, and he gave a grim chuckle.

"Yes, I think I can manage to get you there in time," he said. "You'll miss the express at Wayland, I fear; but there's another fairly fast train half an hour later, and you should get that easily, with time to get your men together at St. Jim's."

"But there's one condition, though," chuckled Glyn. "That is that you shove me in the giddy team."

"I'll do that," said Tom, with a laugh. "In fact, I was just thinking of you for one. Then, with Levison and Talbot and the rest of the usual men—well, we ought to give Rookwood a good game."

"Jump in, lads," said Mr. Glyn, with a laugh. "There's no time in the programme for a roadside discussion on football. That's right. Now we're off!"

The car leaped forward smoothly as the juniors tumbled into the seats at the back. In a few moments after that Mr. Glyn was bidding defiance to speed limits, and the powerful car fairly ate up the miles.

In an incredibly short time they had left Wykham far behind, and almost before they knew it they were speeding through Wayland, and then Rylcombe, and soon St. Jim's loomed ahead.

And Tom Merry's luck still held. All the usual members of the junior team were at hand, and very soon Tom had rounded them up; and then, Tom, Blake, and D'Arcy having obtained spare boots and footer togs, they were rushed to Wayland junction in Mr. Glyn's two cars, that good-natured gentleman proving a good Samaritan indeed by hurriedly summoning his chauffeur to bring the second car over to St. Jim's in readiness.

The train was steaming in when the School House team arrived at the station.

The match with Jimmy Silver & Co. was destined to be played, after all!

CHAPTER 12.

A Shock for Figgy & Co.

IN the gathering darkness of the October evening, eight weary juniors tramped into the lighted hallway of the New House at St. Jim's. They were Fatty Wynn and his footballers from the New House, and they were at their last gasp.

Fatty Wynn collapsed on to a bench near the door. They were footsore and muddy and dog-tired, and their faces wore expressions of the deepest dejection.

They were instantly surrounded by a crowd of questioning New House fellows.

"My hat! They've got back at last," chuckled Leslie Clampe. "Oh crumbs! What a gang of moulting owls!" "Chuck it!" groaned Figgins. "We—we're fed-up and whacked to the wide! We've had an awful time! We've tramped miles and miles and miles! And we've been in a train that must have been drawn by a thumping tortoise; and after that we had to tramp from Wayland. Our thumping cash had given out. Leave us alone, and don't rub it in, for goodness' sake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clampe and Chowle roared. They saw that Figgý & Co. were incapable of assault and battery, and they proceeded to rub it in.

"You—you cackling rotters!" gasped Figgins, far too tired to think even of kicking them, as he would otherwise have done. "Look here! Have those School House rotters come in yet—Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy?"

"Come in!" ejaculated Clarke. "Why, they came in hours and hours ago! They'll be on their way back from Rookwood by this time!"

"Wha-at?" choked Figgins, almost fainting at that piece of news. "They—they've gone to Rookwood, after all!"

"Yes—and I fancy that's them just returning," grinned Walkeley, as a faint roar of cheering came from the School House across the darkened quad. "And I fancy they've won, also, by the sound of things."

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "Oh, the rotters!" He turned to the rest of the weary footballers. "Come on, you fellows—quick! We'll jolly well look into this! We'll see if they'll play a trick like this!"

And Figgins, tired out as he was, fairly bolted out of the New House into the quadrangle. And after him went the New House team, only Fatty Wynn staying behind, and he tottered off upstairs to look for something to eat.

With a rush Figgins & Co. entered the lighted hallway of the School House. They found it crowded with juniors, most of them still cheering. In the midst of them were eleven fellows carrying handbags, with cheery grins on their flushed faces.

They were Tom Merry & Co., just returning from Rookwood in triumph.

"You've been to Rookwood?" spluttered Figgý.

"Yes, old chap—quite a decent time!" said Tom Merry.

"You—you've played Rookwood, after all?"

"Yes—and licked 'em, old dear! Two goals to one! Not bad, eh? Ain't you pleased, Figgý?"

"Oh, you—you cads!" spluttered Figgins. "And we've had an awful time! We had to tramp for miles and miles, and then we had to tramp home from Wayland at the end of a beastly train journey; and now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—"

Figgins rushed at Tom Merry. His chums were about to follow suit in their terrific wrath, when Kildare pushed forwards and grasped Figgý.

"None of that, Figgins!" he said, grinning a little. "Merry did quite right to take a team over, in the circumstances, and he acted with my approval. It's rough luck on you chaps, but—well, that young idiot Wynn is to blame for wanting to go by road, and for being such a gormandising young ass. I'm afraid he doesn't make a very efficient skipper. Still, I've reported that driver merchant, and you should get your togs back, at all events."

That's all. Now get off to your own House, kids! You look as if you need some soap and water."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. went—with the laughter of their triumphant rivals ringing in their ears. There was nothing else for them to do. Too dispirited even to discuss the matter, they trudged back dismally to the New House and up to their studies. They were badly in need of soap and water, as Kildare had said. But they needed something to eat still more.

Figgins and Kerr found Fatty Wynn in their study. He was looking a bit better than he had done, and his smudgy, muddy features were now smeared with jam and crumbs. He had, in fact, just finished emptying the cupboard of every scrap of food it had contained. He had even polished off the last scrap of bread.

Figgins and Kerr looked inside the empty cupboard, and then they looked at the fat and filled Fatty Wynn. It was the last straw—the final knock-out blow! With one accord they fell upon their skipper, and they smote him hip and thigh. They were still doing so, and Fatty's howls were raising the echoes, when Redfern came in, followed by the rest of the New House footballers.

"Here he is!" choked Redfern. "That's right, Figgý—give the fat villain socks! That's what we've come to do! Pile in, chaps! We'll give him leader! We'll make him wish he'd never dreamed of leading. We'll make mince-meat of the fat lard-barrel!"

"No, you won't!" gasped Figgins suddenly, jumping in front of the hapless junior skipper of St. Jim's. "He's had enough! Let the fat idiot alone now!"

Fatty Wynn had had enough, undoubtedly—more than enough, in fact, in Fatty's own opinion. And, seeing this, the would-be raggers tramped out again, and left him alone, making remarks regarding Fatty Wynn and his leadership that would have made Fatty's hair curl had he been in a condition to hear and heed.

But he wasn't!

Fatty Wynn's week of office as junior captain of St. Jim's ended as it had begun—disastrously. His bid for fame and his hopes of leading the New House to victory on footer field and against their enemies within St. Jim's and without had come to nought. Were the New House ever to have a candidate for the post of junior skipper again, it was agreed most emphatically in that quarter that that candidate should not be Fatty Wynn—a sentiment in which Fatty himself was in hearty and devout agreement!

THE END.

"TOMPKINS, THE VALIANT!"

Next week Clarence York Tompkins, the meek and mild junior of the Fourth, takes the reins as junior captain of St. Jim's! That he will prove a more worthy skipper than his predecessors no one is more convinced than Clarence York himself. How he actually fares, however, you will learn by reading next week's ripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

Order next Wednesday's **GEM** Well in Advance!



A SPEED MERCHANT IN THE DESERT! Jack Kennedy fully realizes the dangers that lurk in the wild recesses of the great Syrian desert. But he is not daunted by the thought, nor is he any the less determined to create a world's land speed record with his mighty Saxon car!

'SKID' KENNEDY—SPEED KING!



A Roaring Yarn of Motor Racing Adventure, "starring" "SKID" KENNEDY, the boy who cannot travel fast enough!

By
ALFRED EDGAR.

INTRODUCTION.

JACK KENNEDY gets nicknamed "Skid," because of the daring way in which he can handle a racing car. With his chum—

FRED BISHOP, he works in the showroom of the Saxon Motor Company, while his elder brother, Ben Kennedy, works in the racing department. All three are up against an iron-nerved speedman named—

PHILIP SLADE, the star driver of the Falcon Six firm, who are out to smash up the Saxon people. After many exciting speed events, Jack almost puts the Saxon firm on its feet again with a big win at Brooklands, although he is nearly brought to disaster by—

CARNABY, a confederate of Slade. The boys get an idea that the Falcon Six firm has some secret scheme for beating the Saxons. On investigating, Jack and Fred discover that they are building a marvellous car which they intend to take out to the Syrian desert and shatter the world's speed record. Realising it may make all the difference between success and failure for the Saxon firm, Ben Kennedy sees Mr. Lloyd, his manager, and offers to construct a record-smashing car that will travel at the colossal speed of 250 m.p.h. if only someone can be found to drive it.

"I'll drive it," says "Skid" Kennedy readily, "if Ben builds the car!"

(Now Read On.)

The Hold-Up!

THE following day every newspaper in the country came out with great headlines:

"SKID" KENNEDY TO DRIVE MONSTER MACHINE 250 M.P.H. ACROSS THE DESERT.

Duel for World's Speed Record!
Three-Engined Falcon v. Four-Engined Saxon."

Knowing that his secret was discovered, Slade had lost no time in telling the newspapers of his intentions, so that the Falcon firm would get as much advertisement out of it as possible.

He hadn't bargained for Mr. Lloyd also doing a bit of midnight telephoning to the Press; but Mr. Lloyd was as astute a business man as was to be found in the motoring world, and he told the papers what Saxon's meant to do.

The boys and Ben didn't lose any time, either. They sent wires and messages to every racing mechanic on the Saxon staff, and the men all turned up at six o'clock the

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following morning, ready for work, but wondering why they were wanted.

When they knew what was afoot they scrambled into their overalls, and said that they were prepared not to take them off again until the record-breaker was built.

The fact that Skid Kennedy was due to drive the Saxon created tremendous interest. Some people said that he wasn't old enough to be allowed to take the tremendous risk that must be involved, and others said that he couldn't possibly have the nerve to go through the terrific ordeal of trying to travel at over four miles a minute.

It certainly was going to need a lot of nerve, but Jack wasn't fudging it. He had a lot of faith in his brother, and he knew that Ben would not turn out a car that was impossible to handle.

Lots of folk thought that Jack was some kind of super-human freak. The only thing at all odd about him was that he had had the opportunities to get early into the motor-racing world.

But he knew that this speed duel in the Syrian desert was not going to be easy. It might need every ounce of strength that he had to hold the machine at speed, and he went into strict training from the day that Ben began building the car.

Now that the secret was out, Slade did not hide the particulars of his machine. He let the world know that the three engines being built into the Falcon gave off a total output of 2,000 h.p.

The Saxon's four engines gave out only 200 h.p. each, so that she was much less than half as powerful as the Falcon, but that didn't mean that she could not go so fast. The Falcon was brute strength, the Saxon was to be lightness and science. Which car would prove the better only time could show.

Ben would not let Jack work a lot on the machine. He made the boy concentrate his every energy on getting perfectly fit. But Fred was allowed to work throughout sunny days and far into dark nights; like Ben, he almost lived on the car.

Mr. Lloyd made arrangements with the officials who would time the record run. It was agreed that both the Falcon and the Saxon should be on the desert course together, and that the attempts should, if necessary, last over a whole week.

But the machines were not to travel out to Syria on the same steamer; and it was the Falcon which went away first. The papers were full of photographs of Philip Slade and his mechanics, and of the gigantic crate that contained the machine; but there were no photographs of the actual car. Slade said that he had special stream-lining for the body, and he wanted to keep that a secret. He was afraid that the Saxon people might steal his ideas, and adapt them to their own car!

Three days after the Falcon had gone the record-breaking Saxon was pushed out of her shed to where a great six-wheeled lorry waited to convey her to the docks, ready for embarkation.

She was extraordinarily low built. Her nose was flattened and rounded, with the radiator sunk aslant in the centre. Her wheels carried stream-lined casing in front and behind, and the machine was literally stream-lined in every nut.

Her cockpit was small, and it had been built so that when Jack sat behind the big steering-wheel he would be wedged so tightly that he could not be thrown about in the car. Narrow air-scoops behind the cockpit caught air to cool the twin rear engines, and the tail was very long, coming to an upright wedge.

The car was silver-coloured, picked out in red. She gleamed and flashed in the sunshine, nosing slowly forward, with her body crouching between the big wheels, so that she looked ready to leap into the speed-fight.

Anxiously the boys and Ben watched the machine shipped aboard the steamer, and during the voyage there were two mechanics watching it day and night.

They landed at Beirut, a strange town on the Syrian coast. The buildings were white-walled, and the streets were filled by colourful Arabs, monks, Turks, and Bedouins.

From Beirut they travelled by a rattling railway, with the car on a guarded truck, to Damascus, where telephone wires stretched through the air near slender minarets, and camels made way for motor-cars in the narrow, winding streets.

It was at Damascus that the boys discovered the tremendous task they had undertaken. There were two armoured cars waiting to guard the party against marauding Arabs in the two-hundred miles journey they had to make into the heart of the desert, and Mr. Lloyd had arranged for every member of the racing team to carry revolvers and ammunition.

There was a giant lorry to transport the Saxon car, and a whole string of other lorries bearing food and water and spares for the machine.

In the cool of a brilliant dawn the wheeled caravan left the white walls and flat roofs of Syria's capital behind them, and, sitting together with Ben, who was driving the huge lorry bearing the car, Jack and Fred hitched their revolvers a little more comfortably against the belts from which they hung.

"This thing ain't half a weight!" Fred grunted. "I always thought that revolvers were handy things, but this one weighs about a ton! Think we'll meet any of these Arabs, Ben?"

"If we do, they'll get what they don't bargain for," Ben told him. "Those armoured cars have got a couple of machine-guns apiece!"

"It's like being ready for war!" Jack grinned. "I expect that the Falcon people had the same sort of guard. I heard they were two days in front of us, so they'll be ready to go for the record about the same time as we get there."

"Then we'll get our bus off an' slip it across 'em!" said Fred cheerfully. "Phew! Warm now, ain't it?"

For a while mountains showed away on their left, then these were lost in the heat-haze, and the caravan rolled on over the baked surface of the desert. Sandy patches slowed the machines, but at times they came to long stretches of sun-scorched clay, over which they made good speed.

"This is what the course will be like," Ben told Jack. "Clay, hard and smooth, like we're on now, and absolutely flat. The officials have marked out the course. It's two miles wide and fifteen miles long, so Mr. Lloyd says."

"Shall we get there to-night?" Fred asked; but Ben shook his head.

It was the sandy stretches which would slow them, but they might do it if they had any luck.

When night closed down after the scorching heat of day they were forty miles from their destination.

The official in charge of the caravan consulted Mr. Lloyd and they agreed to stop for a meal, then push through the darkness.

"Ain't seen any o' these Arabs," Fred said, as they sat around a roaring spirit-stove, watching a kettle boil, and he glanced at their surroundings as he spoke.

They had halted at a spot where the country looked like a frozen sea. Mounds and ridges rose on either hand, so that

the vehicles had to be driven between the valleys. Everywhere the surface was firm and hard, and it showed as a queer reddish-brown in the rays of the lights from the machines.

But for the voices of men, it was oddly silent. No sound other than those of their own making came to their ears, and overhead strange stars began to show out in the purple sky.

"I bet you'd go balmy if you had to stop here all on your own," Fred said. "Creepy, ain't it, Jack?"

"Creepy's right!" Jack agreed. "It isn't so bad when the sun's out, except that it's so hot."

"I always thought deserts were all sand, with camels and palm-trees," Fred told him. "Sheikhs and—and—" He broke off, remained seated on the warm ground for the fraction of a second, and then leaped to his feet with a shout, dragging at his revolver.

Where there had been empty ridges all around them, there were now swiftly-moving figures. The boys saw the flying burnous of an Arab flitting through the darkness near them, scores more at his heels.

They were closing in from all directions, silent-footed and swift; strange-clad figures, dim-seen in the darkness. Dark faces and wild eyes showed momentarily here and there in the lights of the lorries. Startled men shouted, a revolver cracked out, and, as though that was a signal, pandemonium woke.

Jack saw a dozen Arabs charging towards himself and the rest. Others were placing the muzzles of their weapons against the tyres of the machines and pumping bullets into them; more were firing into the engine-covers to put the power-units out of action. They came like a sudden flood from the blackness, unexpected and startling.

Jack tugged his revolver from its holster. At his side, Ben had his revolver out, but ere he could press the trigger, a rifle-butt cracked to the side of his head, and he went down.

Jack heard guttural shouts. Fierce faces bored towards his own. He saw levelled weapons, and he heard Fred yell wildly, then a pair of arms that felt as strong as steel bands closed around Jack from behind.

He dropped his revolver as he struggled to free himself. Trained to the minute, every nerve and muscle keyed to perfection, he broke clear and crashed his fist to the bearded jaw of the man who held him.

Two more of the desert robbers leaped forward, others crowding at his heels. Something crashed to the side of Jack's head and his brain seemed to rock. Ere he could recover, he was lifted from the ground and he felt himself being rushed away.

He struggled wildly, and he heard the men who carried him panting as they raced up the slippery side of a mound. From the top he got a glimpse of the scene below, and he heard the thud of a drum booming through the tumult.

At the first sound of it the Arabs began to run, leaving the cavalcade as suddenly as they had come. Machines with punctured tyres showed staggering, startled men reeling about them. Lamps shone on the running figures of the Arabs, and then it was all lost to Jack as he was rushed down the other side of the mound.

He saw horses standing there, lean and rangy animals, bred in the desert and eager with speed. Jack was pitched to the ground and a hide-thong was spun about his wrists.

He was lifted and flung to the back of a horse, and his feet were lashed beneath it. Men mounted on either side of him, one leading the animal and the others steadying Jack on its back as it leaped forward at a word.

The thunder of flying hoofs struck on the night. Ahead of him Jack glimpsed a white figure mounted on a horse and wheeling with the rest. A moment later they were level, and beneath the brim of the man's sun-helmet Jack saw a face that wore a sneering grin.

In that moment he realised that the Arabs had made their raid for the sole purpose of making him captive, and they had disabled the machines so that pursuit would be impossible.

And they had been able to pick Skid Kennedy from the rest, because the man wearing the sun-helmet had pointed him out to them.

The man was Carnaby!

Carried Off!

LASHED to the galloping horse, Jack Kennedy stared under the white sun-helmet of the man who was wheeling his mount as the boy speedman and his captors passed. Jack saw the thin lips and sneering grin of Carnaby, and the man shouted something that was lost in the mad thud of flying hoofs all around, then he was left behind.

A mighty fist was tucked under Jack's shoulder, steadying

him on the smooth, bare back of the horse. He glanced at the man who held him, and saw that the fellow was a gigantic Nubian. His ebony-hued features were squat and brutal, and his coffee-coloured eyes glinted as he glared at the boy.

Jack's horse was being led by a wizened little man—some kind of half-breed. His face was shrunken and his nose was hooked, and his sunken eyes glittered evilly.

All around Arabs were flattened along the backs of their sleek horses, flogging their animals on. The shouts and cries about the motor vehicles which had formed the Saxon desert caravan died away, and Jack thought that he must be beyond all help when, suddenly, he heard the roar of a powerful engine.

He recognised it as that of one of the armoured cars. It was spluttering and banging lamely, and he looked back. He just made out its squat mass climbing atop one of the long ridges which surrounded the camp, and even as Jack sighted it he saw the fluttering lick of flame appear at the muzzle of one of the machine-guns.

He heard the shattering roar of the weapon, and at the very first sound of it the whole Arab cavalcade wheeled, streaking into the shelter of a gorge between two ridges and leaving the armoured car out of sight behind.

Jack heard the machine come on. For a space its engine sounded, and then, abruptly, it died away. He knew that the tyres of almost all the vehicles had been punctured, while the Arabs had blazed disabling shots through every engine-cover.

He heard distant shooting behind him as his mount galloped on, and he guessed that Ben and Fred and the rest were making some kind of pursuit. He noticed that the Arabs had split up, and that he was now moving in the centre of a little group formed by Carnaby and three burnoused men, in addition to the grim pair who had Jack in their charge.

For minutes they raced on, Jack swaying to the rhythmic stride of his mount. He discovered that they were climbing the steep side of a long ridge, and the horses slowed to a walk. Jack looked back.

Far behind there was a lurid glare in the sky. As they went higher he thought that he could make out rolling black smoke, with fire shining beneath it. Once he saw a great tongue of flame which leaped high, held for a moment, and then died.

"That's your caravan burning!"

Carnaby shot the words at him through grinning lips, as he pulled his horse a little nearer. He went on:

"We had a second party specially to set things alight after we'd collared you! With a bit of luck, the big Saxon will be scrap metal inside about ten minutes!"

"And, with a bit of luck, you'll be behind prison bars inside a week for this!" Jack gasped.

Carnaby laughed, his ugly teeth showing, and ere he could say more they had topped the ridge and the horses were slithering down the other side.

Ahead was a flat stretch of desert, half sand and half clay, from what Jack could see of it. Everywhere in front was a black, mysterious immensity, and into the heart of this his captors took him at a gallop, while the leaping flames raged wildly behind.

The Bull-Dog Breed.

FRED BISHOP saw Jack carried off. He tried to go to his help, but a gun-butt slugged to the back of his head, and he went down. By the time he got to his feet again every one of the Arabs had disappeared.

Ben was upright, reeling, with one hand pressed to the side of his head, and the other arm limp; his jacket was half torn from his shoulder, and the shirt beneath was stained with blood.

"Chase 'em! Get after 'em!" Ben gasped. "They've got Jack!"

Already the crews of the armoured cars were trying to get their great vehicles going, but only one would start. It went jerkily up a slope, with those who could pushing behind it, and men running on either side. Fred would have joined them, but Ben had collapsed, and he bent over him.

The big fellow had been shot in the shoulder, the bullet nipping the flesh but missing the bone. The pain from his hurt made him weak, but it was the crack on the head which really brought him down.

Everywhere men were sprawled on the ground or staggering. One or two lorries had their engines running in fits

and starts, and the few cars in the convoy were all derelict with punctured tyres.

Fred heard the armoured car get into action, only to stop almost immediately, and it was as the roar of the machine-gun died that he saw a score of Arabs come galloping out of the night, each one of them bearing a flaming torch.

They were on the caravan ere anyone could make a move to stop them. Two torches slashed into the big lorry where the record-breaking Saxon was housed, and Fred dodged the galloping hoofs of an Arab horse as he leaped for the vehicle.

He clawed one torch out, and sent it crashing into the face of a dark-visaged desert bandit, who reined his horse at the back of the lorry, and sent the muzzle of his gun ramming at Fred. The weapon exploded the fraction of a second after the torch went home, and the man reeled back, his horse plunging from the sparks which showered about it.

Fred slung the second torch out, then stamped on the sparks, and tiny flames appeared on the floor of the lorry.

The second party of raiders had gone almost as suddenly as they appeared, but they had fired two of the lorries and one of the cars.

One of the lorries was loaded with petrol. Fred knew what that would mean when the fuel fired. The cans would explode, showering everything for yards around with burning spirit. Others realised the danger, and a dozen men—some of them wounded and reeling as they ran—grouped about the vehicle, fighting to push it away from the others.

Flames licked madly about them as they pushed it fifty yards from the rest, stopping just as the first of the cans went off. Twenty seconds later and the lorry was at the bottom of a mighty pillar of fire which lit everything with a lurid light.

Fire extinguishers had settled the fire on the second lorry, but the car had burst its petrol tank and was a mass of flames.

Burnt here and there, his head spinning, Fred ran back to Ben, to find him with Mr. Lloyd. The grey-haired Saxon manager had lost a little of his colour, but he still had his nerve.

"They've got away with Jack!" he gasped. "It looks to me as though there's something behind this raid, because they cleared off the moment they'd got the boy. It's impossible to chase them. We don't know which way they went, and we'll get lost in the desert if we try it. The best thing to do is to push on the other forty miles to the coast; they've got a wireless set there, and they'll be able to get into touch with the authorities in Damascus. They'll send out a raiding party to deal with those Arabs, and—"

"And they'll find Jack with a bullet inside him or something!" Fred gasped.

"If they'd meant to shoot him, they could have done it here, on the spot," Mr. Lloyd said.

"Perhaps they're going to hold him to ransom!" Ben cut in.

"Yes, that might be it!" Mr. Lloyd exclaimed quickly. "Anyhow, we'll patch up those who are hurt, and then carry the news ahead as fast as we can!"

Fred wasn't satisfied. It seemed to him to be too much like leaving Jack to his fate. It was all very well to talk about getting into touch with the authorities, but there was no telling what would have happened to Skid Kennedy by the time they'd decided what to do.

Fred tried to argue about it, but Mr. Lloyd suddenly became too busy to listen, and the doctor with the convoy grabbed Ben and attended to his hurts. The whole encampment was still in confusion, and no one took any notice of Fred as he climbed the ridge over which the armoured car had gone.

He found a conked-out engine in the narrow valley beyond, and a single mechanic was trying to patch up the two bullet-holes in the induction pipe, which had made the engine run so badly.

The car was a small affair, with a crew of only three men and armed with two machine-guns, which worked from a turret in the centre.

"Going to chase 'em when you get the engine running again?" Fred asked the man eagerly.

The man shook his head.

"No; don't know where they've gone," he answered. "Can't do anything until daylight." He frowned down at the engine, then grunted: "Have to get a blow-pipe on this job. Might be able to patch it up enough to run on."

He rummaged in the big tool-box just inside one narrow door, then straightened and glanced at Fred.

"D'you mind hangin' on here for a couple o' minutes?" he asked. "I'll slip back and get some stuff I want off the other car. If any of those Arabs show up—mind you,

I think they're miles away by now—nip inside the bus; you'll be all right."

Fred nodded, and the man trotted away into the darkness. By the light of the inspection-lamp plugged into the switch-board, Fred looked down at the holes in the piping at the side of the engine. For half a minute he stared at them, then he slowly drew something from his pocket.

It was a roll of broad, sticky, insulation tape, which almost every mechanic carries with him. Fred held it in his hand as he stared down at the holes, then suddenly he stripped a length of tape off the roll and bound it about the pipe over one of the holes.

The tape plugged the opening effectively, and he covered the other one, then wound more and more tape, until both holes were completely airtight.

knows how many rounds o' ammunition. An' that's a box o' bombs in the corner over there! Well, I ain't ever used a machine-gun, but if I come up with any o' those Arabs I bet I'll jolly soon learn. Here goes!"

And he sent the armoured car rolling forward.

The One-Man Army!

DOWN the valley Fred drove the armoured car, and the lights picked out the hoofprints easily enough. They led him into a gorge, along which the car hummed swiftly, a cloud of dust swirling behind it.

At the end, the headlights showed him a broad, open space, hemmed in the distance by ridges, and here



Fred leaped into the lorry that contained the Saxon car, clawed one of the burning torches out, and sent it crashing into the face of the oncoming Arab. The man reeled back with a cry, his horse plunging from the sparks which showered over him. (See page 26.)

He was working quickly now, almost desperately. The instant that the job was done he slid home the engine cover, locked it, then jumped for the inside of the armoured car. He crashed the lid of the tool-box shut as he stepped in and peered about him.

There was the driver's seat, with quite ordinary driving controls. Behind it was the space in which the gunners stood when they were using their weapons—black and ugly things held in metal clamps behind their loopholes. Fred could see belts of ammunition running from long, grey boxes up to the guns, and the air inside the car was thick with the acrid reek of exploded cordite.

He slipped behind the steering-wheel, hesitated a moment longer, then slammed the armour-plated door.

He had brought the inspection-lamp inside with him, and it showed the engine starter button. He set the hand controls and thumped his fist on the switch. Instantly the roar of the mighty engine sounded, and Fred's eyes lit up.

He switched out the inspection lamp and turned on a light which illuminated the dashboard; then he switched on the two enormously-powerful headlamps. They sent a great swath of light streaking ahead, shining down the little valley and showing its dusty surface all churned up by the hoofmarks of escaping Arab horses.

Fred glanced into the car and muttered:

"Two blinkin' machine-guns, three rifles, an' goodness

the footprints spread out as though the Arabs had split up and travelled on in different directions, to baffle pursuit. Fred slowed the car.

"They might, any of them, have taken Jack," he told himself. "Best thing I can do is to keep straight on, an' then follow to some tracks that are pretty clear."

The machine rolled on, and the tracks Fred was following took him up the side of a steep ridge, which the car could barely climb. It skidded sideways down the slope on the other side, but he managed to keep it upright.

He had picked out a small set of tracks where the prints were merged with one another. From this he guessed that there must be seven or eight horses in the bunch, and he stuck to them until the broken land fell away, and in front of him stretched country that was flat, except for great waves in the ground.

And here, where the ground was clay, baked hard as iron, he lost all sign of any footprints.

Fred drove straight on.

Inside half an hour his headlamps showed him absolutely nothing but hard clay and hollows filled with wind-blown sand. Now and again he stopped the car and swivelled the lamps, but everywhere it was the same.

"One way's as good as another now," he told himself. "I reckon I must have been a perishin' idiot to come

off on my own, like this. Still, I might see something when daylight comes. Wonder if there's any water on this outfit? I could do with a drink!"

He stopped the machine and climbed out of his seat. He found a broad locker, which was full of biscuits, bully beef tins, sugar, and tea—emergency rations of the crew of the car. He found, also, a small metal tank, which was full of water, that could be drawn off by a tap.

Fred had a drink, then stood thinking as he looked around him.

"This blessed desert goes straight on for about five hundred miles. What I'd better do is to go slowly, and when daylight comes, sort of cast round in a big circle. I'll have a look at these machine-guns before I go any farther."

He scared himself stiff when he pressed the fat thumb-triggers of one of them. The car became filled with the shattering roar of the weapon, which juddered and quivered under his hands.

Fred had another try at it, and for a minute or so he amused himself plugging bullets into a ridge of sand. After that he examined the rifles. He understood how they worked, and he loaded them all, then took another drink and went forward again.

It seemed an age before the eastern sky broke into clear, grey dawn. The sun rose in a giant red ball over the horizon, and when the light was strong enough Fred clambered to the top of the turret and stared around him.

"What I'll do now is to make a whacking great left-hand circle," he thought. "I'll travel the dickens of a long way inside an hour, and if I see those tracks again all I've got to do is to follow 'em. Then, when I find those Arabs, I let off one o' the machine-guns, and the blighters'll run for their lives. If they try to take Jack with 'em, I bet this old bus can go faster than any blessed Arab horse!"

An hour passed. The sun grew hotter. The heat from the engine swept back into the car, so that Fred had to open all the loopholes and ventilating slots to get air.

At the end of another hour the sun was beating down on the car with a fury that made Fred's head reel. The glare from the ground ahead hurt his eyes, and by the time a third hour had elapsed he kept going only because he was afraid of what might be happening to Jack.

"I bet anything that Slade's behind this. That ugly rotter ought to be shot—an' I'll do it, too, if I come across him. I've got enough weapons an' ammunition aboard for a whole blinkin' army. Wonder what's happenin' to Jack? These Arabs are a tough lot. I've heard—"

His thoughts broke off. Through the shimmering haze he thought he saw a shifting dust-cloud in front of him. He slowed and stared at it before he could be certain; then he stamped on the accelerator pedal, and the great armoured car leaped forward with a roar.

The cloud was cutting aslant across Fred's path, and inside a minute he made out that a car was at the head of it. He could see the machine clearly now, and it needed but a second's attention to tell him that it was a fast-moving Falcon.

A Falcon car, in the desert! It could belong only to Philip Slade's camp, and as he drew nearer Fred saw that there was only one occupant. The two cars drew nearer still; then, suddenly, the other one swerved off its course, and Fred had an instant's clear glimpse of the man at the wheel—Slade himself!

"Slade—and he's bunking! He can't know it's me on this thing—he's scared of something!" Fred gasped. "He knows these cars come from Damascus, an' he must think this one's looking for Jack! Hi, stop, you rotter! Stop!"

He sent the heavy machine round in a mad skid. Above its roar he could hear the thunder of the powerful Falcon, which had twice the speed of the heavy armoured car. Fred saw Slade getting away from him, accelerating to the full might of his engine.

"I'll never catch him, but I can stop the swab!"

Fred crashed on the brakes, then twisted in his seat and leaped for the nearest machine-gun.

Fingers wrapped about the grips, thumbs pressed on the flat, double trigger, he brought the fat muzzle down until the sights were aligned on the car, now but a shifting blur in the dust-haze.

R-r-r-rah! R-r-r-rah!

(It is a desperate move on Fred's part, but he's determined to bring the rascally Slade to book! If you want a feast of thrills, chums, be sure you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful motor-racing serial.)

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