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EVERY
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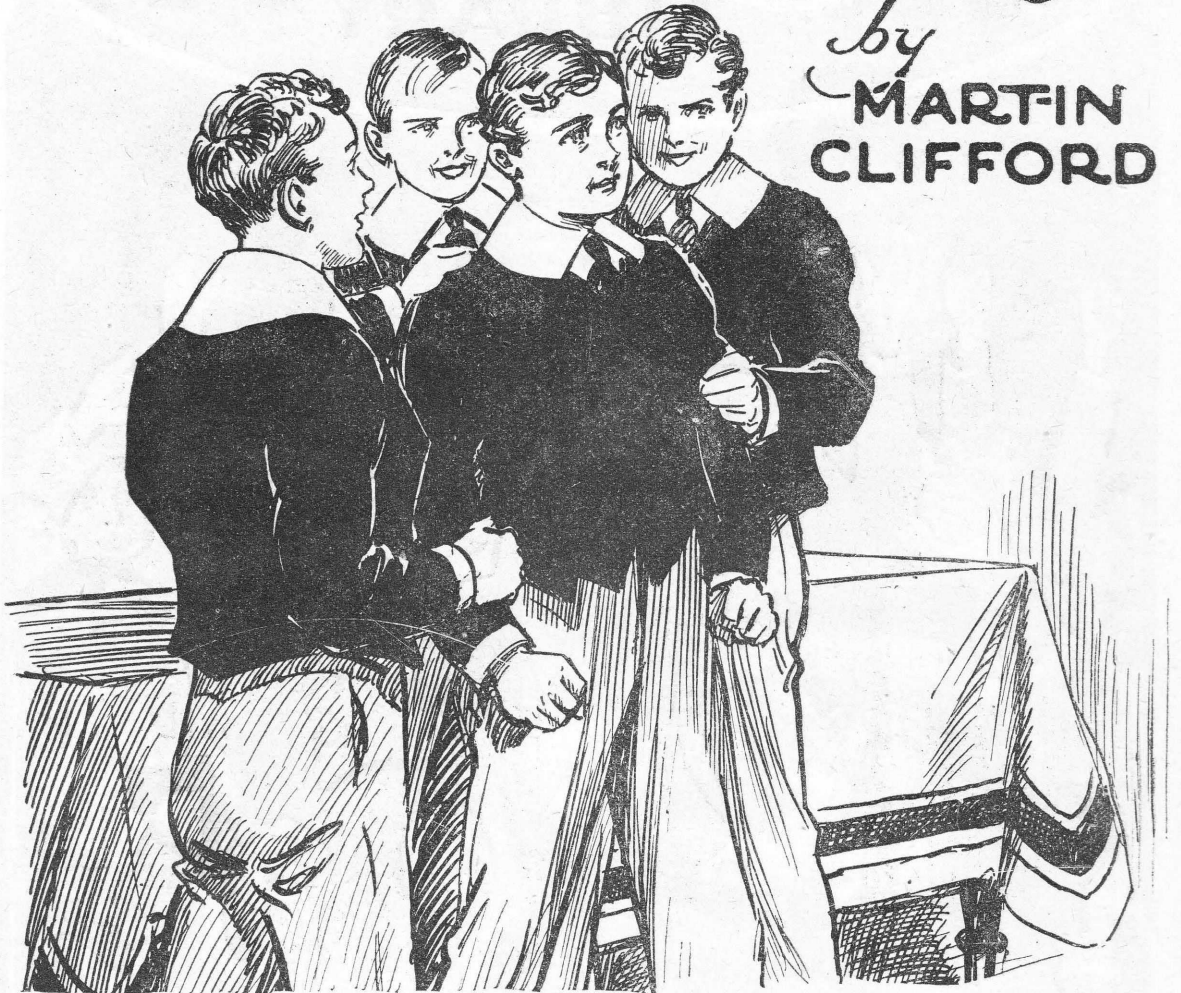
CHAired and CHEERED!

(A rousing incident from this week's fine school tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.)

A LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S—

TOM MERRY'S

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD



Everyone expected the six temporary skippers of the Lower School at St. Jim's to make a fearful hash of the job—and they've lived up to expectations. That amazing experiment, however, has made it clear that at all costs Tom Merry must be made to withdraw his resignation and take up his old position again.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1. The Deputation!

LEAVE it to me!"

"Rats! I'm the man——"

"Wubbish! Pway leave the talkin' to me, deah boys. As a fellow of tact and judgment——"

"You ring off, Gussy! Now, look here——"

"I'll do the talking," said Herries. "A chap with force of character and personality is needed for a job like this."

"Oh, my hat! You silly chump——"

"If you call me a silly chump, Levison——"

"Oh, ring off for goodness' sake!" interrupted Blake. "We don't want the blessed deputation to start with a free fight, you asses! Now, if you fellows will leave the talking to me——"

"Bosh!"

"Wathah not! As a fellow——"

"Cheese it, Gussy! Look here——"

"Oh, stop wrangling or we'll never reach Railton, let

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alone get the chance to talk to him," said Levison, with a chuckle. "I vote old Talbot does the talking. We're all boiling with indignation, but he's only simmering. Leave it to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a chorus of laughs in Masters corridor at St. Jim's. In the ordinary way fellows rarely dared to speak above a whisper in that awe-inspiring spot. But this was an extraordinary occasion, and the seriousness of it was not lost upon the members of the deputation. Yet laughter is akin to tears, according to the poets, and in their present excited state the juniors found it easy to laugh.

"Well, that's not a bad idea, Levison," said Blake, after a pause. "Talbot is a solemn owl, and he's cool enough, at all events. I vote Talbot does the talking."

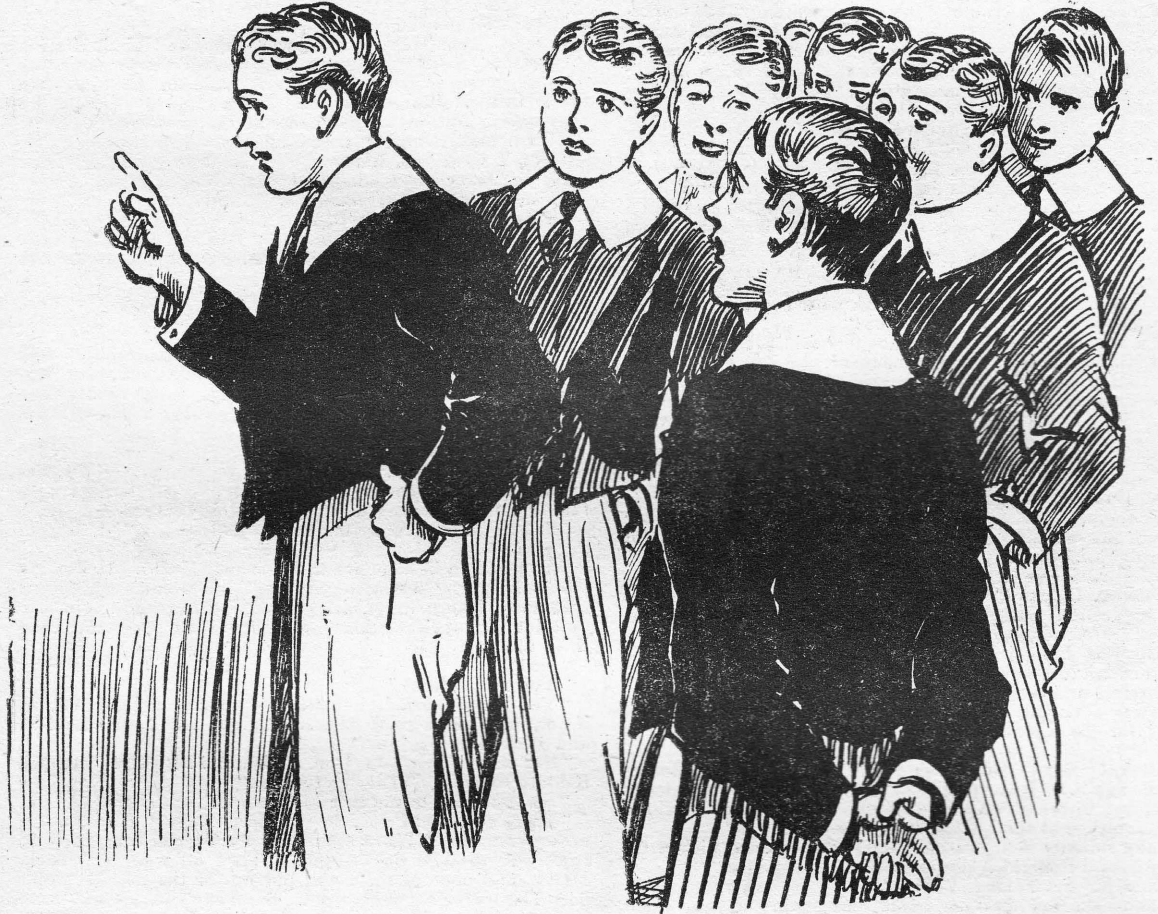
"Hear, hear!"

Nearly all eyes turned upon Reginald Talbot's grave face. Talbot was a serious-minded fellow, with plenty of commonsense, and the suggestion met with general approval.

"Well, I'll talk to Railton if you like," he said, with a

IN WHICH THE JUNIOR CAPTAINCY CONTEST COMES TO AN END!

TRIUMPH!



quiet smile. "No good all of us butting in or we'll land nowhere."

"Unless it's the giddy punishment-room!" chuckled Blake.

"Well, that's settled! Come on!"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "I am afraid Talbot may make a muck of it. Pway allow me to—"

"Oh, gag that ass, someone—"

"Weally, Blake, I wefuse to be gagged! Now, listen—
Ow! Bai Jove! What— Yoooop!"

Bump!

Grasped by several pairs of hands, the obstinate Arthur Augustus was deposited on the linoleum very forcibly. The deputation, with Talbot at its head, proceeded towards Mr. Railton's study door, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sitting on the floor, gasping and seething with indignation.

"Come in!"

In answer to Talbot's knock, Mr. Railton's voice bade them enter. The juniors crowded into the study—the crimson-faced Arthur Augustus just managing to squeeze in before the door was closed.

There were a dozen juniors in the study now, and Mr. Railton eyed them grimly—much too grimly for the liking of the deputation. There were coloured patches on the Housemaster's hair, which stood up in places in queer, sticky tufts. His face looked as if it had been newly scrubbed. As they noted these signs of havoc, the deputation shifted their feet nervously.

"Well?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"We—we've come, sir"—began Blake desperately, quite forgetting the decision to leave the talking to Talbot—"to—to beg you to—"

"To reconsider the punishment—"

"It's rather thick, sir—"

"It was an accident, sir—"

"The booby-trap was meant for someone else, sir—"

"That's it, sir. And if we're all detained on Saturday afternoon—"

"With the Redclyffe match on—"

"Yaas, wathah! But pway allow me to explain to Mr. Wailton, deah—"

"Silence!" thundered the Housemaster.

Half a dozen of the deputation tried to help Blake out, but the babel of voices died away at the Housemaster's angry interruption. Mr. Railton's grim glance roved over the deputation, and rested on Talbot's face.

"Talbot, kindly explain this extraordinary visit!" he snapped. "If any other boy dares to interrupt he will be severely punished!"

"Bai Jove!"

Talbot proceeded to explain—without interruption, this time.

"It's like this, sir," said Talbot quietly. "We're all very sorry indeed for—that accident. The booby-trap was meant for Cutts of the Fifth. It was very unfortunate

that you entered the box-room just then, and got all that stuff over you. We're frightfully sorry, sir, and would have done anything to avoid it happening. But—"

"That matter is now ended!" said Mr. Railton. "You have been punished, and I wish to hear nothing further concerning it. Had the headmaster knowledge of what has happened your punishment would have been still more severe."

"We—we know that, sir. But—but we want to know if you'll be kind enough to lick—I mean, to cane us again and let us off the detention on Saturday," stammered Talbot. "It's the Redelyffe match on Saturday—a very important fixture. If only you'd cane us again instead of detaining us—"

Mr. Railton's lips set and he raised his hand.

"That is enough, Talbot!" he said sternly. "It is impossible for me to reconsider the punishment. I am well aware that the booby-trap was not intended for me. None the less such scandalous horseplay cannot be allowed to go unpunished. That punishment must stand!"

"But, sir—"

"Silence, Talbot! For some time now," said Mr. Railton, glancing over the juniors, "I have noted a serious slackening of discipline, and also a growing amount of slackness in games and conduct. I am determined to stamp it out."

"That can easily be explained, sir," said Blake boldly. "It's only come about since Tom Merry was forced to resign the junior captaincy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Housemaster's face went pink with wrath.

"Silence! How dare you, Blake!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but it's true enough," said Blake doggedly. Mr. Railton was silent for a moment.

"You are insolent, Blake," he said at last. "None the less there is some truth in your statement. Owing to Merry's resignation I was obliged to try an unusual experiment. I gave six boys, who had applied for the position, an opportunity of proving their worth. I gave them each the position of temporary captain for one week in turn."

The Housemaster paused, and then went on grimly:

"The experiment was a complete failure. Each of the six juniors proved himself totally unfitted for any position of authority whatever."

"Weally, sir—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!" rapped out Mr. Railton. "As regards the suggestion that Merry was forced to resign, that is absurd. He resigned of his own accord."

"He was bullied into it, sir!" gasped Blake. "He resigned because he was tired of being blamed and criticised by masters and seniors."

It was a daring speech, and the juniors waited breathlessly for the storm to break. They did not have long to wait.

"Blake! Boy! How dare you!" thundered the Housemaster again. "I was prepared to overlook your impudence in coming to me on such an errand. But I cannot overlook such insolence as this! Hold out your hand, sir!"

Blake sullenly held out his hand. Mr. Railton picked up his cane and brought it down—hard!

"Now the other hand, Blake!"

Blake held out his other hand, and again the cane came down. Levison interrupted him then.

"Just a minute, sir!" he said, with reckless determination. "Blake is only saying what we all think. All the fellows—"

That was as far as Levison got—but it was, apparently, much too far for Mr. Railton. The next minute the cane was biting into Levison's palm. Nor did the angry Housemaster stop there. In turn, the rest of the unfortunate deputation were soundly caned.

"There!" gasped Mr. Railton, laying down his cane at last. "As you all appear to be of the same opinion, and equally responsible for this insolent visit, I have dealt with you alike. I trust this will be a lesson to you. You may go!"

"Ow! Oh, yes, sir! But—"

"Go!"

The Housemaster's tone was ferocious, and the juniors went. In the passage outside, with the door closed upon them, they stood and groaned and nursed their tingling palms ruefully and dismally.

"This was Gussy's rotten idea!" groaned Blake. "We might have known it would end like this. Ow-ow!"

"All for nothing!" groaned Levison.

"I don't call a licking nothing!" snapped Digby. "It's all Tom Merry's fault, if you ask me! Why the thump doesn't he take on the captaincy again and stop all this trouble? I vote we go and rag the bounder until he does!"

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"Hear, hear!"

"Good wheeze! We'll rag him bald-headed if he refuses!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway come on, deah boys! Tom Mewwy is a vewy stubborn boundah, but we'll wag him until he agwees to take on the job again!"

"That's the idea! Come on!" said Blake.

And with that Jack Blake led the deputation on again—this time towards Tom Merry's study. The visit to Mr. Railton had ended in complete failure—worse than failure. But they were determined that the visit to Tom Merry should have better results.

CHAPTER 2.

Nothing Doing!

"COME in! Oh, it's you, Kildare!"

Tom Merry's voice was glum, and his invitation to Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, was none too genial. Tom Merry, usually the sunniest-tempered fellow in the Lower School, had had a great deal to put up with lately, and his temper had suffered accordingly.

"Want me, Kildare?" he asked, as the captain entered.

"Yes, I want you, Merry!" said Kildare gruffly. "Look here, you know we're now without a junior skipper?"

"Yes, I know it!" assented Tom briefly.

"This sort of thing can't go on, kid!" said Kildare, adopting a more genial tone himself. "It's bad for the school. The games and sports have suffered enough this term over this dashed captaincy nonsense!"

"That's so!"

"It's your fault partly!" said Kildare.

"What?"

"You resigned for no reason worth considering," said Kildare bluntly. "You got a bee in your bonnet and chucked the job for little reason, if any. Since then you've refused to take it on again, and sulked like a Third Form fag!"

Tom Merry flushed crimson.

"Nothing of the sort, Kildare!" he snapped. "I was treated badly. I could please nobody. You yourself were full of complaints. I chucked the job because everybody seemed to think a better man could be found, and I thought the same."

"You had to be kept up to the mark, Merry. It was my job to keep you up to it. Anyway, we won't argue about that now. The point is, are you willing to stand again now that lot of hopeless duds have taken their turn and done their worst?"

"No!"

"You still refuse?"

"Yes. And I still feel that a better man can be found, or, if not, one just as good. There's Talbot, and there's Levison and Blake and Figgins."

"I've asked Talbot, Levison, Blake, and Figgins!" snapped Kildare roughly. "They've refused."

"So you come to me as a last resort!" said Tom.

"There's no need for cheek, Merry!" said Kildare, his eyes gleaming. "There seems to be a dashed conspiracy to force you to take on the job. They all want you back, Merry, and none of them will put up for the job. It won't do. The footer's going to pot. Saturday's match will have to be cancelled. Discipline's going from bad to worse, too! The Lower School's slack, and nobody seems to care what happens to the footer. This sort of thing can't go on—the rot must be stopped! Only you can do that, Merry. I'll ask you again—will you put up for the sake of the school?"

Tom Merry was silent for the moment. In his own mind he knew that Kildare was right—that something ought to be done to stop the rot that had set in. But after a moment his face set hard and he shook his head.

"No, I won't put up!" he said briefly. "Only yesterday Railton was ragging me. He said that I seemed to be doing my best to make matters worse. It was unjust, and I refuse to put up with it! I won't stand!"

"Is that final?"

"Yes."

Kildare nodded, and then he turned abruptly and left the study. He had scarcely done so when there sounded the tramp of numerous feet in the passage. The next moment a swarm of juniors crowded into the study.

It was the deputation that had visited Mr. Railton—with many more additions to it. On the way other juniors had joined in when they heard what was "on."

Tom Merry stared at the determined-looking crowd in astonishment.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated. "What the dickens is this game? If you've come to tea—"

"We haven't come to tea!" snorted Blake.

"That's lucky—for you!" said Tom, with a rueful grin. "There's only a quarter of a loaf, and an ounce of butter, and a stale sardine. But what—"

"Look at it, you young idiot!" cried Kildare. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced over the round robin, quite puzzled. Then he gave a sudden jump as he noticed something unfamiliar about the handwriting. Certainly it was a good imitation of his own, yet it was not his. "Bai Jove!" he exclaimed in astonishment. (See Chapter 3.)



"It's business!" said Blake. "We're a deputation—"
 "That's the idea," said Herries. "Now, look here, Merry—"

"You ring off, Herries! Now, Tom Merry—"
 "Pway dwy up, Lowthah! Pway leave this to me, you fellows, you'll only wuin ewewythin'. Now, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, gag that tailor's dummy, someone! Now, Tom Merry—"

"We've come about the—"

"We mean to make you jolly well take on the—"

The buzz of excited voices became a roar as every member of the deputation strove to make his voice heard in order to explain.

Tom Merry stared blankly.

"What the dickens— Great Scott!" he gasped. "Look here, for goodness' sake gct out, the lot of you! This isn't a blessed monkey-house, you burbling lot of owls! Outside! Lowther—Manners, you asses, just help me chuck 'em out!"

"Not much!" said Lowther. "We're part of the deputation, Thomas! Go it, you chaps! Old Tommy will promise anything if you'll keep on like this. Talk about the Tower of Babel—"

"Order!" roared Blake, trying to make himself heard. "Can't you shut up while I explain? Now, Tom Merry, it's about the captaincy!"

"Just that!"

"Yaas, wathah! But I think I can explain the posish bettah, Blake—"

"Will you dry up!" hooted Blake, in great exasperation.

"As I was saying, Merry, we want you back—"

"As junior captain—"

"Hear, hear!"

"With the footer going to the bow-wows—"

"Saturday's match to be cancelled—"

"Everything going to pot—"

"Oh, my hat!" interrupted Tom Merry. "So this is the game! I'm off, then!"

He made a sudden rush for the doorway. Half a dozen hands grabbed him and dragged him back.

"That's it—hold the silly fathead; tie him to the table while I explain the position, and talk to him like a Dutch uncle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order! Silence!"

Some measure of order was restored, and Blake went ahead with his explanation.

"It's like this, Tom Merry," he said. "We want you back as junior captain. We're fed-up with duds! We're fed-up with trouble in general, and the footer being mucked up in particular. We mean to make you stand again whether you want to or not."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We want Tom Merry back!"

It was a roar, in which New House and School House voices mingled. Tom Merry's face flushed with pleasure for a moment—no one could have failed to be gratified by the spontaneous expression of his popularity. But Tom's face changed again just as quickly.

"You're wasting your breath!" he said calmly. "I've no intention of standing. Talbot's as good a man—ask him!"

"I'm not standing!" said Talbot grimly. "You're the one and only, Tommy!"

"Nobody else will, either!" said Blake. "Even Figgins won't. The whole Lower School want you back, Tommy. Railton's put a notice on the board, asking for applications for the job. He won't get any—unless old Grundy has another go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've had enough!" bawled Grundy's voice from the doorway. "I'm backing Tom Merry up! I'd put up again myself, only the job isn't worth wasting my abilities on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Grundy was serious, but the juniors saw nothing serious in that remark. They howled as they remembered the mess Grundy had made of the captaincy during his week of office. Tom Merry looked calmly round at the excited faces.

"It's no good!" he said. "What Railton said yesterday has quite settled the matter for me. I'm not standing, and that's flat! It's good of you to want me back, but you can all go and eat coke! Now clear out—I want my tea!"

"Bai Jove! Did you fellows ever see such an obstinate boundah?" asked Arthur Augustus, eyeing Tom Merry through his famous monocle. "Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am surprised at you! For the sake of St. Jim's you ought to put up again, you know!"

"Hear, hear!"
"I'm not standing!"
"Then we'll bump you until you agree to stand!" said Herries excitedly. "Now, you fellows—"

"Yaas, wathah! Bump him!"
"Bump the obstinate dummy!"
"Hear, hear!"

"Look here— I say, leggo!" roared Tom Merry, in great alarm, as he was grasped again. "You silly asses, why— Yoooop!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!
Solemnly and ruthlessly the deputation bumped Tom Merry again and again. It was rather a difficult process, for every fellow wanted to lend a hand in their eager desire to show Tom Merry with what affection they regarded him, and how much they wanted him back as captain.

But Tom Merry did not appreciate their kindness. He struggled furiously, and several fellows leaped back with howls as his fists clumped home. Then Tom Merry managed to wrench himself free, and he leaped to his feet.

"Look out!"
"Yaas, wathah! Pway stop him— Yoooop!"
In his own effort to stop Tom Merry's escape, Arthur Augustus ran right on to that exasperated junior's fist with his aristocratic nose. He roared and sat down suddenly.

The next moment a wild scramble was taking place in the study as Tom Merry made a desperate fight to reach the door.

In the midst of the confusion a stern voice rang out—at sound of which the struggle suddenly and abruptly ceased.

"Stop! Boys, what does this disgraceful tumult mean! Stop!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Wailton!"
It was Mr. Railton. He stared in at the door, a dark frown on his face. It became darker as he sighted the dishevelled and wrathful Tom Merry, whose face was crimson and dusty. Half a dozen fellows had hold of that hapless junior, and it was plain that the Housemaster had singled him out at once.

"Merry—you again!" he said harshly. "Are you not ashamed of yourself—you, who until recently were in a position of trust and authority?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Tom, and then he stopped, his eyes gleaming defiantly.

"You seem to be responsible for all the unruliness we have had of late in the Lower School," said Mr. Railton. "I can only think that, out of sheer chagrin and bitterness, you have set out to give those in authority as much trouble as possible."

Tom Merry said nothing. Only his glittering eyes showed the effect of the Housemaster's words on him.

But those words were too much for the rest.

"It wasn't Tom Merry's fault, sir!" said Blake hotly. "We were to blame entirely."

"What?"
"We were trying to force him to agree to take over the captaincy again, sir. The row was none of his seeking."

"Wathah not, Mr. Wailton! Tom Mewwy couldn't help himself."

"Oh, indeed!" Mr. Railton flushed a trifle, realising he had taken too much for granted. "Oh, indeed! I am very glad to hear it," he went on. "In that case I will not punish Merry. The rest of you will each take three hundred lines. Leave this study at once, and let me hear no further commotion."

The Housemaster whisked away, obviously regretting his hasty words now.

"Well, I'm blowed!" groaned Blake dismally. "Licked yesterday, licked to-day, and gated for Saturday! And now three hundred of the best on top of it! If we're without a giddy skipper much longer life won't be worth living! Tom Merry, you're an ass!"

"An awful ass!"
"Yaas, wathah!"

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"Oh, let's finish bumping the fathead and get out!" snorted Herries. "We'll have our money's worth, anyway! Bump him, and we'll keep on bumping the ass until he climbs down!"

"Hear, hear! That's the idea!"
"Look here— Leggo, you idiots!" gasped Tom Merry as he was grabbed again on all sides. "Leggo! You rotters— Oh, my hat!"

Bump!
"Yoooop!"

At least a dozen times Tom Merry was raised and dropped on his own study carpet. Then, leaving him gasping there, with feelings too deep for words, the deputation streamed out. Their second errand had been no more successful than their first.

CHAPTER 3. The Round Robin!

"A WOUND wobin!" said Arthur Augustus. "A whatter?" asked Blake, staring.

"A wound wobin!" repeated Arthur Augustus, polishing his eyeglass and regarding his study-mates thoughtfully. "I have been thinkin' vewy sewiously ovah this w'etched Tom Mewwy business. And I have weached the conclusion that a wound wobin might do the twick."

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at the swell of the Fourth in some astonishment.

Tea was over in Study No. 6, and the four chums were seated chatting round the fire—at least, Blake, Herries, and Digby had been chatting, while Arthur Augustus—according to his own claim—had been thinking.

"What the dickens are you talking about, dummy?" exclaimed Blake. "You mean a round robin, I suppose?"

"Yaas, wathah! But I wefuse to be called a dummay, Jack Blake—"

"You can refuse to be called one, but you can't help being one, old chap!" said Blake. "But what's the idea?"

"It is a vewy good ideah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I am quite certain, you know, that Tom Mewwy has got his back up and wefuses to stand for the captaincy again because of Wailton's unweasonable attitude."

"Well, there's a lot in that," assented Herries. "Railton seems to have got his knife into old Tommy lately. I don't wonder at Tom being ratty."

"Vewy well. Is it not vewy necessawwy, then, to point out cleahly to Wailton that the Lowah School wefuses to have any othah skippah except Tom Mewwy? When he realises that, Wailton will atah his unweasonable attitude towards Tom Mewwy, and it will be all wight."

"Will it?" scoffed Blake. "My dear fathead, Railton isn't likely to take any notice of us. In any case, what about our deputation? Didn't we try, and wasn't it a wash-out? Don't be a bigger ass than you can help, old chap!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, with some heat. "Howevah, I considah you're quite w'ong. The deputation failed because you were cheekay to Wailton, Blake. It was your fault entirely."

"Mine?" yelled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! You spoilt the whole thing. Howevah, I do not wish to wub that in. I considah a wound wobin will succeed where the deputation failed."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I do not considah that an intelligible wemark, Blake!"

"Bow-wow!"

"When Wailton sees that the whole Lowah School is solidly behind Tom Mewwy, he will be bound to use his authority to persuade Tom Mewwy to take up office again. I am convinced of that, deah boys."

"Rubbish!" said Blake.

"Waste of time!" grinned Herries.

"Wats!" was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's calm retort. "I shall go ahead with my ideah, and if you do not wish to sign the wound wobin, then you need not. I do not suppose your names will cawwy any weight in any case."

With that cutting remark, Arthur Augustus went to the cupboard, and after rummaging there he produced a large sheet of paper. The next moment he was busy with pen and ink, drawing up his declaration. When he had finished, it read as follows:

"DECLARATION.

"We, the undersigned members of the Lower School, hereby declare that we consider TOM MERRY to be the only fit person to take over the duties of Junior Captain. Since he resigned from that position, games and sports have suffered, and a rot has set in which can only be stopped by his return. We appeal to you, sir, to demand Tom Merry's reinstatement as Junior Captain.

"WE MUST HAVE TOM MERRY BACK!
"Signed)——"

Arthur Augustus signed his name in a suitable position, and then he handed the sheet to Blake with no little pride.

Blake read it and chuckled deeply.

"Well, I don't mind signing it," he assented, with a nod. "After all, you're asking for trouble, and it's only kind of us to back you up in getting it, old chap. I hope you get six of the best on each hand."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake—"

"Pass the ink, old bean."

Arthur Augustus passed the ink and the pen, and Jack Blake signed with a flourish. Herries and Digby read the declaration, chuckled, and also signed it.

"I am vewy glad you have decided to support me in this," said Gussy, with satisfaction. "I will now pwoceed to make a wound of the Shell and Fourth."

D'Arcy left the study, and out in the passage he almost collided with Monty Lowther.

"One moment, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Will you be good enough to glance ovah this? I am goin' to hand it to Waitton when all the fellows have filled in their names. Somethin' must be done to bwing Tom Mewwy back, and I am quite suah this will do the twick."

Monty Lowther glanced over the sheet. His mouth twitched slightly as he read the declaration, but the next moment he was as solemn as a judge.

"You want me to sign this, Gussy?" he asked gravely.

"Yaas, wathah! I want vewy fellow in the Shell and Fourth to sign it. Is Mannahs in your studay?"

"Yes, he's there, old chap. Well, I'll sign," said Lowther. "But you wait here, and I'll run along to the study and get Manners to sign it on the quiet."

"Yaas, but why shouldn't I—"

"Tommy might come in and smell a rat," explained Lowther, winking at the ceiling. "Leave this to me, Gussy. I'll get all the fellows in the Shell to sign as well—excepting Tom Merry, of course. I'll bring it along to your study in five minutes, Gussy."

With that Lowther hurried away with the round robin, not giving Arthur Augustus the chance to approve or protest. He was back well under the five minutes, and he found Arthur Augustus pacing the passage, waiting for him.

"All serene, Gussy!" said Lowther cheerfully. "Here you are. Practically every fellow in the Shell has signed. What about the Fourth now? Shall I take it round? You can still hand it to Railton."

"Bai Jove! It is vewy good of you, Lowthah!" said Gussy. "But I will see to that, deah boy."

"Right-ho! I'll come along with you, old chap."

He followed Arthur Augustus as that worthy entered Study No. 5. Julian, Kerruish, and Hammond were at home, and Julian gave an explosive chuckle as he read over the "declaration." But he instantly became serious again as he caught a wink from Lowther.

"You wish me to sign this, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah! For the sake of St. Jim's, deah boys!"

"Right-ho! These other fellows will sign, too, I bet!"

Dick Julian signed, and Hammond and Kerruish followed suit without hesitation—after reading the declaration. Then Arthur Augustus and Lowther proceeded to call upon the other studies in the passage. The chums of Study No. 5 insisted upon accompanying them, interested grins on their faces.

It was not a long job. In the various studies the fellows read over the declaration, and either laughed aloud or chuckled deeply. But they signed. They also insisted upon accompanying Arthur Augustus and Lowther upon their round of the studies. By the time the last study had been visited and the last signature added, there was quite a crowd in the passage.

"Shall we go on to the Third now, Gussy?" asked Lowther. "The fags would sign it like a shot."

"Yes, rather!"

There was a chorus of chuckles.

Arthur Augustus frowned slightly. Pleased as he was at the popularity of his great idea, he did not quite approve of the levity with which the juniors seemed to regard it.

"I think this will be enough," he said. "Aftah all, the names of the fags will cawwy vewy little weight, deah boys! But I wish you fellows would realise that this is a vewy sewious mattah, and not a subject for hilawity."

Apparently the fellows considered it was.

"Howevah," resumed Arthur Augustus, frowning round again on the grinning crowd, "I will now pwoceed to hand this to Waitton, and I twust he will give it weasonable considewation."

And, with a final glance over the long list of names, Arthur Augustus was about to start for the Housemaster's study when Lowther called him back.

"Hold on, Gussy!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "You're not handing that to Railton personally?"

"Yaas, wathah. Of course, deah boy."

"Don't be an ass! It would only make him waxy at the start," said Lowther, shaking his head. "The official way is through the proper channels. To do the job in an official manner, you should hand it first to Kildare, asking him to hand it to Railton."

"That's right," said Cardew approvingly.

"No good putting Railton's back up to begin with," said Noble solemnly.

"Um! Ah! Pewwaps you are wight!" admitted Gussy reflectively. "Vewy well, I will take it to Kildare first."

"Good!"

The crowd, which was growing considerably, with the addition of a number of Shell fellows, followed Arthur Augustus to Kildare's study.

That great man was at home, and he stared first at the crowd, and then at the paper Arthur Augustus handed to him.

"What the dickens—"

"It is a wound wobin, Kildare," explained Arthur Augustus. "We wish you to wead it, and then to hand it to Waitton. If you would care to add your name it would be of vewy gweat help."

There was a chuckle as Kildare started to read—a chuckle that grew in volume as Kildare gave a sudden start, and then read on, with a very grim face.

Then he turned to D'Arcy.

"You—you young idiot!" he gasped.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Kildare—"

"Have you read this?" demanded Kildare, striving to keep his face straight.

"Yaas, wathah! I w'ote it, deah boy."

"You wrote it?" yelled Kildare.

"Yaas."

"Then what it says must be true enough, then," said Kildare, with a grim chuckle. "A fellow who would write such rot about himself must be potty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Pway what do you mean, Kildare?"

"Look at it, you young idiot!"

Arthur Augustus looked at the round robin, quite puzzled now. He glanced over the declaration, and then he gave a sudden jump as he noticed something unfamiliar about the handwriting. Certainly, it was a good imitation of his handwriting; yet it was not his.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "What—gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus had started to read, and as he read he gave another jump—a big one this time. For the "declaration" was not the one he had written. This one read:

"DECLARATION!"

"We, the undersigned members of the Lower School, hereby declare that we consider ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY to be a hopeless imbecile, a potty lunatic, a born idiot, a howling chump, an empty-headed tailor's dummy without the brains of a bunny-rabbit, and that his proper place is in a home for idiots.

"(Signed)

Then followed the long list of names of Shell and Fourth Form juniors.

Arthur Augustus blinked and blinked at it.

He screwed his eyeglass more firmly into place in order to aid him, just as if he could not believe his own eyes.

"Oh, gweat Scott!" he gasped. "Oh, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

From the doorway and the passage came a howl of laughter.

Arthur Augustus turned and glared at the laughing crowd in speechless indignation. He understood now why all the fellows had chuckled, and why they treated his declaration with such frivolous levity. In each study he had glanced over each name as it had been written down, but he had never thought of looking at the declaration.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he stuttered. "You—you feahful wottahs! You—you fwightful wuffians! Lowthah, you uttah wascal, you must have w'itten this feahful wubbish! You have copied my handw'itin' and w'itten this insolent wubbish!"

"Why, anything wrong with it, Gussy?" asked Lowther from the doorway. "It's true enough, isn't it?"

The question proved too much for the indignant Arthur Augustus. Heedless of Kildare's presence, he gave a roar of wrath and went for Lowther.

Lowther had expected trouble—but not quite so quickly. Gussy's fist smote his nose, and he staggered back amongst the crowd with a howl.

The next moment Arthur Augustus, in a truly terrific rage, was smiting him right and left, amidst roars of laughter and cheers.

In the doorway of Kildare's study the fight waxed fast and furious, Kildare himself looking on in stupefied amazement.

Not for long, however. With an explosive gasp of outraged dignity, the captain of St. Jim's suddenly snatched up his ashplant, and then he waded in with a will.

"Look out!"

"Oh, my hat! Look— Yoooop!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Kildare's ashplant took severe toll for a few brief moments of life combatants and the crowd. But they broke asunder at last, and within ten seconds after that not a single junior remained to satisfy Kildare's wrath.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked a wreck when he limped into Study No. 6 a few minutes later.

"Well?" asked Blake, looking up from the copy of the "Modern Boy" he was reading. "How did you get on, old chap? My hat! I expected you to get it hot; but you look as if you'd been through a coffee-mill!"

"Or a mangle," suggested Herries.

"What happened?" asked Digby, with a chuckle.

"Wats!"

That was all Arthur Augustus had to say on the subject at the moment. But, later on, Blake & Co. sought information elsewhere, and when they heard of Lowther's little joke, they howled with laughter like the rest of the School House—excepting Arthur Augustus himself.

CHAPTER 4. Grundy Has a Go!

"THAT ass—"

"Eh?"

"That born idiot—"

"What?"

"That potty lunatic—"

"Hallo! What the dickens is the matter now, Grundy?"

William Cuthbert Gunn asked the question, and as he did so he exchanged an expressive glance with George Wilkins.

George Alfred Grundy's study-mates had been busy doing their prep for some minutes now. But Grundy had been thinking hard—or he had appeared to be doing so from the deep frown on his rugged features.

Then he had looked up, and given expression to those remarks.

"Who the thump are you talking about, Grundy?" demanded Wilkins.

"Himself, I suppose!" said Gunn, rather daringly. "He's the only fellow I know who answers to the descriptions."

Grundy glared.

"I want no cheek from you, Cuthbert Gunn!" he snorted.

"You know jolly well who I was speaking of—that ass, that born idiot, that potty lunatic, D'Arcy of the Fourth!"

"Oh!"

Apparently Grundy was not referring to himself, but to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, old Gussy is all that!" agreed Wilkins, winking at Gunn. "What about him?"

"What about him?" said Grundy witheringly. "You know what happened this evening? He had the cheek to draw up a blessed declaration demanding Tom Merry's return as skipper. It was a potty idea altogether. He made a silly fool of himself, and all the school's laughing about it."

"Well, that's so," grinned Wilkins. "Old Gussy's an awful ass, and he fairly got it in the neck—so did that funny ass Lowther, for that matter. But what are you getting at, Grundy?"

"I've been thinking about it!" explained George Alfred grimly. "That ass D'Arcy made a muck of things, but still he's right in having a try to make Tom Merry see reason. Something's got to be done to make him stand again for the job."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yes, rather!"

Wilkins and Gunn were in entire agreement there.

"Something's got to be done to make Merry stop sulking and do the right thing," said Grundy. "I don't exactly approve of him as skipper myself. There's a better man available, but Railton won't see reason and give him his chance again."

"Who's that?" asked Gunn, winking at Wilkins.

"Myself, of course!" said Grundy calmly. "I went to Railton this afternoon, and offered to take over the job again. He licked me! Fancy licking a fellow who wants to save the school from going to the dogs!"

"Just fancy!" assented Wilkins solemnly.

"Well, I'm not going to try again," said Grundy. "I'm fed-up! Tom Merry can have the job, and I'll help him. I think he's the best man for it—next to me, of course! So

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I've decided to make him take it on. That ass D'Arcy's failed, but I shan't fail."

"Good! But Tom Merry won't accept the job!" pointed out Gunn. "How are you going to make him?"

"I've just thought of that," said George Alfred confidently. "I shall force him to take it on again—by hypnotism!"

"By what?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hypnotism!" said Grundy triumphantly. "You fellows know my powers as a hypnotist. I've proved the power of my eye again and again. I haven't tried to use it for a long time, but I mean to make use of it to force Tom Merry to take over the job of junior captain. I shall hypnotise him, and force him by the sheer power of my unyielding will, to do what all the fellows want him to do."

"Oh crumbs!"

Wilkins and Gunn looked at each other. They wanted to roar with laughter, but they dared not. Grundy had a useful pair of fists, and he always objected strongly to being laughed at. But their looks at each other were eloquent. On more than one occasion Grundy had claimed to be able to hypnotise, and he had "tried it on" with very painful results to himself—and no results whatever on his victims.

Yet, despite frequent failures, George Alfred evidently still cherished the delusion that he was a born hypnotist.

"And—and you're really going to hypnotise Merry?" gasped Gunn.

"Yes," said Grundy, rising briskly from the table, "and the sooner it's done the better for St. Jim's. You fellows can come along, if you like, and see it done. There's no danger, so you've no need to be afraid, Gunny. I shall just make him agree to take the job on again, and then, once he's promised, I shall switch off the 'fluence again."

"Oh! Oh crumbs!"

"I think I'll make him sign a paper, and also write a note, offering to accept the captaincy, to Railton," said Grundy. "Come on! That's just the idea!"

And Grundy hastily left the study, his eyes gleaming with determination. Wilkins and Gunn looked at each other helplessly, and then they followed him hurriedly. They did not wish to miss seeing Grundy hypnotise Tom Merry.

Grundy had entered Study No. 10 when they arrived there. Tom was busy doing his prep, as also were Manners and Lowther.

Without a word Grundy drew up a chair facing Tom Merry and sat down upon it. Then he fixed his eyes intently upon that astonished junior.

"What the thump's this game, Grundy?" demanded Tom.

"Has it come at last?" asked Lowther, tapping his own head and looking at Wilkins and Gunn significantly.

Wilkins and Gunn winked and said nothing.

"What the dickens are you staring at me like a blessed gargoyle for, Grundy?" demanded Tom again.

Grundy went on staring, his features twisted in a truly ghastly manner. Tom Merry still stared back, far too astonished to do anything else.

Then Grundy spoke quietly and authoritatively.

"Don't move—look at me!" he ordered. "You are now going to sleep in response to my will!"

"Am I?" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What the merry thump— Oh!"

Tom Merry suddenly understood. He remembered that Grundy prided himself on the power of his eye—that he had, on numerous occasions, claimed to be able to hypnotise people. It was a delusion on Grundy's part, and it had caused no little hilarity in the School House. But Grundy believed in himself if nobody else did.

Remembering this, Tom Merry winked slyly at Wilkins, and then his eyes began gradually to open wider and wider, whilst his body became curiously rigid.

"Phew! He's doing it!" murmured Wilkins, with a soft chuckle. "Go it, Grundy! Splendid!"

"Shut up!" hissed Grundy, waving his hand behind him frantically for silence. "My hat! He's going off already! Now, Merry! You hear me? Answer!"

"Yes, Grundy!" said Tom Merry, in a curiously far-away voice.

"You are now under the power of my will!" said Grundy.

"You will do whatever I order you to do. Understand?"

"Yes, Grundy!"

"You will stretch out your right hand and take hold of the pen there," said Grundy. "Then write at my dictation. Understand?"

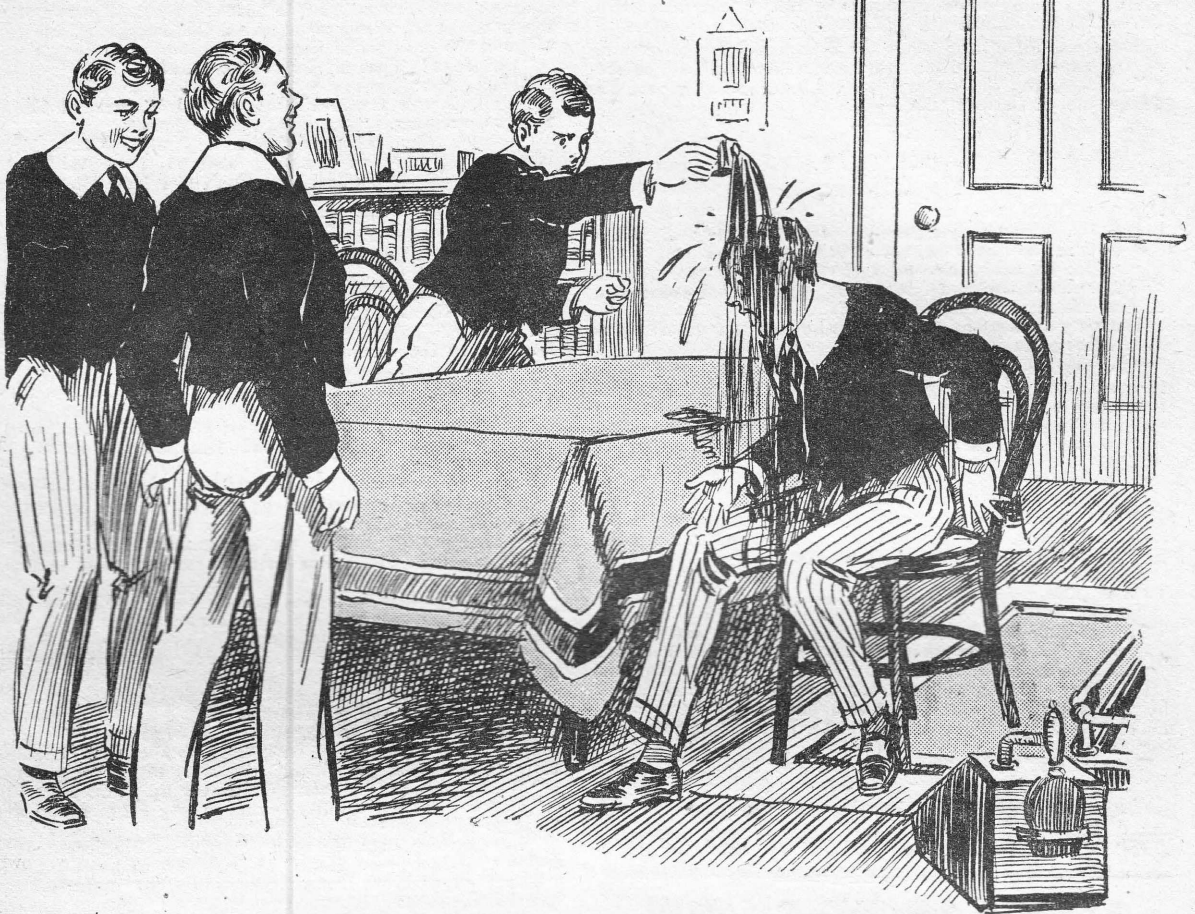
"Yes, Grundy!"

"You will address the note to Railton, and you will say what I command you to say. Now, there is ink and paper before you. Write!"

"Yes, Grundy!"

This time Tom Merry did not obey literally—he did not obey at all, in fact. He just reached out his hand and

"Stretch out your right hand," commanded George Alfred Grundy, his eyes fixed intently on Tom Merry's face, "and take hold of the pen. Then write at my dictation. Understand?" "Yes, Grundy!" Instead of obeying, however, Tom Merry reached out his hand, grasped the ink-pot, and with a swift movement emptied it over Grundy's head. "Here—what—Grooooh!" roared Grundy. (See Chapter 4.)



grasped the inkpot. Then he stood up jerkily, and, with a swift movement, emptied the inkpot over Grundy's head.

"Here—what—Grooooh!"

Grundy roared as the ink splashed on his hair and trickled over his face, dripping from thence to the floor. He sprang up and gasped and spluttered frantically.

The interested onlookers howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry stood motionless, with the empty inkpot held rigidly in his hand, his face still vacant, and eyes still staring.

Grundy grabbed his handkerchief, mopped his face frantically, and then made a rush at Tom.

But Wilkins, Gunn, Manners, and Lowther grabbed him and held him back.

"Lemme gerrat him!" bellowed Grundy furiously. "I don't believe the rotter's gone off at all! He's spoofing! Why, I'll—I'll—"

"Steady! For goodness' sake don't touch him!" yelled Lowther. "The consequences may be serious, you ass! Steady! I— Oh, my hat! Look out!"

The warning appeared to be very necessary, for just then Tom Merry gave a fearful yell. Then with a wild rush he made for the fireplace and grabbed the poker.

Waving this aloft in a truly dangerous manner, he made a blind rush at the startled Grundy, his eyes staring in a ghastly manner.

"Look out!" yelled Lowther. "You've done it now, Grundy! You've driven him mad! Run for it!"

"Oh crikey!"

Grundy gave one look at Tom Merry, and then he ran for it. He went round the table like a champion on the cinder-path.

Tom Merry went after him, making most ferocious and weird noises in his throat. Round and round the table went pursuer and pursued, Grundy yelling frantically for help. Tom Merry undoubtedly looked mad.

Lowther and Manners, with Wilkins and Gunn, crowded round the door—none of them, apparently, thinking of

attempting to escape. Nor did they give the hapless George Alfred the chance of getting out of the study.

All he could do was to rush round and round the table, dabbing frantically with an ink-stained handkerchief in order to keep the streaming ink out of his eyes. And as he did so he roared for aid.

Then suddenly he stumbled and went crashing down on the hearthrug, Tom Merry almost falling over him.

"Help!" roared Grundy, terrified out of his wits by this time. "Help! Murder! Police! Help! Rescue, you footling idiots! Can't you see he's— Yooooop! Yar-rooooooh!"

Dropping the poker suddenly, Tom Merry had grabbed at the coal-scuttle. He raised it on high, and then emptied the contents over the head of George Alfred as he sprawled on the hearthrug.

Grundy bellowed as the heavy lumps of coal cascaded over his head, while the coal-dust smothered him as in a shroud.

Then Tom Merry dropped the scuttle, and, with another wild cry, dashed to the door, tore it open, and vanished, his footsteps dying away in the distance.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wilkins, Gunn, Lowther, and Manners doubled up and howled with hysterical laughter. Grundy sat up dazedly on the hearthrug, hugging his head and groaning. He looked a sight.

"Ow! Ow-ow! Oh crikey! Oh, my hat!" he gasped. "Has he gone? Ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling fools!" roared Grundy. "Couldn't you see that he'd— Oh! M-my hat! I believe he was spoofing all the time, and I believe you fellows knew it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rotters!" panted Grundy. "Oh, you rotters! Why, I'll—I'll smash you to little bits! I'll spificate you! I'll—I'll—"

Grundy dropped words for action then. He jumped and

made one will rush at the hilarious juniors. They bolted through the open door and fled.

Nor did Grundy catch them. He chased them along the passage for some distance, and then he abandoned the pursuit and made his weary way towards the nearest bath-room. Whether Grundy could hypnotise or not, it was now painfully clear to him that he had not hypnotised Tom Merry.

There was little laughter in the School House that evening at the expense of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was forgotten now, and the juniors chortled loud and long over the adventures of Grundy, the hypnotist.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins' Scheme!

"ROTTEN!"

That was the general view of the state of affairs in the Lower School at St. Jim's.

In Study No. 6 on the Fourth passage, quite a select band of Shell and Fourth congregated that evening to discuss the matter.

The only fellow of importance who was not present was Tom Merry himself.

"Something's got to be done!" remarked Jack Blake, for the twentieth time. "The footer's going to go to pot this term, and everything else as well. The blessed slackers are doing just as they like, and everything seems to be going wrong. And there's Saturday's match—"

"Blow it!"

"It's rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But what's the good of gassing?" asked Figgins of the New House. "It's my view, of course, that a New House man is the man for the job. You see—"

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"Bosh!"

The School House fellows expressed their opinion of Figgins' remark in no uncertain manner. Figgins chuckled.

"Still, we're ready to back Tom Merry up," he went on.

"Though we strongly disapprove of a School House worm being skipper, we admit that old Tommy's a good man. He'd be a still better man if he was a New House man."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.

"Absolutely!" said Redfern.

"Bai Jove! You cheeky New House wottahs—"

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"Pitch the worms out!" snorted Herries.

"That's it! Sling 'em out on their necks!"

There was a roar of approval at the suggestion from the School House fellows, but Blake held up his hand.

"No House ragging, now!" he said sternly. "The matter's too serious, you fatheads! When it's a case of the good of St. Jim's as a whole, House rivalry must be off, and we must stand shoulder to shoulder."

"Bai Jove! That is vevy twue, Blake!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, them's my sentiments entirely!" grinned George Figgins, nodding. "But what's to be done?"

"Goodness knows!" said Levison glumly. "Tom Merry won't give way—the burbling chump! It's Railton, of course, who's put his back up. Can't you New House chaps think of anything?"

"Well," said Figgins, his eyes gleaming curiously, "I've just thought of a wheeze—"

"Bai Jove! Good man, Figgay!"

"Out with it!"

Figgins chuckled.

"I think it as well not to tell you School House worms yet awhile!" he grinned. "But leave it to me. I think I can work the oracle. Come on, Fatty, and the rest of you!"

"Hold on!" said Blake warmly. "Why can't you tell us—"

"Wouldn't do to tell you infants; you'd only muck it up!" said Figgins cheerfully. "Ta-ta! Remember to scrub your necks before bed-time!"

And Figgins walked out, his grinning chums at his heels.

In the Hall downstairs George Figgins called a halt before the notice-board. On the board was a notice in Mr. Railton's handwriting, calling for applications for the post of junior captain. There was no name on the sheet of paper at present.

Taking a pencil from his pocket, George Figgins carefully wrote his own name under the notice.

His followers stared blankly.

"Great Scott!" gasped Kerr. "You—you're not putting up for the job, Figgay?"

"Yes, old chap! Why not?"

"But—but it's rather thick!"

"Too thick!" said Owen, shaking his head. "Of course, a New House man would be better any day than a School House man. That goes without saying. But—but—"

"We've promised to back Tom Merry up," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn, eyeing Figgins uneasily.

"Figgay, old man—"

"I'm backing Tom Merry up!" grinned Figgins. "Wait and see! I fancy—Hallo! What's the matter, Grundy?"

The knot of New House fellows in front of the notice-board had aroused George Alfred Grundy's suspicions. He gave a roar at the sight of Figgins' name on the House-master's notice.

"Matter?" howled Grundy. "Why, you rotten traitor, Figgins! I thought you New House worms were as keen as we are to get Tom Merry back! Well, of all the rotten tricks!"

"My dear man—"

"Put your fists up!" hooted Grundy, turning back his cuffs. "You're a cad, Figgins, and I'm going to lick you until you'll be jolly glad to cross that name off again!"

Grundy made a rush at Figgins. He was promptly collared with a resounding bump and deposited on the floor with a resounding bump and a howl.

Then, as several School House fellows came running up, Figgins & Co. took to their heels and fled. They knew better than to remain in the enemy's camp after that.

Safe in the New House, Figgins' followers eyed him rather uneasily.

"But, dash it all, you can't do this, Figgay!" remonstrated Edgar Lawrence. "We'll back you up tooth and nail, of course. But—but I wish you wouldn't put up against old Tommy, in the circumstances. It looks rather mean."

"That's so," agreed Redfern hesitatingly. "Still—"

"Chuck it, Figgay!" pleaded Fatty Wynn. "We'd like you as skipper no end, but after what we've promised those School House worms—"

"Don't worry!" said Figgins, eyeing his chums and chuckling. "Leave this to me! I shall expect every New House man to vote for me, of course."

"But—but—"

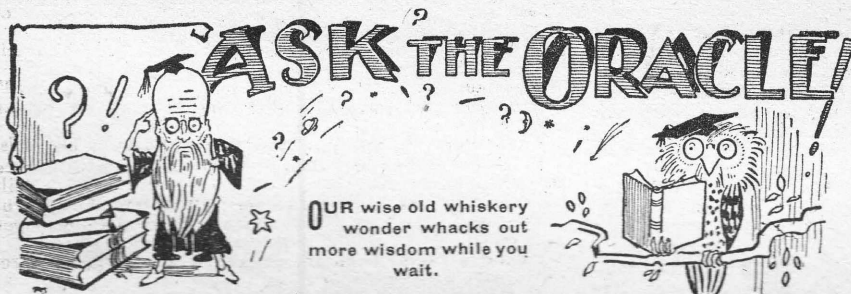
"Nobody else is putting up, you dummy!"

"But somebody will when it's known I'm putting up!" grinned Figgins cheerfully. "Those School House wasters will never allow a New House man to be skipper—the cheeky owls! So—Hallo! Here they come!"

There sounded a rush of feet outside the New House doorway, and next moment Jack Blake, followed by Herries, D'Arcy, Digby, Levison, Talbot, and several more School House fellows dashed into the hall-way. They looked excited and wrathful.

"Oh, here you are!" yelled Blake. "Well, what d'you think of yourself, Figgins, you rotten traitor?"
 "You rotten New House cad!"
 "Yaas, wathah! You are a feahful wottah, Figgins!"
 "My dear young infants—" began Figgins coolly.
 "Is that genuine?" bellowed Herries. "Are you standing for the captaincy, Figgins?"
 "Yes, old bean!"
 "Well, you howling worm!"
 "You rotten twister!"
 "Smash him!" howled Herries. "Show him what we think of him!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 The next moment the rush came, and George Figgins vanished beneath the angry swarm of School House fellows. He roared frantically.
 "Stop, you duffers! Hold on! Yooop! It's all right, I tell you! Ow-ow! Back up, New House! Oh, my hat! Yow!"
 It was more than the New House could stand. Much as they disapproved of Figgins' action, they were not going

to allow the enemy to enter their camp and do as they liked with their leader.
 In a matter of seconds a general scrap was in progress in the lighted hall-way.
 Backwards and forwards the battle raged.
 But such a state of affairs could not last long in such a public place. There was a warning cry as Monteith, prefect and Sixth-Former, came rushing on the scene.
 He charged the struggling crowd, cuffing heads and boxing ears right and left. In a matter of moments the battle was over, and the juniors drew apart, ruffled and dishevelled and breathless.
 "You—you young idiots!" gasped Monteith. "You cheeky young hooligans! You School House kids can get back to your House at once! Any more of this and you'll have cause to regret it!"
 Monteith walked away with a last warning glance at the crowd. Apparently he expected his orders to be obeyed to the letter. But they weren't!
 Blake & Co. glared at the New House fellows.
 (Continued on next page.)

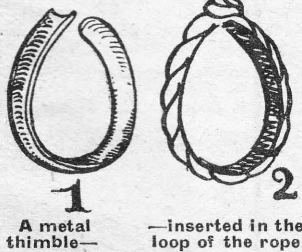


Q. What is a chimera?
 A. A curious type of fish which is supposed to be a descendant from the sharks. A common species is found in the Mediterranean and East Atlantic; other kinds in the North Pacific, off Portugal, in the West Atlantic and off Japan.

Q. Is it true that there is a millionaire now serving in a regiment as a corporal?
 A. Yes, Jimmy Hedley. A millionaire named Lloyd Nelson is serving in that capacity in the United States Marine Corps.

Q. Is it true that negroes can always be trusted with secrets?
 A. Certainly, Dolly Dean. Negroes can always be trusted to keep dark.

Q. What is a thimble?
 A. Whoa, whoa, there! Don't all yell at once, for I am sure that my young reader, Percy S., who sent in the question, does not mean the sort that mother uses when she gets busy on that patch of yours. You see, Percy explains that he was reading "Pirate Death-Head's Revenge," and saw something about the rope which was to hang Mango Dan being



1 A metal thimble—
 2 —inserted in the loop of the rope.

rove through a thimble. This, Percy, is a small metal eye or ring, which may be inserted in the loop of a rope to prevent wearing from any other rope or line passed through it. The left-hand illustration shows the metal thimble, and the right-hand one, a thimble that has been inserted in the loop of a rope,

Q. What does hall-mark mean as applied to silver?
 A. I am always delighted, "Prefect," to receive a question like this, because it gives me a chance to let my brainbox out at full throttle, and show the Editor I am really earning my screw, which at times, I fear, he doubts! All silver is hall-marked, a term which originates from the Hall of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, where gold and silver articles were assayed and stamped as proof that they were genuine. Borrow a basketful of silver fishknives and forks, from your headmaster, "Prefect," and examine them carefully. You will find that each piece bears various marks. The first shows the town of origin—the crown for Sheffield, leopard's head for London, an anchor for Birmingham, and so forth. The next mark—the lion—is the proof that the article is genuine silver. The letter which follows shows the date when the article was made, and each town which stamps silver has its own letter code.

Q. What is a sycophant?
 A. Tom Watkins, who lives near Huddersfield, has sent in this question, or rather he has demanded to know what is a "sick elephant," which term he says he heard his schoolmaster use in connection with one of the followers of William of Orange. And so my correspondent wishes to know if William of Orange really had a menagerie as well as an interest in Covent Garden fruit market, which he founded. As far as I am aware, Tom, William of Orange neither had anything to do with menageries or fruit markets, and I have supposed that when you had "sick elephant" in your mind, you really meant sycophant. Anyway, here goes to explain what a sycophant is: A good specimen is at St. Jim's—a toady, parasite, snob, flunkey, lap-dog, lick-spittle, hanger-on, *cavaliere servente*, pick-thank, flatterer, carpet knight, *Groeculus esuriens*, tuft-hunter, fawner, sneak, abject worm or dirty dog. By all means write again, Tom Watkins, if I have not made myself plain, but please oblige next time by stamping your letter and writing with something other than one of mother's clothes-pegs.

Q. What is the origin of the term "dead marine"?

A. Harry Peale who has sent in this query, informs me that he is shortly sitting for an examination—though why he should imagine that he would be asked such a question as this I have no idea. A "dead marine," Harry, is a term used for an empty bottle, and generally it is considered a libel on a famous and gallant corps, the Royal Marines. It is related that many years ago when the Duke of Clarence was Lord High Admiral, he said to a waiter at an official dinner, pointing to some empty bottles, "Take away those marines!" A Marine officer present arose and, with dignity, demanded why His Royal Highness should liken an empty bottle to the corps to which he had the honour to belong. Whereupon the Duke of Clarence with great tact, replied: "Indeed, I called them marines because they are good fellows; they have done their duty and are ready to do it again!"

And all was well again among the guests and the dinner proceeded without any further hitch.

Q. What is the origin of the barber's pole?

A. This pole, which is of red and white stripes, was commonly seen outside all barbers' shops in the old days, but is quite rare now. It is a grim reminder of by-gone times when barbers used to act as surgeons for the bleeding of patients, which was then a very common remedy. The pole represents the splint to which the patient's arm was bound, and at one time a basin used to be hung from the end of it. The red and white stripes suggested the bandages which were employed in the minor operation.



The red and white striped pole seen outside barbers' shops in the old days.

Q. What is amber?

A. The fossilized resin of trees chiefly found on the shores of the Baltic Sea.

Q. What do the following four sets of letters stand for: (1) C.O.D., (2) O.H.M.S., (3) F.R.S., (4) O.M.?

A. (1) Cash on delivery, (2) On His Majesty's Service (usually to be seen on Government envelopes, such as those that contain income tax forms, etc.), (3) Fellow of the Royal Society, (4) Order of Merit (a high British distinction).

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Blake. "A nice trick, isn't it? Pretend to stand by Tom Merry, and then put up yourselves! You're a rotter, Figgins!"

Figgins hugged a swollen nose and glowered.

"You—you burbling chumps!" he panted. "Of all the thick-headed, half-witted idiots! Can't you see it's a wheeze? Can't you see my game?"

"Eh? What d'you mean?"

"I mean that putting up for the job is just my wheeze to force Tom Merry to put up, of course!" snorted Figgins. "Didn't I tell you I'd thought of a wheeze? I thought it best not to explain in case Tom Merry got wind of the game. But I'd better explain, after all, in case any of you asses think of putting up to stay me from getting the job!"

"But—but—"

"Bai Jove! I fail to undahstand you, Figgins!"

"That's because you lack the power to understand anything suitable to the intellect of an infant!" sniffed Figgins witheringly. "Don't you see my game? Tom Merry will never allow a New House man to be skipper—especially if you mob him and rub it in. He'll put up again rather than have that for a cert."

"Oh!"

"M-mum-my hat!"

"See the wheeze?" said Figgins, with a grin. "I shall put up, and there'll be an election, of course. Tom Merry's bound to put up to stop me if no other School House man will. All the New House will vote solidly for me—Tommy would smell a rat if they didn't. But the School House are in a majority, and it's pretty certain he'll romp home."

"Oh!" gasped Blake. "But—but supposing you do win, Figgy?"

"Then I shall gracefully resign and leave the field clear to Tom Merry!" said Figgins calmly. "Now can you silly, sap-headed duffers understand?"

"Bai Jove!"

The School House fellows did understand, and they grinned sheepishly.

"Well, my hat!" said Blake, eyeing Figgins admiringly. "That's no end of a good wheeze, Figgy. I'm sorry we went for you, old chap!"

"Awfully sorry!" groaned Levison, gently caressing a rapidly colouring eye. "Still, it's a good wheeze. But you ought to have warned us."

"I was afraid of it leaking out," explained Figgins. "Still, now it is out it can't be helped, and we'll all have to keep mum about it. We'd better do some electioneering to make it look more genuine."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And now will you walk out or be chucked out on your necks?" asked Figgins pleasantly. "I feel as if I've been through a sausage-machine, but I'm ready to finish the scrap if you are."

"No, we're not!" said Blake, with a laugh. "Sorry we misjudged you, Figgy. We might have known you'd play the game. Anyway, it's a good wheeze, and I believe it will come off. Come on, you fellows."

Blake & Co. left the New House feeling rather sore in body, but quite satisfied and cheery in mind. Figgins' great wheeze certainly stood a good chance of succeeding. It would not be the juniors' fault if it didn't.

CHAPTER 6.

For the Sake of the House.

"TOM MERRY!"

"Yes!"

Tom Merry turned away from the fireplace. It was after dinner on the following day, and he was standing before the fire in his study staring down into the flames, his brow moody and frowning. He was alone, and his face set as he saw the crowd of fellows in the study doorway.

It was another deputation—and Tom knew quite well what it meant.

"Yes," he repeated grimly. "What's the matter now? You want me?"

The crowd swarmed into the study, looking very determined.

"We want you all right," said Blake, speaking for all. "You know what's happened now, Tommy? Figgy has put up for the captaincy!"

"Yes, that's so!" assented Tom. "You can't blame him. I suppose. The New House chaps have seen their chance and taken it! Railton will accept Figgins as skipper. He's a good man, and I hope he'll do well in the job. But—"

He paused.

Blake could have grinned broadly at the frown on Tom Merry's brow. But he knew better than to arouse the latter's suspicions by grinning.

"Yes, you may well say 'but,'" said Blake. "Fancy a New House worm as skipper! We've already had a taste when Fatty Wynn was skipper. He put nearly all the New House men in the team for a start. I expect he really believed he was doing the best. But there it is—we're not going to stand it, of course! The skipper must come up from the School House."

"That goes without saying!" assented Levison. "You see that, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, I do. There's an easy way out of the difficulty, though," he said grimly. "Talbot can put up, or Levison, or you, Blake. The New House would scarcely stand much of a chance if you do."

"Talbot won't put up!" said Levison.

"He jolly well won't!" said Talbot himself. "Nor will any other chap so long as you are available, Tom Merry. You've got to put up—for the sake of the House, Tommy. Be sensible, old chap!"

Tom Merry's frown deepened. But it was very plain that he was deeply disturbed, and in a very undecided frame of mind.

"Figgins is a good man," he said gruffly. "He'll make a decent skipper! If it has to be it has to be. But—"

"We're not putting up with it!" said Talbot. "You've got to put up—for the sake of the House, Tommy. It isn't like you to get your back up like this, or to put your personal feelings before the good of the House and the school."

Tom Merry coloured.

"Figgins may win if I do stand," he said thickly. "Racke and the rest of the slackers don't want me as skipper again, I know. They may think they'll have an easier time under Figgins. They may vote for Figgins and so turn the scale."

"We'll chance that!" said Blake, his eyes gleaming as he noted how Tom Merry was weakening. "But if the cads do vote for a fellow from another House, then we'll scrag them, and make them wish they'd never been born."



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But they won't dare. Now, look here, Tommy, we want you—and nobody else will do! Never mind Railton, or anyone else. Think of St. Jim's and the footer. Will you put up?"

Tom hesitated a moment, and then he nodded slowly.

"Yes," he said quietly. "I think I will! I—I've been an ass to sulk like this. I'll stand!"

"Good man!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo!"

"Yaas, wathah! Good man, Tom Mewwy."

There was a roar of satisfaction in Study No. 10.

"Up with him!" shouted Herries excitedly. "Let's chair him and yank him down to the notice-board—make him put down his name now."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good wheeze!"

"Look here, you asses! What—Leggo!"

Despite his protestations, Tom Merry was lifted on high, and a triumphant procession escorted him down to Big Hall. Fellows came rushing from all sides as he was lowered before the notice-board. With flushed face and glistening eyes, Tom Merry wrote down his name underneath that of Figgins, amidst a roar of cheers.

Mr. Railton came rustling up, looking astonished and angry.

"Bless my soul! What does this disturbance mean, boys?"

"Tom Merry's standing again for the captaincy, sir!" said Talbot.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Railton, a trifle coldly. He glanced at Tom's name on the board, and then he glanced at Tom's flushed face. "Very well, I am glad he has done so, and we must have the election with as little delay as possible. It had better take place in Hall here at six o'clock this evening, boys. I will have a notice placed on the board to that effect at once!"

The Housemaster strode away, leaving the juniors in a buzz of excited discussion. But a minute later the bell for afternoon classes rang, and the crowd dispersed to their various Form-rooms.

That afternoon was a trying one for Figgins and the rest of the schemers. Classes seemed endless, and their one dread was that the plot might leak out. They knew Tom Merry would be furious were he to discover how he had been "tricked"—if it could be called that.

But six o'clock came at last, and it found Big Hall crowded with New House and School House fellows.

"Going to be a close fight!" commented Grundy. "My hat! What a worm that cad Figgins is to play a trick like this! I'm going to smash him to a jelly when this is over!"

There was a laugh from the fellows "in the know," and Grundy glared at them.

"It's nothing to cackle about!" he snorted indignantly.

"Figgins has let us down badly, and I'm blessed if I know why you fellows take it so calmly. You're as big a set of rotters as those New House sweeps! Anyway, whether Figgins gets in or not, I'm going to smash him to a jelly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You weally are a corkah, Gwundy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, laughing. "Hallo! Here is Wailton and Kildare!"

The Housemaster appeared on the platform at the end of Hall and silence reigned supreme.

"The election will only take a few moments, boys," he began quietly. "Two names have been handed in—Figgins, of the New House, and Merry, of the School House. The voting will be taken by a show of hands. I shall ask for votes for Figgins first, and then votes for Merry. Kildare and Darrell will count them."

The business proceeded at once, and there was no little excitement as Figgins' name was called, and the hands went up.

The buzz increased as Kildare and Darrell counted and compared notes. Then Tom Merry's turn came, and again Kildare and Darrell counted amidst breathless excitement. It was done at last.

Mr. Railton held up his hand for silence.

In cool tones he announced the result.

"Thomas Merry, Shell Form—Forty-one votes!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bwavo! Tom Mewwy wins!"

That was now a foregone conclusion.

"Silence!" called Mr. Railton. "George Figgins, Fourth Form—Twenty-five votes! Merry is therefore duly elected junior captain of St. Jim's. Boys, kindly dismiss with as little noise as possible."

Mr. Railton left the Hall, and Kildare and Darrell, smiling a little, followed him. There was silence for a moment, and then a wild roar.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Tom Merry's skipper again! Tom Merry for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

The Hall resounded with cheers as the juniors dismissed. Tom Merry left the Hall after shaking hands with the grinning Figgins, who did not seem at all disturbed or disappointed.

The fellows streamed out of Hall, Tom Merry, his face flushed with pleasure, surrounded by his own chums and supporters. They were all grinning very cheerfully indeed. After chatting for a little while in the Shell passage, Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy left the Shell fellows and went to their own quarters. In the Fourth Form passage a crowd of fellows were discussing the result gleefully.

"Wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "Ewewythin' is now all wight, deah boys!"

"Right as rain!" laughed Levison. "But mum's the word, remember, chaps. If Tom Merry ever gets to know—"

"He won't know from us!" grinned Blake. "Well, all's well that ends well!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! It all went off splendidly! Figgins is a vewy bwainy chap, and his wheeze was weally splendid, you know!"

"Well, don't gas about it now—the less said about it the better!" warned Blake. "You especially had better keep your chin still about it, Gussy!"

"Weally, there is no need whatever to tell me that, Blake!" said Gussy, with some warmth. "I fancy I am the last fellow who would be likely to let the secwet out. Howevah, it has all gone off vewy well. Tom Mewwy does not suspect— Bai Jove! What are you makin' faces at me for, Blake?"

"Shut up, you burbling chump!" hissed Blake. "Can't you—"

"Pway do not be wedic, Blake! I am not likely to disclose the secwet," said Arthur Augustus, blissfully ignorant of the fact that Tom Merry had just come along, and was standing behind him. He went on cheerily, blind to the frantic warnings of the fellows. "Tom Mewwy does not deem that it was all spoof, and that Figgins had no intention of bein' skippah! He would be vewy angwy if he did know that the election was solely to get him to stand again. But he shall nevah know frowm me, Blake. I do not suppose— Bai Jove! Whatevah is the mattah with you fellows— Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus jumped almost clear of the floor as he turned and sighted Tom Merry.

A sudden silence fell.

Tom Merry had heard every word—and it was only too plain that he understood. His face was dark and his eyes were gleaming.

"So it was all spoof, D'Arcy," he said in quiet, level tones. "The election was merely to force me to stand again. Figgins had no intention of being captain."

"Oh, bai Jove!" ejaculated the swell of the Fourth in utter dismay.

"I see it all now," went on Tom Merry. "I understand lots of things about the election that were puzzling me. I've been tricked—made a fool of! But you'll find that the scheme hasn't worked. You've tricked me into standing again, but you can't trick me into retaining the captaincy. Now I know the truth I'm going at once to resign again."

With that, Tom Merry strode away, his eyes gleaming with anger.

"Oh dear!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"That's done it!"

It undoubtedly had!

The dismayed juniors stared after Tom Merry, and then they looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

That junior fairly shrivelled up under the ferocious glares.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he mumbled. "Weally, how vewy unfortunate!"

"You—you— Oh, you footling idiot!" gasped Blake. "You—you howling jackass! You blithering lunatic!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You chump-headed gabbler!"

"You wooden-headed fumbler!"

"You chattering tailor's dummy!" gasped Monty Lowther, fairly stuttering with wrath. "You've mucked it all up—after all the trouble and scheming! You've spoilt the whole show. Tom Merry will keep his word now, and he'll resign. You—you— Oh, you—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, we'll smash him for this!" gasped Blake. "Bring him into the study—quick! We'll teach the footling idiot to keep his chin still in future! Yank him along!"

"Weally, Blake— Ow! Leggo, you feafuhl wuffians! Ow! Bai Jove— Yoooop!"

In the grasp of many hands, Arthur Augustus was rushed into Study No. 6, the crowd following to lend a hand. Then the hapless Gussy went to the carpet with a fearful bump, and the irate juniors swarmed over him. Lowther rushed to the cupboard without asking permission, and brought out jam and treacle. Digby got cinders from the fireplace, and Herries soot from the chimney. Blake grabbed the inkpots—one red and another blue—while Talbot obtained some gum, and Julian opened a cushion to get feathers in readiness.

During the next few moments Arthur Augustus had the time of his life.

He yelled with wrath and dismay as treacle, jam, gum, ink and feathers were tipped over his aristocratic head, and cinders and soot rubbed in his hair; but his yells went unheeded. Arthur Augustus was bumped and rolled, until he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels, and at last he was left, looking a weird and woeful sight, seated on the carpet and gasping as if for a wager.

Then, the lesson duly, dealt out to the hapless Arthur Augustus, the irate juniors went off to try to discover if the worst had happened.

It had! From Kildare they soon learned the news. Tom Merry had resigned again—he had kept his word. Figgins' great scheme had succeeded—and failed—thanks to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Once again the Lower School at St. Jim's was without a junior captain!

CHAPTER 7.

Cousin Ethel to the Rescue!

KNOCK!

Blake & Co. were busy at prep a little later, when a gentle knock sounded on the door of the study.

"Come in, fathead!" called Blake.

The "fathead" came in. It proved to be a pretty girl of about their own age, and at sight of her Jack Blake turned the colour of a freshly-boiled beetroot.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, jumping up from the table in astonishment and pleasure. "Cousin Ethel! Do come in, deah gal!"

Cousin Ethel—otherwise Miss Ethel Cleveland, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's cousin—came into the study, smiling. She shook hands with the juniors in turn. Blake's crimson face seeming to cause her no little amusement.

"I—I'm awfully sorry, Miss Cleveland!" gasped Blake, blushing furiously. "I thought it—it was some other fathead—I mean to say, one of the fellows. I hope you—"

"That is quite all right!" laughed Miss Ethel. "I quite understand! Please do not worry about that!"

"But why are you heah so late, Ethel?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "Have you had tea?"

"Yes—with Mrs. Holmes," smiled the juniors' girl chum. "I came to this study, but you were all busy electioneering, or something."

"Then—then can you stay for some supper with us—if you're staying overnight?"

"So sorry—no!" laughed Cousin Ethel. "I am staying at Abbotsford with a school friend, and really must rush back in a few minutes. I only called in just to see you all before going back."

"Oh!"

It was a chorus of disappointment.

"No, I won't even stay to sit down," went on the girl as Blake hastily remembered a chair. "But what is the matter with your hair and face, Arthur?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy blushed crimson as he remembered the gum and ink that still lingered on his person—though he had spent nearly an hour in the bathroom trying to remove all traces of his "lesson."

"I—I have had an accident, Ethel!" he stammered at last, glowering at Blake, who was chuckling. "Just a—little accident."

"He's been trying jam, and treacle, and ink as a new hair-wash, Miss Cleveland," explained Blake solemnly. "You see, we've been having an election—"

"Oh, I heard about that from Figgins! I met him in the quad some time since," said Miss Ethel, suddenly becoming serious. "I'm so sorry about Tom Merry. Do tell me all about it."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, glancing meaningly at his chums. "Pewwaps Ethel could help in this mattah. Tom Mewwy would take a lot of notice of what she says."

"Please tell me," said Miss Cleveland. "If I can help in any way—"

"My hat! I do believe you can!" said Blake impulsively. And he explained the full situation to the girl, who frowned slightly.

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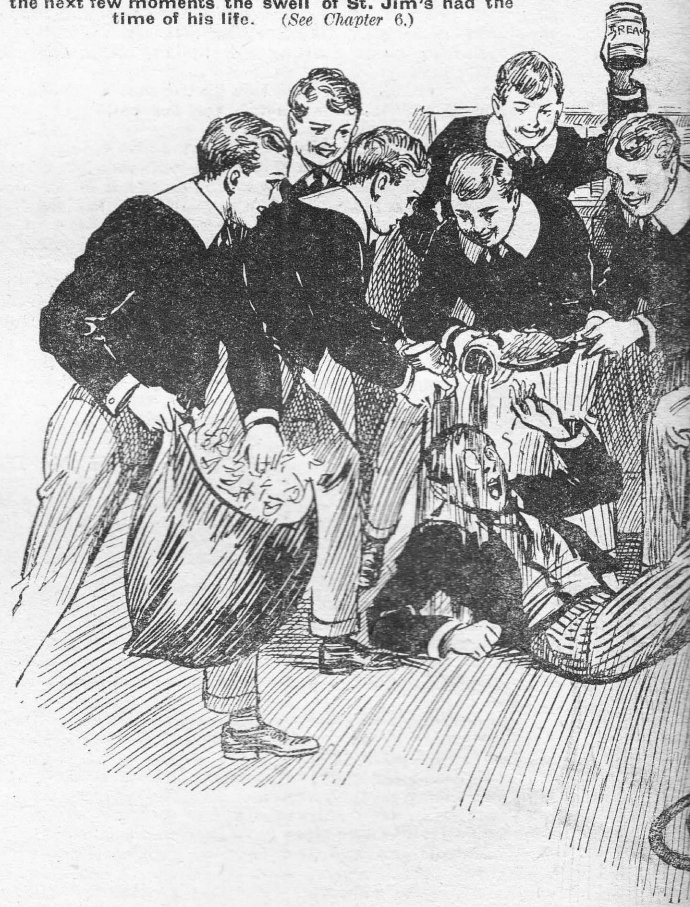
"How unfortunate!" she said slowly. "And Tom has now resigned again?"

"He's told Kildare," said Blake glumly. "But Railton's out, and the resignation can't be handed in again until he returns from Wayland."

"Then I will try and do my best," said Miss Ethel promptly. "I really must rush away now, but perhaps Tom would come with me to the station. I could then talk to him, and perhaps I could influence him."

"Bai Jove! That will be wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "I wanted to escort you to the station, Ethel, but—"

In the grasp of many hands, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went to the floor of Study No. 6 with a fearful bump. Lowther brought out jam and treacle from the study cupboard; Digby got cinders from the fireplace, and Herries soot from the chimney. Blake grabbed the inkpots—one red and another blue—while Julian opened a cushion to get feathers in readiness. During the next few moments the swell of St. Jim's had the time of his life. (See Chapter 6.)



"He'll have to get permission, of course," said Blake. "Dr. Holmes has already told me I may ask one of you," said the girl, with a smile. "I was going to ask Arthur, of course. But if he does not mind—"

"Not in the circs, of course!" said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "Tom Mewwy will be delighted, deah gal!"

"Yes, rather!" said Herries enviously.

"Very well. I will see him now, and do my very best," said Miss Ethel. "And now I really must rush off, or I shall miss my train at Rylcombe. Good-bye!"

She shook hands with the juniors, and hurried along to Study No. 10, which she had often visited before. And as Arthur Augustus had stated, Tom Merry was delighted at the opportunity of escorting the juniors' charming girl friend to the station, though he was greatly astonished at being asked in place of Arthur Augustus. It was not until the two were well away from the school that Cousin Ethel made her reason clear.

After discussing everyday matters, she suddenly changed the conversation.

"Tom Merry," she exclaimed seriously, "I expect you are

wondering why I asked you to come with me this evening."

"Well, I—I'm afraid I am!" gasped Tom, blushing in the dusk.

"I had a reason for it, and I'm going to be quite frank with you, Tom," said Cousin Ethel. "I want to talk to you about the captaincy."

"Oh!" gasped the junior. He understood now. "Oh! Blake and the others have—have told you?"

"Yes, and they've asked me to do my best to persuade you to take up your old position again—or, at least, not to resign it when Mr. Railton returns," explained Miss Ethel frankly. "You are so very popular, Tom—all the boys



want you back. And you are so good at games and sports and everything. Won't you try to please everybody and keep the position?"

"I—I can't!" gasped Tom. "A rotten trick was played on me. I can't after what has happened!"

"But think of the school!" said Cousin Ethel. "It was too bad of Figgins, I know. But he is a good sort, after all, and he did it for the best. And remember, he is very keen himself to be captain—I know that. It was very unselfish of him to do what he did."

"Well," admitted Tom hesitatingly, "I suppose it was. But—"

"It isn't a matter of personal things, however," went on the girl quietly. "The school is the main thing, isn't it? It's a fellow's duty to put the school first before his personal wishes and troubles."

"That—that's so," Tom was forced to admit.

"And then," said Cousin Ethel, playing her trump-card, "there is your aunt, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. You know how proud she has always been of you, how proud she always was of your being the junior captain of St. Jim's."

Tom Merry was silent now.

"It will upset her very much when she learns what has happened," pursued the girl, as she saw the effect of her words. "She is coming to the school shortly—I know that. She will be very hurt and disappointed when she knows you have resigned of your own free will, Tom. Why not sink these personal differences, and let her come and take pleasure in her pride in you? If not for her sake, then for the good of St. Jim's."

Cousin Ethel paused, and for some moments the two walked on in silence. Then Tom Merry spoke:

"Very well, Ethel," he said, a trifle huskily. "I—I know I have been sulking, and have been in the wrong. I won't resign now. I'm glad you've made me see what an awful sulky ass I was. Thank you!"

"You will not resign, then?"

"No; I'll tell Kildare I've changed my mind, and the result of the election can stand," said Tom clearly.

"Oh, good!" said Cousin Ethel boyishly. "I'm so glad! It's awfully good of you to take notice of me! And now shall we talk of other things?"

And they talked of other things until the station was reached. There Tom shook hands warmly, and after seeing the train out of the station he returned to St. Jim's in the gathering darkness. He still felt a trifle angry with Blake & Co., but he felt curiously light-hearted and relieved for all that. His decision had raised a load from his mind, for he had secretly known that he was acting unreasonably.

In the School House hallway he met Blake & Co., who were obviously waiting for him to come in.

"You—you saw Cousin Ethel off?" asked Blake carelessly.

"Yes. I've also told her that I've changed my mind about resigning," said Tom Merry bluntly. "So your little game has worked, Blake."

"Oh!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Good, Tom Mewwy!"

"But I shan't forget that trick in a hurry, for all that!" snapped Tom.

And turning on his heel, he walked away swiftly. But Blake & Co. did not trouble now. All was serene again—Tom Merry was still junior captain.

But they forgot the saying that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip!

CHAPTER 8.

Trimble Tries It On!

"IT'S all rot!" scoffed Trimble.

"Oh, dry up," said Wildrake, "and let a chap get on with his prep, old lard-barrel!"

"It's all rot!" went on Trimble, ignoring Wildrake.

"If Tom Merry doesn't want to be skipper, why the thump should anybody trouble? I've a jolly good mind to put up myself!"

"You fat ass!"

"You shut up, Mellish!" said Trimble. "I'd make as good a skipper as Tom Merry any day!"

"As good a kipper, did you say?" asked Wildrake.

"No; as good a skipper!" snorted Trimble. "Here we are, in the same position as before. Tom Merry's been to Kildare, I believe, and resigned again. That ass D'Arcy fairly mucked things up, didn't he?"

"He's a bigger ass than you, and that's saying a lot!" agreed Wildrake. "Now stop wagging your fat chin, for goodness' sake!"

"But the matter's serious," said Trimble. "I'm not going to put up myself. I could do the job, I know. But Railton's an ass. He wouldn't let me stand before, and the fellows are all frightfully jealous of my abilities."

"At grub-shifting?" asked Wildrake.

"No; in every way—games and sports especially," said Trimble. "Well, as I say, I'm not standing for the job. But I bet I could make Tom Merry stand again if I wanted to."

"Oh, rats!"

"That ass D'Arcy tried it on, and so did Grundy," went on Trimble. "Grundy tried to hypnotise Merry into taking on the job again—the awful ass! Well, if I tried I could do it easily."

"Ret!" sniffed Mellish. "Cheese it, you fat ass!"

"I bet you a bob I could!" grinned Trimble. "I've got a ripping wheeze, and if it doesn't come off I'll eat my hat!"

"Will you dry up and let a fellow get on with his prep?" hooted Wildrake, in great wrath.

"Blessed if you fellows aren't as jealous as the rest of them!" grunted Trimble. "You won't even listen to a chap when he wants to explain a ripping wheeze. Now—Here, what are you going to do with that ruler?"

"Lay it about a fat gas-bag!" growled Wildrake, gripping the long ebony ruler ferociously. "Perhaps this will make you stop wagging your chin! Take that!"

"Yoooooop!"

Trimble howled, and made a wild leap for the door, the ruler just missing him by inches as he vanished through it. Wildrake slammed the door shut after him, and the key clicked home in the lock. Then Wildrake resumed his prep.

Out in the passage Baggy Trimble stopped to regain his breath.

"The rotten beast!" he snorted. "Now I can't get on with my prep. Never mind. I'm jolly well going to try my stunt on, and see if I can't succeed where those asses have failed. If I can manage to wangle Tom Merry back into his job the fellows are bound to be grateful! They'll stomp up all round, and stand me no end of feeds! My hat! I'm trying it on!"

Trimble grinned, and went along to the Housemaster's study. He knew Mr. Railton was not likely to be back before eight o'clock—indeed, he had overheard the Housemaster impart that information to Mr. Lathom. He pushed open the door of the study and looked in.

The room was lit only by the flickering firelight, and after a quick glance round him, Baggy Trimble crept in and closed the door. Then he switched on the electric light and went over to the desk, which was covered with examination papers and other documents and letters.

After rummaging about in drawers of the desk, Trimble soon found what he wanted—a sheet of Mr. Railton's notepaper. It was a special kind of paper, well known to all at St. Jim's, and Mr. Railton usually typed his notes and letters upon it.

The Housemaster's typewriter stood on a table by the window, and Trimble carried it over to the desk and inserted the sheet of notepaper.

He had just done so when a step sounded outside, and, with a gasp of alarm, Trimble shot beneath the table, like a frightened rabbit.

The door opened after a knock, and Tom Merry looked in. He glanced round and went out again.

"Blow him!" grunted Trimble. "Scaring a chap like that!"

Trimble proceeded to type, wasting several sheets of paper before he was satisfied. When he had finished, at last, the note he had typed read as follows:

"To Tom Merry, Shell Form,—Please noat that your resignation is not aksepted by me. The time of masters and prefects cannot be waisted to please you, a boy in the Shell. The results of the election must stand, and I order you to remane in your position of junior captain of St. Jim's. If you mension the matter to me again you will be severaly punished.

"(Signed) VICTOR RAILTON,
"Housemaster."

Trimble signed Mr. Railton's name quite calmly—writing another person's signature was a trifle light as air to the fat Fourth-Former. Then he glanced over the note cheerfully and with satisfaction.

"Good! That should do the trick!" he murmured. "That ass Tom Merry won't dare to speak to Railton about it now, for fear of being severely punished. He, he, he! I'll just— Oh!"

Again there came the sound of footsteps in the passage. They stopped outside the door. With a gasp, Trimble gave a hasty jerk to the inksand, which he was just replacing on the table, behind the typewriter. Unfortunately, he was a bit too hasty. His sleeve caught in the keys of the typewriter, and the next moment—

Crash!
The inksand crashed to the table, shooting its contents of blue-black and red inks over the papers, and documents, and letters. Ink streamed over the desk, splashed on the study carpet, and dripped from the typewriter.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Trimble.
It all happened in a flash, and just then the door-knob was turned, following a knock. Trimble gave another gasp, and, cramming the note he had written—now half swamped in ink—into his trousers pocket, he dived once again beneath the table.

He had scarcely reached concealment when the door opened. This time it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who looked in. The swell of the Fourth glanced round the room. For a moment he stood undecided, as if wondering whether to wait or not, and then he went to the door again, almost bumping into Tom Merry, who came along just then.

"Mr. Railton back yet, Gussy?" asked Tom briefly.
"I am afraid not, deah boy! As I want to get on with my lines, I must wush off, howevah."

"I'll wait, I think," said Tom.
Arthur Augustus hurried away, and Tom entered the

study. He gave a jump as he sighted the havoc wrought on the desk.

"M-my hat!" he gasped, in some alarm. "Who the thump— Oh, it must be that awful ass, Gussy! No wonder he was in a hurry to get away! Well, my only hat!"

Tom Merry frowned, not a little astonished that Arthur Augustus, after doing such damage, would run away, not daring to face the music. It was rather surprising, Tom reflected, and he had not expected a fellow like Gussy to do such a thing. Somebody else might easily get blamed for it.

"The—the silly chump!" gasped Tom to himself. "He ought to have stayed and owned up! This isn't like Gussy, anyway!"

Tom waited; not for the moment thinking about his own position. He wanted to see Mr. Railton as soon as possible, for Kildare, he had learned, had already told the Housemaster, before he went out, of Tom Merry's decision to resign again from the captaincy. And Tom was anxious to see Mr. Railton, to tell him of his change of mind. Railton would be waxy, of course. Still, it had to be gone through.

As he stood in deep thought, not quite certain now whether to wait or not, and not a little disturbed regarding Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, a step sounded in the passage—a firm, heavy tread.

As he expected, it proved to be Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster came in, and he stared at Tom Merry.
"You wish to see me, Merry?" he said coldly. "Kildare has already told me of your extraordinary wish to resign again— Ah! Why—what—"

The Housemaster's eyes had fallen upon his desk.

He stared at it in utter amazement at first, and then his eyes went hard, and he turned upon Tom Merry. That junior flushed crimson under his icy glance.

"Have you done this, Merry?" he said, in cold, steel-like tones.

"Me?" gasped Tom, quite taken aback. "Certainly not, sir! It was—I—I—I—"

"I demand the truth, Merry!" snapped Mr. Railton angrily. "If you have not done it, then who has? How long have you been in this room?"

"Only a couple of minutes, sir," gasped Tom, his face crimson.

"For what reason did you come here?"

"I—I came to tell you I'd reconsidered my decision about the junior captaincy, sir," said Tom. "I have decided that I will accept the result of the election."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Railton bitingly. "But the final decision regarding that must remain with me, Merry. A boy who can play such a despicable and mean action as this," said the Housemaster, pointing to the desk, "can never be allowed to remain junior captain of St. Jim's."

"You—you think I did that, sir?" gasped Tom, going suddenly white.

"What else am I to think?" said Mr. Railton. "Have you seen any other boy or boys in here, Merry?"

Tom Merry hesitated, and the Housemaster's face darkened. To him the junior's hesitation could mean only one thing.

"I am waiting, Merry. Have you any knowledge of any other boy visiting this study this evening?"

Tom Merry felt a sudden feeling of despair. Yet he was the last fellow to dream of mentioning D'Arcy's name.

"I can't answer that question, sir," he said. "But—but I didn't do it. I'll swear to that, sir!"

"I am afraid that I cannot accept your word, Merry," snapped Mr. Railton, his jaw setting strangely. "I find you here alone, apparently just leaving the room. You hesitate strangely when I ask you if anyone else has been here. You are perfectly well-aware that nobody else has."

"Sir!"

"Until recently," went on the Housemaster grimly, "I had every faith in you, Merry. I considered you one of the best and most honourable boys in this school. But of late I have had cause to wonder if I have been right. Since you resigned the captaincy, some weeks ago, you have been sullen and resentful—especially towards myself, your Housemaster. You have also been unruly and troublesome in every way. You appear to have set yourself to cause as much trouble as possible to those in authority. And now—this!"

And the Housemaster pointed to the havoc on the desk.
"You are unjust, sir!" said Tom Merry indignantly, his face crimson with bitter anger.

"What? Merry, how dare you?"

"I don't care, sir," said Tom Merry passionately. "I did not do it, and you ought to believe me. You have never found me out in a lie. I didn't do it! I had only just come in, and I found it just as it is now. Someone else has done it!"

Mr. Railton pursed his lips, obviously still unmoved.

"I regret that I cannot accept your word, Merry," he said icily. "You may go now, and I will send for you later. I am more grieved than I can say to discover such mean spitefulness in a boy whom I had always held in the highest estimation."

"I—I tell you, sir—" burst out Tom. But the House-master waved his hand.

"That will do, Merry—go! This matter will be gone into later. Your resignation of the captaincy must stand now, of course. It is impossible for you to remain in any position of responsibility whatever. Go!"

Tom Merry went, his face flushed with anger and utter dismay and indignation.

Mr. Railton stood for a moment, eyeing the ink-splashed desk and papers. He noted the typewriter, and frowned thoughtfully and in a puzzled manner. Then he switched off the light and left the room, his overcoat still on his arm.

His footsteps died away, and then Baggy Trimble cautiously crept out from underneath the table. His face was almost like chalk, and his heart was palpitating against his fat ribs.

"Ow! Oh!" he gasped. "What a jolly narrow escape! Good job I wasn't spotted, anyway. Here goes!"

And Trimble stepped softly to the door, and peered cautiously out. Then he took to his heels and fled. He had not accomplished what he had set out to do in Mr. Railton's study. But he felt he had done quite enough there already. Actually he had done too much. This time it was Trimble's fault that St. Jim's still remained without a junior captain.

CHAPTER 9.

Trouble!

"**H** ALLO! Here he is!" Lowther spoke cheerfully, though his voice sounded just a trifle uneasy and uncertain.

Behind Lowther were Manners and Blake, and D'Arcy and Digby and Herries. They had just arrived at the door of Study No. 10, and Lowther referred to Tom Merry as he looked in at the door.

Tom was seated before the fire. The gas was not lit, and the firelight cast flickering shadows round the study. Tom Merry's face was pale and set. The juniors could see that clearly, and it did not look a hopeful sign.

Tom Merry's chums were on an errand of conciliation. They knew he was still in a resentful frame of mind over the way in which he had been tricked into standing for re-election, but they hoped to make their peace with him. The sight of his grim-set features, however, was not very encouraging.

Yet Lowther tried hard to speak cheerily.

As his chum did not answer, Lowther crossed to the gas and lit it. Tom Merry stood up.

"Here you are, Tommy," said Lowther. "You've been to Railton?"

Tom nodded.

"You've told him you mean to stick to the captaincy?"

Again Tom nodded.

"Good man!" said Lowther heartily.

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway cheer up, deah boy! We have come to apologise for that little dodge we played you ovah the election, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus gracefully and sincerely; "and we weally do twust you will not be watty about it aftah this."

"We hope not," said Blake. "It was rather a questionable dodge," admitted Blake. "But—"

"It was necessary," said Herries.

"For the good of St. Jim's," added Digby.

"Let's be happy now, and let bygones be bygones," said Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"But I'm not junior captain," said Tom, speaking at last.

"Bai Jove!"

"You—you're not? But you said—"

"I told Railton I was willing to allow the election result to stand. But Railton wasn't. He's kicked me out of the job!" said Tom, with a mirthless laugh. "So all your trouble, and all Cousin Ethel's trouble, has gone for nothing."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"But—but—"

"Something's happened," said Tom, eyeing the astonished Arthur Augustus steadily. "D'Arcy here knows what that is."

"Bai Jove! Pway what do you mean, deah boy?"

"Do you want me to speak about it before these fellows?" said Tom curtly.

"You can speak about whatevah you like befoah these

fellows, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with some dignity, not at all liking Tom's tone. "What is the mattah?"

"You know what the matter is," retorted Tom. "Are you going to bluff it out—to deny it?"

"Bai Jove! What is the feahful ass talkin' about?"

"I'm talking about what you did in Railton's room!" snapped Tom, unable to keep it back any longer. "You upset that ink over his desk and all over his papers. It's done a lot of damage to exam papers and other things. You were afraid to stay and face the music, whether you did it by accident or not."

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"I wondered why you were in such a hurry to get away from the study," went on Tom, his eyes gleaming scornfully. "I saw the moment I got into the room, though. I suppose it didn't occur to you that someone else might be blamed for it, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus eyed him in wonder, though his own temper was rising at the scorn in Tom's voice and looks.

"I still do not undahstand you, Tom Mewwy," he said indignantly. "You say that someone has upset ink ovah Mr. Wailton's desk?"

"Yes."

"And—and you think I have done it?" asked Gussy hotly.

"Naturally. I'd already been in the room several minutes before. After that I stood chatting to Darrell at the end of the corridor. If anyone else had been to Mr. Railton's room in the meantime, I must have spotted him. But nobody else did, and the damage wasn't done when I was in the room the first time. Now do you deny it, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus stood silent for a moment. The others looked on in stupefied amazement, and with distress showing on their faces.

"Tommy—" began Lowther pleadingly.

"Let D'Arcy answer for himself," said Tom. "I've been blamed by Railton for it. It means a flogging for me from the Head for it, for a thing I haven't done. Is it likely I should say nothing about it?"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Blake. "And—and you think Gussy did it?"

"Of course. You heard what I said. Who else could have done it?"

"And you think he ran away, leaving someone else to get the blame?" said Blake, his eyes gleaming.

(Continued on next page.)

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Tom Merry hesitated a moment, and then he nodded.

"I can see nothing else for it," he answered quietly. "Ask D'Arcy why he hurried away?"

"Bai Jove!" The swell of the Fourth seemed unable to say little else. "Bai Jove!"

"You—you are a thumping ass, Tom Merry!" said Jack Blake, speaking deliberately. "I don't believe old Gussy did anything of the kind, either by accident or otherwise. And as for running away, and leaving someone else to face the music—tell that to the marines! Gussy couldn't do it, and you're a howling rotter to suggest it!"

"Hold on! Peace!" pleaded Monty Lowther. "There must be some mistake somewhere. For goodness' sake, don't squabble about it yet!"

"There's no mistake!" snapped Tom Merry deliberately. "D'Arcy did it. And he ran away rather than face the music!"

Smack!

There was only one thing that could happen after those words of Tom Merry's, and it did happen. D'Arcy's open palm smacked home on Tom Merry's cheek, and sent him reeling back. Then, his eyes blazing with fury, he flung himself at D'Arcy.

The next moment they were fighting furiously.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake. "This is awful! Lowther—Manners, help me to separate 'em. We can't have this!"

He rushed at D'Arcy and grabbed him in an effort to stop the fight. At the same moment Lowther and Manners jumped forward to grasp the raging Tom Merry.

A wild, whirling struggle followed, all of the juniors getting damaged more or less in the melee. But as the rest stepped in to help, the fight was soon brought to an end.

With Lowther and Manners holding Tom Merry back, and Blake, Herries, and Digby grasping the indignant and raging Gussy, the two combatants could only eye each other wolfishly.

"No, you don't!" said Lowther soothingly, as Tom Merry strained to break free. "This won't do at all. Tommy, old man, chuck it! There must be a mistake somewhere. And you can't scrap in here. You'll have the beaks here, and that will only make matters worse."

"That's it," said Blake, looking very grave and concerned indeed. "Chuck it, Gussy! If you must fight, you can have it out in the gym with the gloves on."

"I'm ready!" snapped Tom Merry. "I didn't mean to make a row like this. But I couldn't stand that fellow denying the truth like that."

"It isn't the truth!" shouted Arthur Augustus, who had quite lost all his usual repose. "I tell you I never did it, Tom Mewwy, you feahful wottah! I know nothin' at all about it."

"Rot!" snapped Tom. "Well, I'll settle this with you any time you like. And if you still mean to bluff it out with the beaks—well, you can do so. I shan't give you away, you may be sure of that. Now get out of my study, and take your pals with you! I suppose they're going to back you up in this?"

"Yes, we jolly well are!" snorted Blake angrily. "You're a howling cad, Tom Merry, to come here with such rotten lies! We'll go all right, but we've finished with you after this; and if you lick Gussy, then I'll have a go at you!"

"And so will I!" snapped Herries.

"Same here!" said Digby angrily. "Come on, Gussy! Let's get out of this!"

And with that Blake & Co. escorted the raging Arthur Augustus out of Study No. 10. The unthinkable had happened. A split had formed in that staunch band of chums, known all over the school as Tom Merry & Co., and it looked like being a very serious split. And how it was going to end none of them knew.

CHAPTER 10.

A Split in the Co.!

THERE was plenty of excitement in the School House at St. Jim's for the remainder of that evening.

The story of what had happened in Mr. Railton's study—and its sequel—was soon on every tongue. The fact that Tom Merry & Co. had quarrelled, and that there was the possibility of a fight between D'Arcy and Tom Merry seemed scarcely believable.

Yet it was undoubtedly true. The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. were not on speaking terms. The news caused great astonishment and no little regret amongst their numerous friends, both in the School House and New House.

As regards the identity of the culprit who had upset the ink over Mr. Railton's desk there were not two opinions. Few thought it was an accident, and few believed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had done it. There was no motive in his case. And everyone knew of the resentment and bitterness between Tom Merry and his Housemaster.

Of Tom Merry's guilt there seemed little room for doubt. It was not like him at all, for all agreed that it was a

mean and caddish trick. But Tom Merry had not been himself for some weeks. He had done it, and it was amazing and rather "thick" that he had also tried to throw the blame upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

That afternoon, and early that evening the fellows had been clamouring for Tom Merry's return as junior captain. He had been at the height of his popularity. Now, in a few short hours, there was a great change of feeling in the Lower School.

Just before nine o'clock on the following morning Mr. Railton sent for Tom Merry.

"Well, Merry," said the Housemaster, as the junior stood, his face pale and set, before his desk, "you have had the night to think this matter over. I trust you have now something to say to me—a confession to make?"

"I have nothing to say, sir!" said Tom quietly.

"You refuse to admit that you were guilty of wanton damage in my study last evening?"

"I have nothing to confess, sir!"

"Very well!" The Housemaster pursed his lips. "I am sorry for your own sake that you are obstinate, Merry. Had you confessed of your own accord I would have punished you myself and the matter would have ended there. As it is, I have no course left other than to report the matter to Dr. Holmes and request him to deal with you as you deserve."

"Very good, sir," said Tom Merry in level tones. "I am ready to go before Dr. Holmes, Mr. Railton. I shall be sure of justice from him."

The Housemaster's face flushed with anger.

"Insolence will not help you, Merry!" he snapped. "I can see now that—"

Knock!

It was a knock at the door, and in response to Mr. Railton's call a junior entered, closing the door behind him. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and his face was flushed. He did not look at Tom Merry.

"Well, D'Arcy?"

"It—it is about Tom Mewwy, sir!" began the swell of the Fourth. "I wish to make a statement in regard to the mattah!"

"What do you know regarding it, D'Arcy?" demanded the Housemaster.

"I know nothin' wegardin' the actual cwime, sir," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "But I undahstand that the evidence against Mewwy is merely that he was discovered comin' out of this study."

"That," said Mr. Railton, "coupled with the knowledge that there is motive for what he has done. He has been resentful and insolent to me, his Housemaster. But why do you ask this, D'Arcy? If you have any knowledge—"

"I know nothin', sir," said Gussy. "But I felt bound to come and explain that I also was in your study last evenin'. Tom Mewwy met me as I was comin' out. I came to ask you if you would allow my lines to remain ovah until this mornin' as I had got behind with them."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, eyeing Arthur Augustus in amazement. "Did you see—"

"I saw nothin' at all, sir! I did not even glance at your desk. But I feel bound to explain this, to show that if the evidence is merely that Tom Mewwy was known to have visited the study, then I am equally undah suspicion."

"Bless my soul! I cannot believe, D'Arcy, that you could possibly have had a hand in such a mean action."

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, sir!" said Gussy in some alarm. "I know nothin' whatevah about it. I merely came to show that othah fellows may have done it."

"Ah! You are a great friend of Merry's, D'Arcy?"

"I was, sir!" corrected Gussy, glancing at Tom for the first time. "But we are fwiends no longah."

"How is that?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"Because he had the awful cheek to charge me with havin' done that damage on your desk!" he said at last indignantly. "Natuwally, I wesented it, and we quawwelled."

Mr. Railton frowned as he glanced from Tom Merry's set face to the flushed countenance of Arthur Augustus.

"This has surprised me very much," he said at last.

"Does this explain why you refused to say whether you had seen any other boy in my study last evening, Merry?"

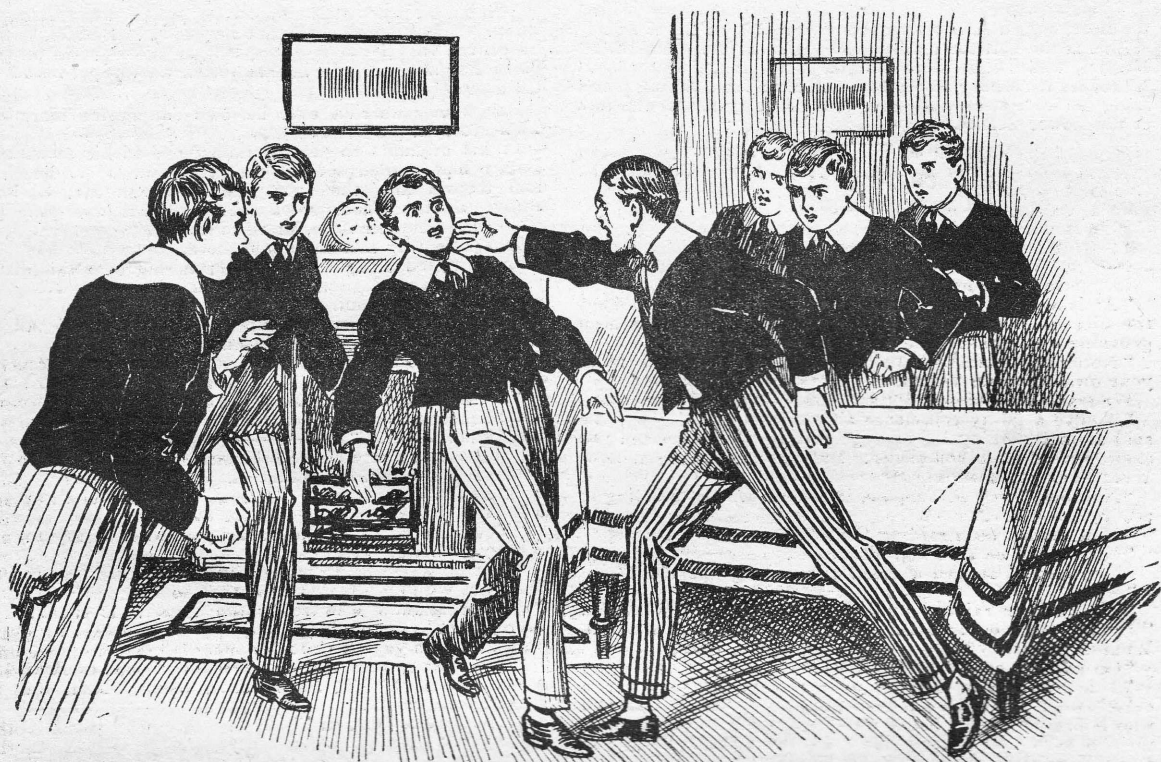
"Yes, sir!"

"You wished to shield D'Arcy?"

"I suppose so, sir!"

"Yet you have charged D'Arcy with the offence! It is very strange indeed!" said Mr. Railton, biting his lip in his perplexity. "Yet D'Arcy has no motive, so far as I am aware, to show spite or to do me an injury. In your case it is different. In your manner and in your actions you have shown obstinacy and sullen resentment. Moreover, D'Arcy states that the damage was not done when he visited the study—or, rather, that he did not see it. And I myself met you when you were about to leave the study."

"Yes, sir!"



"There's no mistake!" snapped Tom Merry deliberately. "D'Arcy did it! And he ran away rather than face the music!" Smack! Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's open palm smacked home on Tom Merry's cheek and sent him reeling back. (See Chapter 9).

"I am sorry I cannot accept your word, Merry. I still believe you are responsible!" ended the Housemaster coldly. "I will give you until six o'clock this evening. If you have not confessed by that time I must take you before Dr. Holmes and request him to punish you. You may both go!"

The juniors left the study. Tom Merry was striding away without a glance at D'Arcy, but the latter caught him by the arm.

"One moment, Tom Mewwy!"

"What is it?" said Tom curtly.

"I wegwet vewy much what has happened!" said Arthur Augustus in frigid tones. "And I am weady to believe that you did not do that damage to Mr. Wailton's desk."

"You can keep your regrets and beliefs!" snapped Tom. "I want to have nothing to do with a rotter who lets the blame for his own dirty trick fall on another fellow's shoulders!"

"Bai Jove! Do you wish me to stwike you heah, Tom Mewwy?"

"You can strike me where the thump you like," said Tom disdainfully. "I shall hit back. As for the fight—well, I am ready to meet you at any time. We can arrange that now, for that matter. What about behind the boathouse after afternoon classes?"

"That will suit me quite well, Tom Mewwy!" returned Arthur Augustus haughtily. "I shall do my best to teach you not to call me a liah and to charge me with wotten, mean twicks like that. Behind the boathouse aftah afternoon classes, then!"

With that Arthur Augustus strode away, his noble head in the air. Tom Merry returned slowly to Study No. 10.

"Well?" demanded Lowther as he entered. "How did you go on?"

Tom Merry laughed bitterly.

"Just as I expected to go on!" he retorted. "Railton's got his knife into me. He wants to believe me guilty, and he sticks to it that I am guilty. He won't give me a chance!"

And Tom related what had happened in the Housemaster's study.

"Phew!" exclaimed Lowther, when he had finished. "That's queer, and no mistake. If D'Arcy did it, then why should he rush there and tell Railton he was on the spot? I tell you there's a big mistake somewhere, Tommy."

"There's no mistake at all!" said Tom angrily. "D'Arcy did it. It wasn't done when I entered the study the first time, and I saw nobody go in while I was talking to Darrell. Only D'Arcy could have done it. Anyway, I'm fighting the cad this evening, and I mean to hammer him until he owns up to the truth."

"Look here, Tom," said Lowther, with an uneasy glance at Manners, "this won't do! We believe you, and we're backing you up—you know that! But there must be some blunder somewhere. I can't see old Gussy doing it."

"Nor can I!" said Manners quietly.

"Then I'm the liar!" said Tom Merry, eyeing his chums with angry face and blazing eyes. "I'm the liar and I did it, then, in your opinion?"

"Rot! You know perfectly well that we don't think so!" said Lowther pleadingly. "For goodness' sake don't quarrel with us, Tommy. We think there's a mistake somewhere—someone else must have done it. And we don't want that fight to take place."

"It's going to take place!" shouted Tom.

"Then postpone it for a bit! Something may come out yet!"

"Something won't come out!" said Tom savagely. "D'Arcy did it, and he means to bluff it out, the mean cad! I'm going to thrash him this evening, and nothing will stop me."

Lowther and Manners said nothing more regarding it. They changed the subject promptly then. They could see that nothing would turn their chum from his purpose.

In Study No. 6 a somewhat similar conversation was going on.

"It beats me hollow," Jack Blake was saying glumly. "I simply can't believe Tom Merry did it—or, if he did, that he'd be such a cad as to deny it, and let suspicion fall on anyone else!"

"Same here!" agreed Herries. "There must be something wrong somewhere. Gussy, old man, why not drop the idea of a fight? Tom Merry didn't mean what he said!"

"Of course not!" said Digby. "Chuck it, Gussy! It won't do any good!"

"Only make matters worse!" agreed Blake. "Call it off, Gussy. Besides, he's bound to lick you!"

"I have no intention of callin' it off, Jack Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, his eyes gleaming with determination. "I have told Mewwy that I am weady to believe he did not do it. In return, he has stated again to my face that he believes I did it. He has called me a liah, and he has charged me with a wotten, mean action. I have no othah wecourse than to give the wottah a feahful thwashin'!"

"But—"

"I do not feah him at all!" continued Gussy grimly. "He is not bound to lick me, and I have no intention of allowin' him to. I shall lick him, and shall thwash him until he apologises for his wotten conduct."

"But listen, old man—"

"I wefuse to listen! I am goin' to fight Mewwy behind the boathouse affah lessons this aftahnoon. That is final!" And as the bell for morning school rang just then, Blake, Herries, and Digby were obliged to let it go at that. It looked as if nothing would stop the fight from taking place. Long before classes were over that morning it was the talk of the Lower School.

CHAPTER 11. Baggy is Worried!

"O H dear!" Baggy Trimble groaned. Wildrake, who was sitting at the study table, looked up at him blankly.

"At it again?" he said, staring at the fat youth. "What the dickens is the matter with you, Fatty? You've been greaning and looking like a moulting owl all day."

"Nothing!" mumbled Baggy. "You jolly well mind your own business, Wildrake!"

Wildrake eyed him steadily.

"You've a guilty conscience about something, Baggy," he said at last, shaking his head severely. "It's not often you show you've got a conscience. But you're showing it now. What have you been up to?"

"Nothing!" gasped Trimble, in some alarm. "Nothing at all, you silly ass!"

"You haven't been raiding the school larder?"

"No. Don't be an idiot, Wildrake!"

"You haven't robbed a bank, or anything like that?"

"Rats!"

"You've been raiding studies—that's it!" said Wildrake. "Though that doesn't usually make you conscience-stricken. What is it, Baggy?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I heard Levison kicking up a row yesterday about a cake," went on Wildrake remorselessly. "If it was you who boned it—and I bet it was—then I advise you to own up and take your licking like a little fat man. Then you won't be conscience-stricken any longer."

"Oh, rats! You're a silly ass, Wildrake!"

Having given his opinion of his study-mate, Baggy Trimble sniffed and rolled out of the study. As a matter of fact, Baggy was feeling a trifle conscience-stricken, and he didn't feel like facing Wildrake's accusing eyes any longer.

In the ordinary way Baggy Trimble never gave anyone cause to suspect that he had a conscience. Long-continued abuse had almost completely killed any conscience he ever had. If he raided a study cupboard and left it bare, the despair and dismay of the cupboard's owners never troubled him in the slightest.

Strange to say, this affair of Tom Merry's had. Trimble was the culprit, and Tom Merry was going to be flogged for the crime. Moreover, the affair had parted erstwhile chums, and Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry were going to fight over it. And it was all Trimble's fault.

Hardened as he was, the fat Fourth-Former could not help seeing that and feeling a trifle remorseful. And Trimble had reason to feel worried as well. All that day he had worried and groaned at the unexpected result of his accident in Mr. Railton's study. He almost wished now that he had showed himself and owned up to it. But he dared not do so now—in fact, he knew he could never have dared to do so.

But he was worried and conscience-stricken—to some extent.

"Oh dear!" he groaned, as he rolled away from his study. "How I wish it hadn't happened! Besides, it may be proved that I did it even yet! If those sheets of notepaper I spoiled are still in that rotten wastepaper-basket—Oh dear!"

Baggy was worried over his own danger far more than Tom Merry's.

In his attempts to get the note typed to his satisfaction Baggy had spoiled several sheets of notepaper, which he had thrown into the wastepaper-basket in Mr. Railton's study. If those sheets were found, then it was quite possible the crime might be traced to him.

The possibility made Trimble shiver. As he rolled along the passage thinking over this dismal reflection, Mr. Railton himself came striding along the corridor towards him.

Baggy took a deep breath, and, plucking up all his courage, he stopped the Housemaster.

"Can—can I speak to you a moment, sir?" he stammered.

"Very well, Trimble. What is it?"

"It—it's about the affair of Tom Merry, sir!" gasped Trimble, regretting his rashness now he was face to face with the Housemaster. "I—I—I—"

"If you know anything of the matter, Trimble—"

"I—I know nothing about it, of course, sir!" gasped Trimble, in great alarm. "I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing! I like you too much for that, sir!"

"You absurd boy! What do you wish to say to me? Kindly be brief."

"I—I only wanted to make a suggestion, sir," stammered Trimble, wishing heartily now that he had left well alone. "I think I know who really did it, sir. It wasn't Tom Merry, sir!"

Mr. Railton gave a start. "You know who did it, Trimble?" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Tell me at once, then! If it was not Merry, who was it?"

"Mrs. Mimms' cat, sir!"

"What?"

"That's that, sir!" gasped Trimble. "It must have been M-mum-mrs. Mimms' cat! The—the House-dame's cat, you know, sir!"

"You utterly absurd boy! How dare you stop me to make such a ridiculous suggestion!" snapped the Housemaster.

"I—I think it must have been, sir!" said Trimble, fairly trembling under the keen glance of Mr. Railton. "You—you see, sir, I happened to be passing, sir, and I saw Mrs. M-mimms' cat come out of your study, sir—last evening, sir. So—so I thought the cat might have upset that ink over your desk, sir!"

The Housemaster's eyes searched Trimble's face, and then he smiled grimly.

"You are an extraordinary boy, Trimble," he said at last. "It is thoughtful of you to make the suggestion. But the idea is absurd. No cat could have caused such havoc, and, in any case, it could not have carried my typewriter over from the side-table to the desk. Whoever moved my typewriter is undoubtedly the guilty person. I am afraid your suggestion cannot be taken into consideration, Trimble."

And, with a grimly-amused smile, the Housemaster walked on.

"Oh dear!" groaned Trimble. "Oh, my hat!"

His little suggestion had failed. Trimble wondered now how he could have dared to make it to the Housemaster. He was sorry now that he had, and thus brought himself under Mr. Railton's notice.

And that remark about the typewriter! It made Trimble shiver.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Trimble. "Supposing he finds those blessed sheets of paper in the basket! Nobody can prove it was me, of course. But—but—"

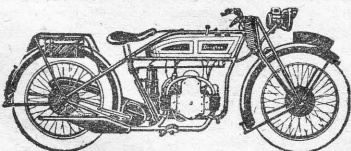
The danger was undoubtedly there. After reflecting for some moments Trimble came to a sudden, desperate resolve, and then he hurried along to the Housemaster's study. Mr. Railton had been coming away from his study, and Trimble guessed he had gone to see the Head about something.

The door was half-open, and, pushing it wide, Trimble slipped inside, closing the door after him. A moment later he was rummaging in the wastepaper-basket frantically, his heart thumping against his fat ribs.

Trimble had hoped to find the basket empty, cleared by the maid when she tidied the room that morning. But it had obviously not yet been cleared.

Almost at once he found one of the spoiled sheets, and then the next moment he found another. Both he crammed into his trousers-pocket, and continued the search. He was engrossed in his task when a step sounded in the passage outside, and before Trimble could even jump up, Mr. Railton came into the study with his usual brisk step.

MUST BE WON!



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Trimble almost fainted. He remained crouching over the basket, with one arm plunged inside, too startled to move.

"Trimble!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Trimble.

"Trimble!" thundered Mr. Railton. "What are you doing in here, boy?"

"Ow! Oh dear! I—I was looking for my handkerchief, sir!"

"What?"

"I—I mean my pencil, sir—that is, my fountain-pen, sir!" gasped Trimble. "I—I dropped it in the waste-paper basket, I think, sir!"

"What are you doing in my study at all?"

"I—I came to—to ask the time, sir!" stuttered Trimble.

"That is, I mean to say—"

"Silence, boy!" thundered the Housemaster. "Your answers are absurd and obviously fabrications! I demand to know why you are searching my waste-paper basket!"

"Sus-searching, sir?" gasped Trimble. "Not at all, sir! I came to—to report to you that I'd lost my fountain-pen—"

might have been worse. Anyway— Hallo! What's that?"

Trimble paused.

He was passing along the Shell passage at the moment, and his glance had happened to stray through the open doorway of Grundy's study.

The study was unoccupied, and Trimble's casual glance



Baggy Trimble was searching frantically in Mr. Railton's waste-paper basket when a step sounded in the passage outside. Before Trimble could even jump up the Housemaster came quickly into the study. The fat Fourth-Former remained crouching over the basket, with one arm plunged inside, too startled to move. "Trimble!" thundered Mr. Railton. "What are you doing here?" (See Chapter 11.)

a solid gold one it was—the nib, I mean! Then—then I thought I'd take some of the waste-paper, sir, to—to write home on."

And Trimble looked hopefully at the master, hoping he would accept that explanation. It was a vain hope.

"Trimble, that is enough!" said Mr. Railton angrily. "You are obviously speaking gross untruths. I have not the slightest doubt that you came in here to play some foolish prank. Hold out your hand, sir!"

"Oh dear!"

Mr. Railton reached for his cane. Trimble held out his hand—very gingerly.

Swish, swish!

"Ow! Yow!"

"Now the other hand!"

Swish, swish!

"Ow-ow! Yow-ow!"

"Now leave my study!" snapped the Housemaster, pointing to the door. "If I find you in here again without good reason I will punish you very severely indeed! Go!"

"Ow-ow! Ye-es, sir!"

Trimble took his departure, twisting his fat features into weird and wonderful contortions, and hugging his tingling palms frantically.

Yet he could not help feeling he was lucky—astoundingly lucky. Obviously Mr. Railton did not dream of suspecting anything. Indeed, Trimble was astonished that the master had allowed him to go without further and more searching questioning.

But he had got out of the scrape, and he was undoubtedly lucky in doing so. He had not recovered all the spoiled sheets, but he had recovered some. He could only hope that Mr. Railton would not think of searching the basket.

"Ow!" groaned Trimble. "The awful beast! But it

suddenly became riveted upon a couple of small packets in silver-and-red coloured paper that lay on the tablecloth.

"My hat!" breathed Trimble, quite forgetting his tingling palms at sight of them. "Chocolate, for a pension! That mean beast Grundy's stuff, I suppose. He ought really to be taught a lesson for being so careless as to leave them there! Putting temptation into anyone's way like that! Why, a blessed servant or anyone might easily be tempted to pinch the stuff!"

After reflecting a moment and giving a careful look up and down, Trimble promptly decided to teach Grundy the well-needed lesson. He slipped into the study, crammed the packets into his jacket pocket, and then departed hastily. At the end of the passage he almost collided with Wilkins, but that junior merely kicked him and passed on.

"Beast!" grunted Trimble, rubbing himself and glaring after Wilkins. "I hope he doesn't suspect it's me. Anyway, Grundy ought to be taught a lesson!"

And the fat Fourth-Former rolled on towards his study, grinning a little now. Not for one instant did Trimble dream that that little raid on Grundy's chocolate was to prove his undoing.

CHAPTER 12.

Bowled Out!

"HALLO! Here you are again, Fatty! Always turning up like a bad penny just when a fellow was hoping you'd gone for good!"

"Oh, I say, Wildrake—"

"I'm off to see the scrap between those asses Merry and

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D'Arcy," said Wildrake grimly. "Mind you have tea ready by the time I come back, Trimble!"

"You—you cheeky owl!" gasped Trimble, glaring. "I thought you'd have had tea by this. What is there for tea, anyway?"

"Nothing supplied by you, I bet!" said Wildrake, with a chuckle. "But whose chocolate have you been scoffing?"

"I haven't been scoffing chocolate, you beast!"

"Why, it's all over your fat chivvy!" snorted Wildrake.

"That isn't chocolate!" sniffed Trimble untruthfully. "It's—it's paint!"

"What?"

"Paint!"

"But how the thump——"

"It's a pity you can't mind your own business, Wildrake!" said Trimble, with dignity. "I'm always telling you—— Oh!"

Trimble jumped as the door flew open. He jumped still more as somebody rushed into the room and grabbed him ferociously.

It was George Alfred Grundy, and he was in a fearful rage.

"Ow! Yow!" roared Trimble, as Grundy proceeded to shake him wrathfully. "Leggo, you beast! Rescue, Wildrake! Back your study-mate up, you rotter!"

"Not much!" grinned Wildrake. "Go it, Grundy! What's he done this time?"

"Done!" roared Grundy. "I'll jolly soon tell you that! He's boned my blessed chocolate—two thumping packets! I'd only left the dashed study two seconds, and when I came back they'd gone! Wilkins spotted him leaving the study. Now, you fat thief, where is it?"

"I tell you——"

"You couldn't have scoffed the lot already!" snorted Grundy. "If you have, I'm going to take it out of your fat hide, you little worm! Two packets! Hold him, Wildrake!"

"Right-ho!" said Wildrake.

Wildrake chuckled and grabbed hold of the yelling Trimble. Grundy plunged his hands into Trimble's pocket. There was no chocolate in the jacket-pocket—nor in any of the other pockets. All the chocolate, apparently, was inside Trimble by this time. But as Grundy withdrew his hands from the fat Fourth-Former's trousers-pocket Wildrake gave a gasp.

"What's that the fat ass has got?"

"Only dashed letters, or something——"

"Here, let's have a squint!" snapped Wildrake.

Something suspiciously familiar about the paper had caught Wildrake's eye. A single glance showed him the engraved heading, and he knew that it was a sheet of Mr. Railton's private notepaper.

"What the thump——" began Wildrake. His glance went over the typed words. It was one of the spoiled sheets Trimble had crammed into his pocket. "Is that more of it, Grundy?"

"Yes!" snorted Grundy. "Why, the fat rotter's even had the nerve to pinch Railton's notepaper! It's coming to something——"

"But what's this mean?" said Wildrake.

He had read the typed words on the sheet. They were somewhat similar to those Trimble had used in the final note. Wildrake whistled as he read what had been typed.

"You did this last night, you fat ass!" he said, with a laugh. "So this is what you meant to do when you said you'd make Tom Merry agree to be skipper! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters!" howled Baggy Trimble, making an unsuccessful snatch at the sheet of notepaper in his study-mate's hand. "Gimme my letter!"

"Cheeky ass!" snorted Grundy. "If Railton knew—— Hallo! Here's another sheet! My hat! Look at the ink!"

"What?" yelled Wildrake.

A single glance at the third sheet was enough for Wildrake. That sheet was the final sheet Trimble had typed. It was dirty and crumpled, and had evidently been in Trimble's pocket since the evening before.

But that was not all. The sheet was simply soaked in red and blue-black ink, the paper itself being stiff where it had dried.

Wildrake's eyes were keen, and his mind was keener still. In a flash a sudden suspicion was aroused, and he pushed the almost raving Trimble back as he snatched at the ink-soaked note.

"No, you don't, you fat rotter!" he said grimly. "This wants looking into, Grundy!"

"Gimme my letters!" shrieked Trimble, in the greatest alarm. "Gimme my papers, you rotten beasts! Oh, crikey! Gimme my letters! Oh, you rotters!"

"But what's the matter, Wildrake?" sniffed Grundy, who was always rather dense. "The fat rotter's only been pinching Railton's notepaper for his silly-ass games."

"There's a good bit more in it than that!" was Wildrake's

grim retort. "Can't you see? Trimble did this last night—he must have done! He typed this rubbish on Railton's typewriter. Railton himself says that the fellow who carried his typewriter and shoved it on his desk was the fellow who must have upset that ink."

"Oh! Oh, great pip!"

"It wasn't Tom Merry and it wasn't Gussy!" said Wildrake crisply. "I guess we've got the culprit. It was this critter, Trimble."

"Phew! I'm blown if you aren't right, Wildrake!" said Grundy. "M-my hat! Good for you!"

"And here's further proof!" said Wildrake.

And with a sudden movement Wildrake grabbed Trimble's arm and pulled back the sleeve of his jacket. Trimble gave a yell of alarm and jerked his arm away. But not before Grundy had seen the red and blue-black ink that was splashed on the cuff of his shirt.

"That settles it!" remarked Wildrake coolly. "I guess we've got the galoot all right! Trimble did it. He upset the ink over his shirt-sleeve and cuff. He went there to type that idiotic note to send to Tom Merry. It was an accident, of course. But Trimble should have owned up instead of letting other fellows come under suspicion."

"I tell you I didn't do it!" howled Trimble, shaking with alarm. "You've made an awful mistake!"

"You fat——"

"I tell you—— Yoooooop!"

Bump!

Trimble sat down hard as the disgusted George Alfred brought him down with a thump. Wildrake took charge of the sheets of notepaper.

"See the fat rotter doesn't vamoose until I come back, Grundy!" he snapped. "I'm off now."

"Yow! Come back!" roared Trimble in alarm. "Don't you go to Railton, Wildrake! Oh, dear!"

"I'm off to stop that fight!" snorted Wildrake.

And Wildrake rushed from the study. Like most of the decent fellows in the Lower School he had been dismayed at the thought of the forthcoming fight between two such old chums as Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus. And he meant to stop it now, if he could. The culprit was found, and both Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus would soon be cleared if Wildrake had anything to do with it!

CHAPTER 13.

Healing the Breach!

"FEELING fit, Tommy?"

Monty Lowther asked the question rather anxiously as he glanced at the set features of Tom Merry. The Terrible Three were on their way to the boathouse, in the hollow behind which the fight was to take place.

Tom Merry did not look at all happy at the prospect. He knew that he was a better man with the gloves—or without—than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The result of the fight did not worry him in the least.

But the prospect of the fight did not please him.

He could not forget that, until the day before, Arthur Augustus and he had been the best of chums.

"Yes, I'm feeling fit enough!" he answered briefly.

"Well, you look none too chirpy, anyway!" commented Lowther.

"I wish the fight wasn't necessary," said Tom. "I wish it was any other fellow than D'Arcy. It's rotten!"

"If you go into the scrap thinking that you're booked for a licking!" warned Manners. "Still, well—it is rotten!"

"A rotten business altogether!" grunted Lowther.

"There's those Fourth chaps in front!" said Manners.

Swarms of fellows were making their way down the narrow lane that led to the boathouse. The news of the forthcoming fight had caused a sensation at St. Jim's, and everybody wanted to see it—though few were likely to take pleasure in it. Most of them would have given anything to stop it from taking place could they have done so.

But the thing had gone too far for that; or so they imagined.

The boathouse was reached at last. In silence a ring was made behind it by the crowd, and the two principals took off their collars, ties, and jackets, and rolled back their sleeves. Two pairs of gloves were produced. Lowther was seconding Tom whilst Blake was seconding D'Arcy. Talbot had agreed to be time-keeper and referee—much as he disliked the task.

"Time!"

Talbot's quiet voice rang out, and the former chums faced each other and touched gloves. Then they sprang apart.

Next moment a shout came from the other side of the boathouse, and the figure of Wildrake came rushing into view. He pushed his way through the crowd and stepped inside the ring, panting.

"Hold on!" he gasped, stepping before D'Arcy and Tom

Merry. "Before you start the scrap I've something to say, my pippins!"

"Out of the way, Wildrake!"

"Clear off, you silly ass!"

"What's this game?"

There was a roar of voices from the crowd, and Wildrake grinned a little. But he did not move.

"What's this mean, Wildrake?" asked Talbot, eyeing him in astonishment.

"It means that this giddy fight isn't going to take place, if I can help it!" said Wildrake grimly. "I guess that fat worm Trimble isn't worth fighting over!"

"What the thump do you mean, Wildrake?" snapped Tom Merry, his face going angry. "Get out of the way!" "Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Kindly wemove yourself, Wildwake!"

"Not much!" said Wildrake. "Listen to me! You galoots are scrapping each other because you both think the other is guilty of mucking up Railton's desk and things? Am I right?"

"I suppose you are!" said Tom Merry impatiently.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said nothing.

"Then I take it that if I produce the galoot who really did the dirty trick, you won't fight? Is that so?" asked Wildrake cheerfully.

Tom Merry looked at D'Arcy. There was a buzz from the crowd.

"If you can prove that D'Arcy did not do it, then I'm willing to withdraw from the fight!" said Tom Merry, setting his lips.

Arthur Augustus did not speak for a moment. Then he looked at Tom Merry.

"I have nevah weally believed that Tom Mewwy did do it," he said quietly. "I am fightin' him because he charged me with doin' it, and because he as good as called me a liah! But—but if you can pprove who did it, and if Tom Mewwy does not wish the fight to go on, then I also am willin' to withdwaw!"

"Good man, Gussy!" called Blake.

"Right!" grinned Wildrake. "Then if you'll come back to St. Jim's, I'll produce the fat worm who did do it, Grundy's holding him for me now because there's a whole heap of red and black ink on the galoot's shirt-cuff that he might try to get rid of. It's a heap more satisfactory evidence than Railton could produce against old Tommy here."

"Trimble!" came the yell. "Was it that fat rotter?"

Wildrake nodded coolly.

"Yes, it was Trimble!" he said. "The fat ass went to Railton's study to type a silly note on his typewriter. He must have upset the ink somehow. And he must have been hiding under the table when Tom Merry went into the room."

"Bai Jove!"

"And here's further proof if you want it!" said Wildrake, holding up the sheets of notepaper. "You'll notice the mess of ink on this one, and you'll remember it was red and black ink that was upset. Grundy and I found them crumpled up in Trimble's pocket. We tackled Trimble, and as usual the fat ass gave himself away completely."

"He—he admitted it?" yelled Blake.

"He admitted it by the way he swore he didn't do it!" chuckled Wildrake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Everybody knew Trimble's way of denying anything!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Levison. "We might have known Trimble had a hand in it. Let's have a squint at those sheets."

The sheets of notepaper were passed round amidst chuckles at Trimble's note. Trimble's spelling was peculiarly his own. They did not doubt Wildrake's statements when they saw the ink-soaked sheet of notepaper.

In high spirits now, the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. accompanied Wildrake back to St. Jim's, the crowd following. The brief split in the two Co.'s was healed and they were friends again once more, thanks to Kit Wildrake. The trouble for them was over, but the trouble for Baggy Trimble was just beginning.

CHAPTER 14.

All Serene.

"L EMME go!" roared Trimble.

"Not much!" grinned George Alfred Grundy. "Stop that squealing or I'll bang your fat napper on the floor—like that!"

Bang!

"Yarroooogh!"

There came the tramp of feet in the passage, and Wildrake came into the study, followed by Blake & Co., the Terrible Three, and a swarm of other fellows.

"Here's the fat galoot!" grinned Wildrake. "Good man, Grundy! Keep him down while I show these chaps his shirt-cuffs!"

"Help!" roared Trimble. "I tell you it's all rot! That's paint on my cuff—red paint! I tell you I know——"

Bang!

"Yooooop!" wailed Trimble, as Grundy banged his head on the floor.

"I told you what to expect if you didn't keep quiet!" said Grundy. "Here you are, you fellows! This fat worm did it, after all!"

"Phew!"

"That settles it!"

"Bring him along to Railton!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

There was a chorus of assent to that. But, as it happened, it was not necessary to take Trimble before the Housemaster. For just then there was a cry of "cave" and as the crowd parted, Mr. Railton himself appeared.

He entered the study, and he frowned as he saw Grundy seated on Trimble's chest. Trimble's features were crimson, and he groaned deeply at the sight of the Housemaster's grim face.

"Grundy! Get off Trimble at once!" snapped Mr. Railton. "What does this mean, boys?"

"We were just going to bring Trimble to you, sir," said Talbot. "We discovered it was Trimble who upset that ink over your desk!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Railton grimly. "I was beginning to wonder if that were not the truth myself."

"Oh!"

There was a buzz of amazement at that.

"It—it wasn't me, sir!" mumbled Trimble fairly shaking with fright. "Don't you believe them, sir! I'm as innocent as a baby! It—it must have been Mrs. Mimms' cat, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered the Housemaster. "This is no occasion for merriment. Trimble!"

"Y-yes, sir!"

"A short while ago I caught you in the act of searching through my wastepaper-basket! Your explanations were palpable untruths, and I knew it was hopeless to elicit the truth from you. I, however, searched through the basket myself."

"Oh dear! Did you, sir?"

"Yes, I found there a crumpled sheet of my notepaper on which an absurd note had been typed—or, at least, on which was some typing. Was that what you were searching for, Trimble?"

"Oh, nunno, sir! Of course not, sir! I haven't even seen any notepaper of yours, sir. Besides, I didn't use your typewriter at all. I used Kildare's, sir!"

There was another laugh. Mr. Railton soon stopped it with a gesture. Wildrake stepped forward with the crumpled sheets of notepaper in his hand. He handed them to the Housemaster, who looked at them, and then looked at Trimble.

"You typed these also, Trimble, I presume?"

"Nunno, sir! I tell you I know nothing about it, sir!" groaned Trimble.

"We found them in Trimble's pocket, sir!" said Wildrake quietly. "If further proof is necessary as to who did it, then look at Trimble's shirt-cuff, sir!"

Despite Trimble's desperate struggles, Wildrake grasped his arm and turned back the jacket sleeve. The ink-stained shirt-cuff was revealed. Mr. Railton set his lips.

"Oh dear!"

"Trimble was hiding under the table when Tom Merry went into the room, sir," explained Wildrake. "He must have been in the room when you arrived, Mr. Railton."

Trimble groaned again. But he did not deny that. He saw that it was useless.

"I think that is quite enough, then," said Mr. Railton. "Trimble, you will come with me." The Housemaster paused and turned to Tom Merry, who was standing silent.

"This, of course, clears you completely, Merry."

"I suppose so, sir," said Tom quietly.

"I regret that this has happened, Merry," said Mr. Railton, after another pause. "I am sorry that I have misjudged you. I feel now that, from what I have known of your character, I should have, perhaps, accepted your word in the matter."

"Yes, sir."

"But you must remember that you have not been yourself of late. You have been sullen and resentful towards me over the matter of the captaincy."

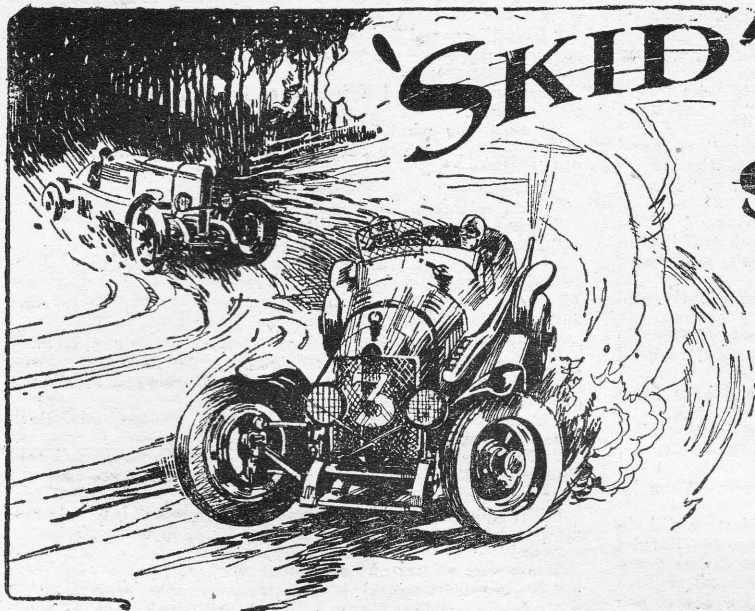
(Continued on page 28.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,080.

I · SEE · ALL

WHO WILL CREATE THE WORLD'S SPEED RECORD ?

The moment for the Great Speed Trial has arrived—the moment when the hopes and destinies of two big motor concerns hang in the balance! Who will create a new world's speed record—"Skid" Kennedy for the Saxons, or Slade for the Falcons ?



'SKID' KENNEDY- SPEED KING!

THE CONCLUDING CHAPTERS OF
OUR BRILLIANT SERIAL OF MOTOR-
RACING ADVENTURE, STARRING
JACK KENNEDY, A YOUNG SPEED
MERCHANT.

By
ALFRED EDGAR.

Four Miles a Minute.

THE spinning tyres whistled on the surface of the desert as the machine leaped away, and in bare seconds it was all but out of sight in the heat-haze.

"Everybody off the course—hurry!" an official yelled; and the boys ran with the rest to one of the gigantic yellow-and-white pylons which marked the beginning of the test mile. From the pylon a narrow black strip ran straight to the other side of the track—an electrical timing strip connected to delicate instruments which would record to the hundredth part of a second the time which Slade took to cover the measured distance.

The roar of the Falcon came from the distance, hollow and menacing as the machine drew farther and farther away. The sound faded out at last.

"That'll be him turning, I expect," Fred commented. "He'll be coming back soon."

"And the first time he passes it'll be only to warm up his engine," said Jack. "Still, we'll get an idea of what the car will do."

The Saxon and the Falcon were in rivalry for the mile speed record, which then stood at something like 207 miles an hour. In order to get the record a car had twice to cover a measured mile, once in one direction and the second time the opposite way. The average speed of the two runs counted for the record, and the idea of a run in either direction was so that if the wind helped the car one way, it would be against it in the other.

Near where the boys stood were three or four reporters who had come out from England specially to watch the giant cars at grips. These men stood tensely, staring with field-glasses in the direction from which the red Falcon would presently appear.

The desert silence dropped once again. All work on the Saxon had been abandoned, and the mechanics now stood with Ben just behind Skid Kennedy.

It was a strange scene, there in the heart of the sunbaked desert, and soon there catapulted into the silence the shrill drone of the Falcon as it started on its trial run.

Jack picked out a cloud of dust, and then he made out a faint, black speck which he knew must be the car. It grew larger with incredible rapidity, and almost before he expected it the machine was charging past them, its howl lifting to a mad note which changed as the machine slashed by. In an instant it was gone, hidden by the plume of dust which lofted from its tail.

For a space they listened to its speed-song as it ripped on up the course, then a timing official called through a megaphone:

"His speed was about three miles a minute. Slade is now going to start on his first record run, if he is satisfied with the car."

"Three miles a minute—gosh!" breathed Fred. "We've come out to try and do over four miles a minute," Jack grinned. "I want to do two hundred and fifty miles

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an hour, if I can! Anyway, I'm going to lick Slade's best, whatever happens—or, rather, I'm going to have a jolly good shot at it!"

Silence dropped once more. Tense figures were all around the two boys. The whole world had been told by wireless what was happening in the desert, and the whole world was waiting on the result.

News had gone out about the bandits, and there were special editions on the London streets telling of the amazing way in which Jack had been rescued by Fred in the armoured car. In a little while more editions would be out, telling the story of the speed trials, sent by wireless from the little white tent which stood between the two camps, its aerial shimmering in the sun.

Silence, then once again the distant drone, but this time with a fierce crackle in the heart of it, a sound which lifted to a piercing scream as a man gasped:

"Here he comes!"

The blazing red Falcon appeared like some leaping projectile from the yellow-brown of the desert—a bellowing, hurtling thing that slashed between the tapering red pylons, howling madly.

It showed at the foot of a spreading dust-cloud, and as it ripped into the measured mile the boys saw that the mighty car was weaving on the desert.

It was slewing from side to side, boring out towards the pylons first in one direction and then in the other. It came with enormous velocity, and the crashing roar of its progress made men press their hands to their ears.

Then it was past, and in its place there came a veritable sandstorm. Dust and sand, torn from the crevices in the desert's surface, whirled and lashed in the wake of the car, stinging as they struck with a hissing sound.

Everything was blotted out by the dust, which began to settle when the car had vanished.

"My hat!" Fred gasped. "I've never seen anything like that! What a speed! It looked like about three hundred miles an hour! What d'you think he was doin', Jack?"

Jack could not even hazard a guess, and Fred's query was answered by the rolling voice which came through the megaphone, sounding through the dropping dust.

"Slade's speed for his first run was two hundred and forty miles an hour exactly—four miles a minute!"

"Four miles a minute!" Men gasped as they heard the announcement, and from every throat there lifted a sudden cheer, Jack and Fred joining with the rest.

Never mind if Slade was a rotter—he was the first man in the world to travel at four miles a minute, and he deserved credit for having the nerve to do it. The Falcon mechanics danced in a frenzy of excitement, and they were still cheering when they heard the bellow of the giant car as it came back on its second run.

Once more its mad howl boomed out, and again the car

showed, weaving still and travelling faster than ever. It was bouncing on the surface of the course, kicking and bucking madly as it slid between the pylons. It appeared to be travelling in a wild series of terrific half-skids.

"He'll never hold it!" Fred gasped, as he watched.

Even as he spoke the car shot at a tangent across the course, coming, it seemed, straight towards them, although it was yet half a mile away.

Right across the course it came, and men shouted in horror as they saw that the car was all but out of control.

"He'll hit us!" Fred yelled, and already men around were running.

Straight for the nearest yellow pylon the machine was streaking. It struck the painted woodwork as Fred spoke—struck it and smashed it into a thousand whirling fragments.

The car appeared to bounce from the impact. Slade straightened it, and the fraction of a second later the machine was boring straight at the watching group, bits of the shattered pylon pitching with it.

In the last possible moment Slade seemed to wrestle the Falcon back to the course. There was a colossal, stupefying roar, and the machine passed less than ten yards away, the rush of air all but knocking the boys off their feet, and splintered woodwork showering around them as they staggered.

Ere they recovered, the furious roar of the machine had died as it slowed in the distance. Men were reeling in all directions, choked by the sand, and some of them shaken by the impact of woodwork from the smashed pylon. But they forgot their hurts as the megaphone from the marquee containing the timing apparatus blared:

"Slade's speed for that run was two hundred and forty-four miles an hour. His average speed through the measured mile is two hundred and forty-two miles an hour—breaking all existing records by over thirty miles an hour!"

An ecstatic yell went up from the Falcon mechanics, while Jack and Fred looked at one another.

"He's done it!" Fred gasped. "Busted the record with over four miles a minute, and very nigh killed himself doing it! That'll take some beating, Jack!"

Skid Kennedy said nothing. He glanced across to where the silver-and-red Saxon stood quiescent in the shade. The machine was but half as powerful as Slade's, but Ben had built the car, and Jack knew that his brother had constructed a wonderful machine.

"Four miles a minute!" he muttered to himself. "Well, I don't say that I can beat it, Fred, but"—his jaw tightened, and his eyes narrowed with the expression which Fred had come to know so well—"but I'll have a darned good try!"

"Four miles a minute!" Fred Bishop gasped, and he stared at the long trail of whirling dust and sand which still spun in the wake of the record-breaking Falcon.

The Falcon mechanics were yelling their heads off, dancing with delight. A little way away, the wireless operator was already telling the waiting world that Philip Slade, mounted on his triple-engined Falcon, had shattered all land speed records by more than thirty miles an hour.

The two chums saw Carnaby shaking hands over and over again with the Falcon men; and presently the vicious-tempered ex-salesman glanced across to the chums.

"Let's see you beat that!" he yelled, and he laughed in his ugly way, then looked to where the Falcon was coming back up the course.

It slid out of the dust-cloud. The terrific speed at which he had been travelling seemed to have upset Slade's judgment, because he overshot the timing official's tent, then crashed on his brakes. The car slewed sideways, skidded for fifty yards, and then came to a stop, with dust spurting from the tyres and the powerful engines choking off into silence.

The Falcon men made a rush for the car. Jack and Fred ran with them. Everybody in sight was racing through the blazing sunshine of the Syrian desert, eager to get a glimpse of the man who had attained such a stupendous speed.

Because Jack and Fred were as fit as fiddles, despite their

INTRODUCTION.

Jack Kennedy gets nicknamed "Skid," because of the daring way he handles a racing-car. With his chums, Fred Bishop, he works in the show-room 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 the Falcon Six firm build a car with which they intend to shatter the world's speed record out in the Syrian desert. Losing no time, Ben constructs a car which will travel at the colossal speed of 250 m.p.h., and which Jack consents to drive. Whilst journeying through the wild recesses of the desert, however, the Saxon convoy is attacked by Arabs, who capture Jack and carry him away. Fred sets off in pursuit and succeeds in rescuing his pal. The two arrive back on the course in time to see Slade set his powerful car in motion for the great speed test.

(Now Read On.)

rough time at the hands of Hussif Saud's tribe of Arabs, they were almost the first to reach the car.

Slade was slumped down in the narrow seat, his hands still clamped about the steering-wheel. When Carnaby reached over to slap him on the back the speedman hardly moved.

"He's fainted!" Carnaby gasped; and a dozen men helped drag Slade from the car.

He had not fainted, but he was in a state bordering on collapse from the terrible strain of holding four tons or so of hurtling metal. The awful narrowness with which he had escaped death when he struck the pylon had had its effect, too.

The dreadful heat from the three engines, the fierce battering of the car itself, and the choking rush of air in his face, had sapped his strength. He was carried to one of the nearby tents, and two doctors busied themselves over him, while every man on the course waited outside.

It was nearly ten minutes before Slade reappeared. His face was patchy white under its tan, and he had to lean on a man's arm before he could stand upright.

Skid Kennedy and Fred cheered with the rest. Slade might be a rotter and an outsider, he might be a scheming cad, and he might have tried to send Jack to his death, but he had proved he'd got the courage to do four miles a minute in a car, to hold it at that speed and master its every trick to send him hurtling to his doom, and a man with all that pluck deserved a cheer.

Slade grinned shakily, then Jack turned away. The Saxon mechanics were round him, and most of them were applauding. Jack found Ben almost at his side, and the boy gasped:

"Let's get our car out now, Ben. We want to make our attempt before the Falcon's feat makes an impression outside the—"

"You'll never be able to stand it!" Ben gasped. "Why, Slade's a grown man, and he was all in when he finished! You've been up all night over those Arabs, and you can't possibly have the strength."

"Eh?" Jack stared at him blankly. "Don't talk rot!" he grunted. "I'm as fit as a fiddle. Besides, there's that wireless report about a storm coming up. If we don't make the run now we won't get another chance for weeks, perhaps. Come on, boys!" He turned to the mechanics around. "Run the old car out and start her up!"

He and Fred led the way at a run to the awning under which the silver-and-crimson Saxon stood quiescent. Ben could not run, because it jarred his wounded arm too much. By the time he reached the machine Jack was superintending the starting of its engines.

Her staggered radiator, sunk in her rounded nose, gave the record-breaker a fierce appearance. The narrow air-scopes behind the driver's cockpit looked like tiny ears, laid back like those of some hound ready to give battle. Everything about the car was smooth and lean and purposeful, and when the crashing thunder of her four engines struck on the desert air it sounded like the bellowing voice of a monster held in leash.

The Saxon had four engines, where the Falcon had been fitted with three. But the Falcon gave out 2,000 horsepower, whereas the total power of the Saxon's four motors was less than half that. In addition, the Saxon was lighter than the Falcon, and that meant the car would be more difficult to hold.

Mr. Lloyd came running over to Jack as he and Fred were looking round the car.

"Have you seen Slade?" Mr. Lloyd asked the boy speedman, and Jack nodded. "You have? Then you'll understand why I'm not going to let you drive this car until you've had some rest!" Mr. Lloyd went on. "No, don't argue about it, Skid. I'm not going to let you risk your life just for the sake of a few hours' rest. Slade's just come next door to fainting again, and he's said he'll never drive that car at speed again if the Falcon people offer him a fortune for doing it!"

"But I'm all right," Jack protested. "Anybody'd think I was a kid, the way some people are going on. I can hold the car, and I—"

He broke off. One of the officials was striding into the shade flung by the broad awning above. He glanced around, then sighted the Saxon director and came straight towards him.

"Mr. Lloyd!" He had to shout at the top of his voice to make himself heard above the bellowing of the car. "We've just had another radio message from Damascus. They say that the storm raging in the west is a regular simoom, and that it'll be on us within a couple of hours!"

Mr. Lloyd stared at him blankly. The coming storm would strew sand in great drifts all along the course, and it would be days before it would be possible to run a car at speed across it.

"If you're going to make your attempt, the sooner you start the better!" the official called.

Mr. Lloyd swallowed hard. He glanced at Jack, then he

looked at the car. Skid Kennedy glanced from him to Fred, then he jumped forward and roared to the mechanics: "All right, boys; run her out! I'm going to try for the record straight away!"

The Start!

THERE were several reasons to stop Mr. Lloyd making further progress. All the world now knew that the Falcon had done 240 miles an hour. The Saxon had come out to try and touch the phenomenal speed of 250 m.p.h.

If they waited for the storm to pass, and idled for days afterwards for the course to clear, the Saxon's record would not create so great an impression, even if Jack did beat Slade's performance. In addition, it was almost the eve of the great Motor Show at Olympia, and for the famous Skid Kennedy to do 250 miles an hour now would make all the difference between success and failure for the Saxon Motor Company.

So the car was rolled out on to the course, and Fred superintended the work of making Jack ready for the great run. He donned white overalls, with fat, tightly-gripping rubber bands about his ankles. He wore light shoes with rope soles, and buckled broad straps about his wrists to support them.

Mechanics fastened pads of rubber at the sides and back of the cockpit, to protect him from the jarring of the car when it leaped from any bumps there might be on the course. Jack examined them carefully, when he went over the car for the last time, to make certain that all was in order.

Fred fastened the specially high collar of Jack's overalls and tied down the cuffs so that they fitted tightly over his wrist-straps. Then Jack pulled on his crash-helmet, with its long, green-tinted peak to shade the sun from his eyes.

All the preparations were complete now. The engines were warmed up, and away in the west there was a darkening of the sky, heralding the approaching simoom.

"I'll go to the far end of the course," Skid told one of the officials. "Then I'll turn and make my first run. After that I'll turn once again and make my second attempt. Is there any way of letting me know what my speed for the first run is?"

"Yes; we'll telephone it to some men we've got at the end of the track," the official answered. "They'll write it on a board they've got there. Good luck!"

He shook hands. Jack shook hands all round with the Saxon mechanics, then with Mr. Lloyd, and then with Ben. The big fellow's face was white. All his work was to be tested now, and if it were faulty the boy speedman would pay for it with his life. Both knew it, but neither spoke as they gripped hands.

"Best o' luck!" said Fred, as his fingers wrapped about Skid's palm. "Wish I was comin' with you, Jack!"

Skid grinned, then clambered over the side of the machine, and slid into the narrow cockpit. In front of him were a number of small dials, at which he glanced as he pulled down his goggles; to the left was the dial of a big revolution counter.

This instrument took the place of a speedometer, and it told him how fast his engines were turning over. The dial was cut up into colours—white, green, yellow, and then red. When the broad, black needle of the rev counter was in the middle of the red section his speed should be somewhere around 250 miles an hour. As he settled down, Jack resolved that he'd get the needle right across to the far side of the red section, and hold it there!

Men backed away from the mighty machine as Jack trod on the broad, long accelerator pedal, and the war-song of the record-breaker crashed out. Jack glanced around him, grinned at Ben, waved his hand to Fred, then slipped into gear, and sent the machine away down the course.

He saw the towering pylons stretching ahead of him, tapering in the distance. Between them little groups of desert Arabs were standing, immobile figures on their horses. News of what was afoot had gone clear across the desert, and these bearded, fierce-looking men had come to watch in awe.

Jack left them behind as the speed of the car increased. The machine felt steady as a rock under his hands, and in a little while he made out the fat, flag-topped towers which marked the extreme end of the course.

Some officials were standing here, and one of them was waving a huge green flag as Jack passed. It indicated that the course was clear for his first run. He slowed the machine, then turned it in a huge sweep, and pulled it to the middle of the course again.

He lifted a hand from the big steering-wheel as he came level with the men. They waved back to him, and, through the glare of his engines he thought he heard a faint, thin cheer; then he stamped on the accelerator pedal, the monster car surged forward, squab thrusting in his back.

The threshing wheels gathered speed with every turn, the course showed broad and straight, the pylons were sun-splashed streaks of colour against the yellow-brown of the desert, and on the hot silence there smashed the vibrant thunder of the Saxon as she leaped into her record-breaking effort.

"Well done, Jack!"

RIGHT in the centre of the course was the measured mile which Jack had to traverse for the record. He had to cover it first one way, and then in the reverse direction, and the average speed of the two runs counted for the record. This was because any assistance he might get from the wind one way would be counteracted in the other run.

He felt the machine begin to leap beneath him as the merged voice of the four engines lifted to a sonorous roar. The needle of the revolution counter slid up through green to yellow, moved across it, and then touched the red section.

Now the air was screaming past his ears, booming hollowly past his ears as he hugged down in his seat and crouched behind the little, sloping, steel-strutted wind-shield. The heat from the forward engines slewed back at him; fumes plugged into his nostrils, and the steering-wheel began to switch under the kicking of his front tyres.

His foot went hard down on the accelerator pedal, holding the throttle wide; then, before he expected it, he saw the big pylons which marked the measured mile.

They rushed to meet him at incredible speed. Everything seemed to be slashing past him. The surface of the desert was a yellow blur, and things standing on it were just masses of black or blurred colour.

No time to see what his speed might be now. The machine was bucking and jerking beneath him. It was a metal monster reaching to the limit of its speed, a thing that fought against him. He felt the tail wagging and trying to slide in a skid as it jumped from a bump.

Bringing it straight took him towards the side of the course, so that the pylons and the tents beyond appeared to be crashing at him ere he brought the machine square again. Then he was in the measured mile.

He went through it with the stamping wheels waking a titanic cloud of dust and sand behind. He passed the watchers in a stupendous roar of sound, the front of the car weaving wildly in its terrific speed, Skid's head showing as a tiny, rounded shape hardly discernible above the side of the machine.

The car whipped across the timing-tape at the end of the mile, and Jack felt it leap from the minute impact. He eased on the throttle, and it seemed an age before the machine began to slow. The needle came down around the dials, but it was still on the green section when the end of the course showed up.

He braked gently, but the machine skidded. He straightened it, braked again, and, with the shoes screaming in the big drums, brought the machine down to a mile a minute, and at that speed shot out from the end of the course, and made a circle to come back again and pass close to the men who were grouped under an awning there.

As he neared them he saw that one was painting figures with a huge brush on the board beside the tent. Jack strained to catch them, and presently he read:

"235 M.P.H."

Only 235 miles an hour! He could hardly believe his eyes. It had seemed to him that he had travelled the measured mile at the car's absolute limit of speed. To break the record with 250 miles an hour, his next run must be made at the colossal speed of 265 m.p.h.

"It's impossible!" he gasped to himself. "But I'll have a cut at it!" And as he passed the board he pushed the throttle pedal down.

When a racing-car is being driven in a speed test, in order to get maximum pace, it has to be thrashed up to the uttermost peak of its speed. It has to be flogged until everything about the engine is shifting at its limit. If nothing breaks under the strain, then the limit of the machine's speed is attained.

On his first run, Jack had not done this. He realised it now, and he made up for it. He had the needle on the red section earlier than before. He kept his eye on it, watched

it pass the middle of the red streak and lift towards the far side—then the terrific vibration made it impossible for him to see it any longer.

Far in front of him he picked out the measured mile, and already the machine was a raging inferno of stupendous sound and heat. What had gone before was nothing to what happened now.

When a bump put the machine a little off its course, he had to fight with all his strength to get it back. It did not answer the steering-wheel at first; it felt like a runaway horse, paying no heed to its reins. But he got the car straight, and he held it.

He could see that it was slewing first to one side of the course and then the other. He was bumped and jarred in his seat, shaken almost to sickness as he gritted his teeth and battled the machine on.

The great pylons which marked the mile vanished from his gaze long before he reached them, simply because he was going too fast for his eyes to sight them. Everything in front was streaky, slithering towards him.

The wind beat and thudded at him as though the air had turned solid. When a bump pitched him sideways in his seat, the grip of the gale on his crash helmet made his chin-strap drag with strangling force, flinging him backwards against the squab as though to tear him clean out of the car.

Gasping, he forced himself down, to find the machine flinging straight at the blurred shape of a pylon. He knew he could not miss it, but he never knew when he hit it.

It seemed to dissolve as the machine struck it with the force of a flying projectile. A second pylon showed momentarily, and then vanished as the car caught it sideways on.

Jim felt the Saxon plunge wildly, tilt, then come back on even keel again, rocketing once more to the centre of the course, and he piled all his strength into his arms to hold it straight.

What speed he was doing he did not know. He had an instantaneous glimpse of tents and watching men, then they were all behind him—wiped out—lost in a stupendous blaze of sound.

From the side of the course the watchers saw the machine streak past, with the debris of the demolished pylon leaping and dancing in the speed-spume which formed the wake of the machine, upturned dust and clay and sand.

The car looked to them to be a blind, mad monster, a thing beyond the power of anything human to control. Yet Skid Kennedy was controlling it. He had it dead in the centre of the course when it plunged into the measured mile.

He held it down the middle, and at the far end of the course the machine leaped sheer into the air from the timing-tape—leaped with daylight under its four wheels,

and then was lost from sight in the cloud of dust that rose behind.

The car went on, a silvery bullet, slowing as the gasping boy eased its terrific speed. Skid went far past the limit of the course before he steadied the car and slowed it enough to turn it round and run back.

He returned at a mere crawl of sixty miles an hour, and behind him there loomed to the sky the menacing blackness of the approaching simoom.

"If that didn't get the record, there won't be time for another attempt!" he told himself, and as he approached the tents he saw men running to meet him. They were little, black figures which seemed to move with astonishing slowness. He picked out Ben with his arm in a sling, the mechanics, Mr. Lloyd, and then Fred, running ahead of all the rest and waving his arms.

Jack stopped the machine as Fred came up. He remained in the cockpit, because the run had taken too much out of him for him to move. He saw that Fred was shouting, but he could not hear what he said, after the howling of the car.

Then Jack noticed that a big, troop-carrying plane was wheeling in the sky, shaping to land on the course. From away to the right, a little group of three grey-painted armoured-cars was coming, crawling slowly forward and making for the camp.

Jack was watching them, wondering what they wanted, when Fred's voice pierced his deafness. His chum was straining over the side of the car and howling:

"Just over 265 miles an hour, Skid! You've done it! Your speed works out at 250 m.p.h.! You've smashed all records!"

Skid Kennedy was dragged from the machine by a bunch of cheering men. They shouldered him all round the car, then rushed him towards

the officials' tents, where the wireless was already flashing out news of his feat.

Fred produced lemonade from somewhere, and Jack emptied the bottle at a single draught, then he saw that the plane had come down near the car. Soldiers were tumbling out of it, and two officers were ahead of them, striding towards the Saxon men.

One of them wore the crown of a major on his sleeve, and there was a grim smile on his face as he approached.

"You'll be Skid Kennedy?" he said, as he checked.

"Have you—"

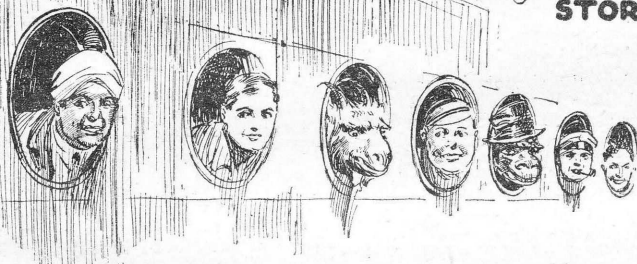
"He ain't Skid Kennedy no more!" Fred yelled. "He's Speed King o' the World, sir! World's speed champion—that's him!"

The officer smiled, then shook hands.

"Congratulations!" he said. Then went on: "Is Philip Slade anywhere about?"

CHUMS of the BOMBAY CASTLE!

by DUNCAN STORM



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"SKID" KENNEDY—SPEED KING!

(Continued from previous page.)

Silence dropped on the group as he glanced around and added:

"We've caught Hussif Saud. He's handcuffed and in that machine. Also, he has told the truth of what happened last night."

The boys glanced at one another. Jack knew what the major meant to do. He'd arrest Slade and Carnaby, and charge them with conspiracy and kidnaping and about a dozen other things.

"I shall be wanting you as a witness," the major told Skid, as he glanced at him.

"I'm not—I'm not making any charge against Slade," Jack said slowly, and the major smiled in his grim way.

"Very well; but that will make no difference," he told Skid. "This business is a little too big for your personal feelings to receive consideration. Slade and that man Carnaby paid Hussif Saud money and incited them to bear arms against a desert caravan. We've got a very big job to keep the peace here, and Hussif Saud and his band must be punished. Those two must suffer with them. Still"—and now he smiled—"don't let that spoil your enjoyment at the Saxon car's success. Congratulations once again, my boy! And now I'll go and arrest Slade."

He strode away.

The big plane got away before the simoom broke, and it carried Carnaby and Philip Slade to just punishment. News of what they had done in their efforts to defeat the Saxon record-breaker proved the final blow that broke the Falcon Company. They did not even exhibit their cars at Olympia.

Instead, the Saxon firm took over their stand in addition to their own. Mr. Lloyd wanted to exhibit the great silver and red Saxon on it, but the authorities would not allow this, because it would have drawn too big a crowd.

So the car was shown in an adjoining building, and during all show week a queue half a mile long waited to get in to see it.

At certain hours famous Skid Kennedy was with the machine. The crowd was astonished to find that he was only a boy. Many of them could hardly believe that he had indeed driven the car, until they noticed his perfect fearlessness and the clearness of his keen eyes.

Ben, who had built the machine, became designer in chief to the Saxon works, and head of the racing staff.

The firm wanted to make Skid a director, but he wouldn't have it. He preferred to work on with Ben. They offered Fred a swaggar job in the showrooms, but Fred wouldn't have it; either; he said he'd stick to Skid.

So wherever the Saxon machines race, Skid Kennedy leads the team, with Fred Bishop as his mechanic, and big Ben Kennedy watching them closely to see that success does not give them swelled heads, and never letting them know that he thinks they are just about the finest and pluckiest pair of boys that ever laid a spanner on a car.

THE END.

(A ripping serial this—what? And you've enjoyed every line of it, haven't you, chum? Well, the first instalment of another corking serial will appear in next week's GEM. Turn to page 27, read full particulars, and then prepare yourself for the greatest yarn ever written by that famous author—DUNCAN STORM.)

TOM MERRY'S TRIUMPH!

(Continued from page 23.)

"I—I admit that, sir!" said Tom Merry. "I've been to blame. But—but I felt I had been unjustly treated."

"We are all liable to make mistakes, and must put up with criticism while in positions of responsibility and authority!" said the Housemaster. "Possibly I have been unduly severe."

Tom Merry did not answer that.

"I trust, however, that we shall understand one another better in the future," went on the Housemaster quietly. "Kildare told me that you had decided to resign again from the captaincy, Merry. But I understand that you visited my study last evening in order to tell me you had reconsidered your decision."

"Yes, sir."

"Very good! I will now, if you still wish it, accept your reconsidered decision to remain junior captain of St. Jim's. I hope you do wish it, Merry."

"I do, sir!" said Tom steadily. "And I'll do my very best to pull things round! The fellows have elected me, and I'll try to prove worthy of their support—and yours, sir!"

"Very well, Merry. I am very glad indeed to hear that!" said Mr. Railton frankly. "Despite my criticisms, I have always considered you an ideal junior captain. Come, Trimble!"

"Ow! Ow! Ye-es, sir!"

After shaking hands with Tom Merry, Mr. Railton led the shivering Trimble out. As he went George Alfred Grundy started a cheer that rang through the School House.

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Tom Merry!"

"Yaas, wathah!" shouted Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglasses excitedly. "Let it wip, deah boys!"

And the "deah boys," did "let it wip!"

Ten minutes later weird and alarming yells were proceeding from the Housemaster's study. They told all and sundry that Baggy Trimble was suffering for his sins—and accidents!

Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three had tea together in Study No. 6 that evening. And a jolly tea it was. The chums of the School House were united once again, and all was calm and bright, as Monty Lowther expressed it. The troubles over the junior captaincy at St. Jim's were ended—fortunately for St. Jim's, Tom Merry was again junior skipper, and under his able leadership the Lower School were not likely to remain slack or troublesome.

Nor was that all. That evening Mr. Railton, as if eager to aid things towards a better state of affairs, announced that the gatings for Saturday afternoon were cancelled. There was to be detention for nobody. And on Saturday the match with Redclyffe duly took place, and, as generally expected, Tom Merry led his men to victory against the Redclyffians. It was a fitting end to the long weeks of trouble over the captaincy, and a fitting start to Tom Merry's new term as junior captain of St. Jim's!

THE END.

(There will be another rollicking fine story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled: "BOUND BY HIS PROMISE!" Don't miss it, chums.)

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