

GEORGE WASHINGTON, Jnr., AT ST. JIM'S!

# The GEM

2<sup>nd</sup>  
EVERY  
WEDNESDAY.



OH, GEE! HE WOULDN'T TELL A LIE ... COULDN'T TELL A LIE—

# GEORGE WASHINGTON

A Delightful Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford

## CHAPTER 1.

### Crooke Asks for It!

**S**TOP that row!" "What?" "Chuck it at once!" snapped Crooke.

The row stopped—in sheer astonishment! Fellows looked at Gerald Crooke of the Shell as if they could not quite believe their ears, as indeed they couldn't quite.

Crooke had suddenly opened the door of his study, No. 7 in the Shell, in the School House at St. Jim's. He stared out into the passage with a morose and angry face.

The passage was crowded.

On a half-holiday it was unusual for the studies to be crowded; but then, it was not usual for the rain to be coming down in torrents.

It was coming down now, as if a big reservoir had opened somewhere in the upper regions of the air. It dashed on the roofs, it splashed on the windows, it turned the old quadrangle into a weeping swamp, and the playing fields into a soaking morass. Even Tom Merry admitted that football was impossible that afternoon; and Figgins of the New House agreed with him; and the House match, due that day, had been postponed.

Hence the row that was going on in the Shell passage in the School House.

A fellow had to do something, and most fellows' minds were running on football. Gerald Crooke's mind, indeed, had run on cigarettes—rather unfortunately for himself, for his Housemaster had dropped on him smoking in a box-room, with painful results for Crooke. Mr. Railton had dealt with him faithfully, and Crooke had retired to his study to bemoan his injuries—till disturbed by the terrific shindy in the passage outside.

It had to be acknowledged that the fellows were making rather a row.

A few of the Shell had started it with an 'old football—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, and Talbot and Noble and Grundy and a few more. But other fellows, with nothing to do on a rainy afternoon, had soon joined up. A noise attracted the juniors, as a candle attracts the moths. A contingent of the Fourth came along—Blake & Co. from

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Study No. 6, then Levison & Co. from No. 9, then a few more. "Passage" football did not follow the rules of the game very closely; but it was exciting, it was exhilarating, it was ever so much better than frowning in the studies or blinking out of a window saying things about the weather.

Had a master or a prefect butted in with an order to stop the row the juniors would have been mildly surprised, for they expected masters and prefects to turn a judicious deaf ear on a rainy afternoon.

But when Crooke of the Shell butted in they were astonished. For Crooke was nobody—a junior like the rest, and the least considered of juniors.

And the footballers, pausing in the hilarious game as Crooke hooted at them, stared at Crooke.

Crooke stared back at them morosely, savagely. He had a lot of aches and pains, resulting from an application of Mr. Railton's cane, and his temper, never good, was vile that afternoon.

"Chuck it!" he repeated. "Stop it at once! You know it's against House rules! I'm not going to stand it!"

"You—you—you're not going to stand it!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"No!" snorted Crooke. "I'm not!"

"And who the dickens are you?" inquired the captain of the Shell.

# —AND THAT'S THE START OF ALL THE TROUBLE AT ST. JIM'S!

## JUNIOR!



"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth warmly. Pway let us know, Cwooke, who the mewwy dickens are you?"

"Have they made you a prefect lately?" inquired Manners.

"Or are you just talking out of the back of your neck?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Come and join up, fathead, instead of frowsting in there!" suggested Blake.

"On the ball!" snorted Grundy of the Shell. "What's the good of wasting time on that rotten slacker? Get on with it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go it!" said Tom Merry.

Crooke came out into the passage. The passage was wide, but not very wide for football, and in the middle of it Crooke was in the way. Evidently he wanted to be in the way. He was in one of those malicious, disgruntled tempers when an ill-natured fellow likes to make himself a general nuisance.

"Stop it!" he snapped.

"You silly ass!" roared Tom Merry. "Get out of the way."

"I won't!"

"Barge him into his study!" roared Grundy.

"Clear off, you ass!"

"Bai Jove! If you do not wetire, Cwooke, you will bag a feahful thwashin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly.

Gerald Crooke stood his ground. He was, in a way, within his rights. Football indoors was against all House rules, written or unwritten. A fellow who was working in his study could not have done much with such a terrific row going on outside. Crooke certainly had not been working; he never did any work if he could help it. Still, he was within his rights. He broke most of the House rules himself; but now they were in his favour.

"I'm doing lines," he said. "Railton's given me lines! I'm not going to try to write lines with this racket going on! You've got to stop it!"

"Write your blessed lines in the Form-room, then."

"I'm writing them in my study."

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"Will you get out of the way, Crooke?" he asked.

"No."

"Then you'll be shifted."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Crooke, generally despised in his Form for his smoky, frowsty ways, resented dislike and contempt strongly. It was quite a satisfaction to him to butt in like this, with right on his side for once in a way.

But Tom Merry & Co. were not bothering very much about the rights of the matter. Crooke was in the way, and having been, as they considered, rather patient with him, without effect, they proceeded to shift him out of the way.

Five or six fellows crowded round Crooke, and grasped him.

He struggled.

"Let go!" he bawled. "Hands off! I'll yell for a prefect!"

"Yell away!" snorted Grundy. "And if you're going to yell, I'll give you something to yell for."

And Grundy gave it, with his boot! Crooke yelled—a yell that rang through the School House and might have been heard almost as far as the New House.

"Chuck him into his study!" shouted Kangaroo.

"Hold on. I'll kick him in!" said Grundy. "That's what he wants!"

And Grundy let out with his heavy boot a second time; but this time Crooke wriggled out of the way and escaped it.

But every bullet has its billet. George Alfred Grundy's hefty kick missed Crooke, but landed on the football which was mixed up with the legs of the crowd. The ball shot into the air, straight for a gas-bracket. With a crash, glass, globe and mantle flew into a thousand pieces.

A shout of laughter went up.

"Oh, well shot, Grundy! Well shot, sir!"

"Goal! Goal!"

Suddenly another shout was heard.

"Cave! Railton's coming!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Look out—"

Some of the fellows dodged away into the studies. But there was no time for most of them to dodge. Mr. Railton, Housemaster of the School House, was close behind Trimble.

He strode on the scene with a frowning brow.

"Boys! Silence! What does this mean?"

Crooke, released, sat up and spluttered. Round him stood the rather dusty and dishevelled juniors, blinking at their Housemaster. There was silence, save for the breathless gurgling of Crooke.

"Groogh! Ooogh! Woooogh! Oooooooh!"

### CHAPTER 2.

#### "SIX" for Gussy!

**M**R. RAILTON frowned severely. Like a judicious Housemaster, he had been turning a rather deaf ear, on a rainy afternoon, to an unusual amount of uproar in the junior quarters. But there was a limit, and the juniors reached it in dealing with Crooke. Crooke had put the lid on, as it were.

"What does this mean, Merry?"

"Hem!"

"Crooke! Get up, Crooke!"

Gerald staggered to his feet.

"You have been playing football here, Merry?"

"Hem! Yes, sir!"

"And as no notice was taken of this disregard of the rules, you have proceeded to ragging?"

"N-n-not exactly, sir!" stammered Tom. "We—we—"

"Crooke appears to have been roughly handled," said the Housemaster. "I require to know the reason."

Mr. Railton appeared not to remember that only an hour ago he had caned Crooke for smoking in the box-room. Crooke might be a dingy slacker; but he was entitled to justice.

"You see, sir—" stammered Tom.

"Pewwaps you had better leave it to me to explain to Mr. Wailton, Tom Mewwy! You see, sir—"

"You need not speak, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Kindly be silent!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Merry, explain this to me at once!" said Mr. Railton reluctantly

"I wanted them to stop the row," gasped Crooke. "I was writing lines in the study—the lines you gave me, sir! I couldn't work against such a row."

"Quite so! Merry, there is some excuse for your forgetting the rules of the House when you are confined indoors by the rain; but you should have ceased at once when Crooke requested you."

Tom Merry stood silent.

He had a great respect for his Housemaster, but he was not going to enter into a wordy altercation with a fellow like Crooke about the rights and wrongs of the matter. Crooke was technically in the right, though all the fellows knew that he was in the wrong. Tom, at all events, was not going to bandy words with him.

"I am surprised at this, Merry," said Mr. Railton. "You are junior captain of the House, and it is your duty to keep the rules, not to break them. I shall give you five hundred lines, Merry."

"Very well, sir!" said Tom quietly.

"Every other boy concerned in this uproar will take one hundred lines," said the Housemaster, "and let there be no more of it."

"Very well, sir!"

There were dark looks among the School House juniors. Popular as Railton was, the sentence was strongly resented. But the fellows stood silent, with the exception of D'Arcy of the Fourth. That elegant youth felt bound to enter a protest.

"Weally, Mr. Wailton—" he began warmly

"You need not speak, D'Arcy."

"Undah the circs, sir, I feel bound to speak," answered the swell of St. Jim's. "I do not wegard this as just."

"Wha-a-t!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

"I am suah, sir, that you mean to be just," said Arthur Augustus. "I am quite suah that you would not be unjust, sir, if you wefected a little. But as you have been wathah hasty—"

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "D'Arcy, come here! Now bend down!"

Mr. Railton had brought up a cane under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand.

"Bend over, D'Arcy!" he rapped out.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood erect. His noble eye gleamed through his glittering eyeglass.

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?"

Mr. Railton's voice rumbled like distant thunder. He was not accustomed to waiting for his orders to be obeyed.

"I heah you, sir!" answered Arthur Augustus calmly.

"But I fail to understand you, sir."

"I have told you to bend over."

"I am perfectly awah of that, sir! But I think I have a wight to know what I am goin' to be caned for."

"You are going to be caned for impertinence, D'Arcy."

"I should be vewy sowwy, sir, to be impertinent to a gentleman whom I wespct so highly," said Arthur Augustus, with great dignity. "I certainly did not mean to be impertinent. I was merely pointin' out that you are actin' wathah hastily and thoughtlessly—"

"If you do not immediately obey me, D'Arcy, I shall take you to Dr. Holmes for a flogging. For the last time, bend down!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"I will do so, sir. As you are my Housemastah, I am bound to obey your ordahs, even when they are unjust."

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Whack, whack, whack!

When Mr. Railton wielded the cane he seldom wielded it hard. The St. Jim's fellows always said that "six" from Railton was a lighter sentence than one from Mr. Ratcliff, of the New House. But on this occasion the School House master let himself go.

Whack, whack, whack!

It was six, and it was a very severe six. The cane fairly rang on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

That elegant youth squirmed and wriggled under the infliction. Not a sound came from his lips; but his aristocratic features were twisted into contortions of great anguish.

The sixth whack having been administered, Mr. Railton tucked the cane under his arm again.

Arthur Augustus straightened up.

"I trust that that will be a warning to you, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Railton.

"Thank you, sir; but I am not awah of bein' in any need of a warnin'," answered Arthur Augustus, with great calmness.

His friends waited in deep apprehension. Mr. Railton made a motion as if to slip the cane into his hand again. But he refrained, and, turning away, went down the stairs without making any rejoinder.

Arthur Augustus stood very still. Blake and Herries and Digby encircled him, and marched him away in silence to Study No. 6 in the Fourth. The crowd in the Shell passage dispersed with gloomy looks.

Gerald Crooke, with a vaunting look at them, lounged back to his study. He had several narrow escapes as he went, of punches and kicks. But the fellows did not want to bring back the Housemaster, and Crooke was suffered to enjoy his triumph—such as it was.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Vials of Wrath!

TEA in Tom Merry's study that rainy afternoon was not the usual cheery function. The Terrible Three of the Shell looked very thoughtful. Tom Merry had five hundred lines on hand; Manners and Lowther a hundred each.

Blake and Herries and Digby had come to tea with glum looks. Arthur Augustus, who was also due, had not come. Blake explained that he was getting over his licking in his own study. He was disinclined for tea. A large crop of lines was not inspiring; but the juniors were thinking less of their impots than of Arthur Augustus.

"The old ass, you know!" almost groaned Blake. "Of course he was quite right; but you can't talk to a Housemaster as if he was a human being!"

"Railton had to pitch into him," agreed Tom Merry.

"All the same, it was rotten!"

"All that cad Crooke's fault!" grunted Monty Lowther.

"Let's go and rag Crooke after tea!" suggested Herries.

"And bring Railton on the scene again!" said Manners.

"No, thanks!"

"We can kick the brute to-morrow," said Tom. "Blow Crooke! Gussy shouldn't have talked to Railton like that! All the same—"

"The fact is, I'm rather worried about Gussy," said Blake. "He's got his jolly old back up! If he checks Railton again—"

"He's ass enough for anything!" groaned Dig. "He's mouching about the study with glittering eye! I don't like it."

Tom Merry looked grave.

"We'd better look after him a bit, and see that he doesn't come near Railton till he's got over the licking," he said. "He will be all right to-morrow."

Blake nodded.

"Gussy never bears malice," he said. "But just at present he's feeling that he's been unjustly treated. And you never can tell what Gussy will do when he's got his silly back up."

And tea being rather hastily over, the six juniors went along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, to cheer up the swell of St. Jim's with their company and draw his noble mind away from his wrongs.

The rain was over, and the dusk was falling on the old quadrangle. A fine evening was following a dismal afternoon. It was not yet time for lock-up; and some of the fellows had gone out of the House, and Tom Merry & Co. intended to get D'Arcy out of doors; there was nothing like a run in the fresh air to clear the cobwebs from the mind and to drive away a sense of injury.



The light was on in Study No. 6 as they arrived there. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing by the study table, his face a little pale, and with a set, fixed look on it that made his friends uneasy.

On the table before him was a large bottle, which, according to the label, contained indelible marking-ink.

D'Arcy was apparently about to draw the cork when the juniors came in. He glanced up at them, still with the same set look on his noble face.

"What's the game, old chap?" asked Tom Merry, with great cheeriness. "Going to mark your collars, or what?"

"I am not goin' to mark my collars, Tom Mewwy."

"Not going to take a drink, I suppose?" asked Monty Lowther, with an effort at humour.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You know those verses in Lewis Carroll,

"Fill up your glasses with treacle and ink,  
And anything else that is pleasant to drink."

Arthur Augustus did not smile.

"You fellows want anythin'?" he asked.

"Only your pleasant company, old bean," said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"What about ragging Crooke?" asked Herries. "Think it would cheer you up a bit, old chap?"

Gussy's lips curled.

"I wogard Cwooke with uttah disdain!" he answered. "I should wefuse to touch that weptile with a barge-pole."

"Thanks!" said a sarcastic voice from the passage.

Gerald Crooke was glancing in at the open doorway, a sneer on his face.

His glance dwelt curiously for a moment on D'Arcy's set face and the large bottle of marking-ink on which Gussy's hand rested.

Herries made a jump towards the door.

"You rotter! I'll jolly well—"  
Crooke promptly vanished.

"Pway do not soil your hands on that wottah, Hewwyies!" said Arthur Augustus. "If you fellows do not want anythin' you had bettah go. I do not want my fwiends to be mixed up in this."

"In what?" demanded Blake suspiciously.

"The marking-ink?" asked Lowther.

"Nothin', deah boys! I am not goin' to tell you fellows anythin' about it! This is a mattah for me alone."

"What is, you image?" demanded Blake.

"I wefuse to be called an image, Blake!"

"Look here! What are you up to, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

It was clear to all the fellows that the noble Gussy was up to something.

"I wepeat that you fellows had bettah know nothin' about it. Pwobably there will be a feahful wow. Besides, you fellows were only lined; you were not licked by Waitton!"

"You're planning something up against Railton?" exclaimed Tom.

"Pway do not ask any questions!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I do not want to dwag you into twouble for waggin' a Housemastah."

"Ragging a Housemaster!" repeated Tom, almost dazedly. "My only hat and umbrella! Are you dream- ing about ragging Railton?"

"I think I had bettah not tell you, deah boy. It is sahaf for you to know nothin' whatevah about it. But if Waitton thinks," went on Gussy, in a tone of deep and thrilling indignation, "if he thinks that I am the fellow to take injustice lyin' down, then he is vevy gweatly mistaken. I am not that sort of fellow!"

"Oh crumbs!" said Blake helplessly.

"I have been tweated," said Gussy, "with wank in- justice! It was absolutely wank! I have been made to bend ovah and been whacked! I am not the fellow to take it lyin' down."

"But you didn't take it lying down!" argued Lowther. "You took it bending down."



Something, descending from above, collided with Crooke's head and sent him flying!

"This is not a mattah for fwivolous jokes, Lowthah! I have been w'onged! I am not standin' it! Waitlon is goin' to be sowwy for it! I feel that it is up to me to make him sowwy for it! But I would wathah that you fellows had nothin' whatevah to do with it."

"Wha a-at are you thinkin' of doin'?" gasped Manners. "You're not going to punch Railton, I suppose?"

"Or strew the hungry churchyard with his bones?" asked Lowther.

"I wefuse to tell you what I am goin' to do! It will be bettah for you fellows to be able to say, with perfect twuth, that you know nothin' about it when there is a wov about Waitlon bein' smothaned with purple ink."

"Oh, my summer hat!"

"So that's it!" gasped Blake. "That's what you've got that marking-ink for? Ragging Railton?"

"Yaas, wathah! I mean, I pwefer not to confide my intentions to you fellows! Pway do not ask me awkward questions."

The juniors gazed at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Evidently the swell of St. Jim's was in deadly earnest.

He had been given "six"—unjustly, as he firmly believed. He was going to avenge that insult to his dignity.

Vengeance was to take the form of a ragging—drenching Railton with indelible marking-ink, that might take days or weeks to wear off. But the sorrow of Railton, compared with the ultimate sorrow of Gussy, would be as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine!

Gussy was not in the mood to consider that. His friends kindly considered it for him.

"You frabjous chump!" said Blake at last. "It would mean a Head's flogging at the very least! It might mean the sack."

"I care nothin' whatevah for the consequences, Blake."

"Look here, you fathead——" said Digby.

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Dig."

"You're not going to do it!" roared Herries.

"Wats!"

"Gussy, old man——" pleaded Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus waved his noble hand in dismissal of the subject.

"Pway say no more, deah boys! I have made up my mind, and I beg you fellahs to keep cleah of it! Pway wun away."

"And leave you to get on with it?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas!"

"Do you think we'll let you, you howling ass?" bawled Herries.

"I twust, Hewwies, that you are not thinkin' of interferin' with my personal liberty of action!" said Arthur Augustus, with frigid dignity.

"Aren't we?" grinned Blake. "We are—just a little!"

"Just a few!" said Dig.

"You're not going to rag Railton, you fathead! Railton's all right, you chump! He may be a bit of an ass at times, but he's all right! We're jolly well going to take care that you don't rag Railton."

"Wats!"

"And here's for a beginning!" remarked Herries, and he jerked the bottle of marking-ink away from Gussy, and tossed it through the open study window.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom. "If that falls on anybody's napper——"

"Yaroooh!" floated up from the dusky quad.

Apparently the bottle had fallen on somebody's napper! Judging by the fiendish yell the napper was damaged, and the somebody was wrathful.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Herries. "I never thought——"

"You uttah ass!"

"Who was it?" gasped Manners.

The juniors crowded to the window and stared down into the thickening dusk of the quad. But the dusk was too thick for them to see anyone at the distance below, and there was no further sound from the recipient of the ink-bottle. The juniors strained their eyes into the gloom and listened; but they stared and listened in vain.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### A Mystery!

**G**ERALD CROOKE had had the surprise of his life. Crooke's smoky ways had often landed him in trouble; but on this particular afternoon they seemed to bring more ill-luck than usual. He had been caned by Railton, but the caning had not done him any good. Crooke had strolled out of the House in the dusk, to solace himself with a cigarette.

He wanted to smoke, or fancied that he did. And he did not feel inclined to venture on smoking within the House.

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For that reason Gerald sought a secluded spot in the old quad. Below the windows of the Fourth Form studies there was a quiet spot between two buttresses where a fellow was practically hidden, unless somebody passed in front of him.

There Crooke ensconced himself.

In the thickening dusk he was invisible in that cosy corner, and there he put a cigarette between his lips and took out his match-box. There was rather a wind after the rain, and Crooke took off his hat to shelter his cigarette while he lighted it, also to screen the glimmer of light from anyone who might be in the quad.

Then the ink-bottle happened.

Crooke was watchful enough, safe and secluded as that cosy corner was. But, naturally, he was not watching the sky for falling bottles. Danger from that direction he had not thought of.

Something descending from above collided with Crooke's head, giving him a smart tap and sent him flying.

Crooke let out one startled yell. He had had rather a sharp knock, though had the bottle struck him fair and square it would have been a much harder tap. As it was, glancing off Crooke's head, the bottle had landed in his hat without breaking.

With the bottle still in his hat, Crooke stared upwards—and saw the lighted window of Study No. 6 far above him. He guessed then whence the unexpected missile had come.

Crooke gritted his teeth.

For the moment he suspected that the Study No. 6 fellows had deliberately dropped that missile on his head.

But he realised the next moment that they could not possibly know that he was there, and could not see him in the gloom if they looked down from the window.

He groped in his hat and disinterred a bottle of marking-ink; the same bottle, evidently, that he had seen on the table in the study.

Some ass had thrown it out of the window, with a reckless disregard for possible heads below.

Crooke rubbed his head. There was a slight bruise under his hair where the ink-bottle had glanced off. A moment or two later the lighted window high above was crowded with faces looking down. A voice floated to Crooke's ears—the voice of Tom Merry.

"Can't see anybody! But it jolly well hit somebody."

"If it was a master I'll bet he's coming up to the study now!" That was Lowther's voice.

Crooke grinned below in the darkness. He was well content to let the juniors suppose that the falling bottle had struck a master, and that vengeance was on their track. He rubbed his head and kept silent.

"Anyhow, Gussy won't be able to play the goat with it now," came the deep voice of Herries. "I've stopped that."

"If you fellows think you are goin' to stop me fwom waggin' Waitlon——"

"Shut up, you burgling fathead! Anybody in the quad might hear you!" hissed Blake.

"I do not care whethah anybody heahs me or not, Blake! I am not goin' to take an unjust lickin' lyin' down——"

"Will you dry up, you image?"

"I wefuse to dwy up!"

"Look here, that bottle jolly well biffed somebody," said Tom Merry. "He's gone, and if it was a master he'll come up here. I think he'd better find the study empty when he comes."

"Yes, rather!"

"An alibi, Samivel, an alibi!" said Monty Lowther. "Come on! We'd better be occupied with the innocent amusements of youth in some other place if a beak's coming up here looking for a giddy victim."

"I wefuse——"

"Take his other ear, Dig."

"Yawwoogh!"

The light went out in Study No. 6. Faintly a howl floated from the open window, indicating that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was being persuaded—forcibly—to leave the study with his friends. Then silence.

Crooke, with a sour grin on his face, lighted his cigarette, and smoked it. He understood now. Gussy, in his resentment, had intended to use the bottle of purple ink in a ragging on Railton, and his friends had intervened. Crooke had, in fact, guessed that something of the sort was in the wind when he had seen D'Arcy in the study with that set look on his face and the bottle of ink under his hand. Now he was sure of it.

Gerald Crooke had food for thought as he stood leaning against the wall between the buttresses smoking his cigarette.

To judge by the glitter in Crooke's narrow, close-set eyes, the thoughts that were passing through his mind were strange ones.

He finished his cigarette, threw down the end, and

stamped on it with his heel. He was about to light another when there was a sound of footsteps and voices in the gloom. "Buck up! It will be lock-up in a minute or two." "Pway leave me alone, you uttah asses—" Gerald Crooke glided rapidly away in the opposite direction.

"Hallo! There's somebody!" exclaimed Tom Merry. Crooke was wearing a grey jacket; dark, but lighter in hue than the usual jacket worn at St. Jim's. Tom had a momentary glimpse of him as he scudded away into the darkness. The grey tweed jacket vanished.

"Hallo!" he called out. The shadowy figure vanished without an answer. "Look here, we shan't find that blessed bottle in the dark!" said Blake irritably. "It's too jolly dark—" "I am not askin' you to help me look for it, Blake. I should greatly pwefer you to mind your own biznay." "You howling ass! We're not going to let you find it!" snorted Blake. "I dare say it's broken to pieces, but if it isn't—"

"If it isn't, I'm goin' to find it—" "You're not, you burbling chump!" The juniors arrived at the foot of the wall below Study No. 6. They were rather puzzled about the mystery of the ink-bottle. No exasperated master or prefect had materialised in the House to inquire who had thrown the bottle out of the window, neither had any junior come into the House in an inky or enraged state. Yet the bottle certainly had fallen on somebody—as witness the yell that had been heard. A junior might have been expected to follow up that yell with some personal remarks addressed to Study No. 6; but there had been nothing of the kind.

Gussy's opinion was that the ink-bottle, which was a fairly thick and strong one, had not been broken by the fall, and he wanted to retrieve it, for the purpose for which he had intended it. His comrades had followed him into the quad, quite determined that he should not retrieve it. Gussy was not going to rag Railton—not if his chums knew it.

In the deep gloom the juniors looked round for the bottle, but they did not find it. Blake had an electric torch, which he flashed to and fro. But the bottle could not be found.

That was not surprising, as it was in the pocket of Gerald Crooke, who had already dodged into the House. But it was rather surprising to Tom Merry & Co.

"Bai Jove! Where can the beastly thing be, you know?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in annoyance.

"Must be somewhere about!" grunted Blake. "And I suppose we've got to find it, to keep it out of your hands, you ass!"

"It hasn't broken, anyhow, or we should see the ink about," remarked Manners.

"Blow it!" grunted Blake. "And blow Gussy—"

"Hallo, old men!" A cheery face appeared in the gleam of Blake's electric torch. "You fellows lost something? I guess I'll help." It was Wildrake of the Fourth, the Canadian junior.

"Good man!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "Just the man we want. You're the rea. goods at picking up sign and following a trail, Wildrake. We're looking for an ink-bottle that that ass Herries clucked out of the window. Tell us which way it went."

Wildrake laughed. "I guess that beats me!" he said. "What on earth do you want it for?"

"We don't want it—only to keep it out of the hands of a dangerous lunatic."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

There was the clang of a bell from the House. "Look up!" said Blake. "We've got to get in. Come on, Gussy!"

The juniors started for the House doorway. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lingered behind, still groping about in the gloom. Blake turned his head and yelled to him.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Wats!"

"Lock-up, you fathead!"

"Pway do not call me a fathead, Blake! I dislike such expressions."

"Will you come in?" shrieked Blake.

"Not at pwsent."

"You'll get lines, Gussy," said Wildrake.

"I am quite wegardless of lines, Wildwacke."

"Oh, bag the silly ass and run him in!" exclaimed Blake.

The juniors hurried back to collect Gussy. He was stooping and groping at the foot of the wall when three or four hands were laid on him, and he was jerked away.

"Welease me, you wottahs!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I wepeat that I wefuse to allow you to interfere in this mattah!"

"Yank him along!" "You uttah wuffians!" "This way, fathead!" "I wefuse to take one step! Yawoooooh!"

It was all very well for Arthur Augustus to refuse, but with his persuasive friends round him his refusal counted for nothing. He was marched off forcibly, raising strenuous objections as he went.

Still objecting, Arthur Augustus was marched into the House. And the mystery of the missing ink-bottle remained a mystery.

CHAPTER 5. An Inky Rag!

M R. RAILTON left Masters' Common-room as half-past ten chimed out from the clock-tower.

He walked away in the direction of his study with Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell.

There had been rather an interesting discussion in Common-room that evening, and it had kept the Housemaster rather late. Railton, Linton, and Lathom, master of the Fourth, had been discussing a certain obscure

passage in Euripides, which each of them believed meant something, though it was far from easy to elucidate just what it meant. Possibly it did not mean anything, and probably it did not matter very much whether it did or not. But the Housemaster and the two Form masters found the discussion intensely interesting. Each of them had found a different meaning in that obscure passage, and each was convinced that his own elucidation was the right one, and considered secretly that the other two were inadmissible, and, in fact, rather asinine.

Railton tore himself away from Euripides at last, and from Common-room, leaving Mr. Lathom shaking his head. Linton accompanied him to Masters' passage, pointing out, as he went, that his own theory was palpably and obviously correct. Admitting that Euripides had meant something, it seemed certain to Mr. Linton that he, Linton, had pinned down the elusive, ancient gentleman as a bug-hunter pins down a butterfly. Euripides was not an easy man to corner, but Linton felt that he had cornered him, and was surprised that Railton did not share his view.

They were still going strong, when Railton reached his study door.

There they stopped; Linton still unexhausted. But the Housemaster had Greek papers to correct before he went to bed, and Euripides really had to go.



Mr. Linton having unguardedly paused for breath, the Housemaster struck in hurriedly:

"Well, I must really get to my papers. Good-night, Linton!"

And he turned to his study door.

The door was ajar.

Railton noticed this, for he had shut the door on leaving his study some time before. Still, he attached no great importance to it—for the moment. Somebody must have been in his study, that was all.

He pushed open the door and entered.

Crash!

Splash!

Yell!

Mr. Linton, turning away to go down the passage, spun back, with a surprised and horrified exclamation.

"Railton!" he gasped.

"Groooogh!"

"Goodness gracious!"

The figure that tottered in the doorway of Railton's study was hardly recognisable as that of the School Housemaster.

Never had Victor Railton been taken so completely by surprise.

For the moment he hardly knew what had happened, but he knew that he was drenched with something—horribly drenched.

"Railton!" gasped the master of the Shell, gazing at a face streaming with purple ink, his eyes distended with horror and amazement.

"Groooooooh!" gurgled Railton.

"Bless my soul!"

"Ooooh! Gug-gug-gug! Goooooh!"

Mr. Railton clawed at his face. He gouged his eyes. He staggered and spluttered and gurgled.

Purple ink, mixed with water, drenched him. Something—which turned out to be a flat tin pan—had fallen from the top of his door as he pushed it open and entered, and it had fairly bonneted the Housemaster. It had been full of ink mixed with water; and the contents had drenched Victor Railton. Purple ink streamed over his head, streamed down his face, streamed down his neck. He was of the ink, inky; more impurpled than if he had been, like the ancient Greek emperors, born in the purple!

It was a booby-trap; and Railton had walked into it unsuspectingly. He knew now why his door had been set ajar.

Railton gouged watery ink from his eyes. He glared about him with a purple glare.

"Who—what—who—who has done this?" he gurgled.

Mr. Linton could not answer that question. He could only gasp with horror.

"A—a trap has been laid for me—in my own study!" gasped Mr. Railton. "I—I—I am smothered with—with ink!"

It was only too terribly true!

Mr. Railton was not merely smothered with ink, he streamed with ink; he reeked with ink; he lived and moved and had his being in ink!

And it was not, so to speak, common or garden ink, it was purple marking-ink—ink of a rich hue and an indelible nature! It was the most unpleasant kind of ink imaginable to get into one's hair and over one's face and down one's neck!

Under its coating of ink, Railton's face was crimson with wrath.

He was a good-tempered master, a thoroughly good-natured man. But the best temper and the best nature might have failed any man in these circumstances. Railton was in a towering fury.

"A—a—a booby-trap!" he gasped. "This is what the boys call, I believe, a b-b-booby-trap! A trap laid for me—in my own study! Upon my word! Grooh!"

"Incredible!" gasped Mr. Linton. "Outrageous! Unheard of! Amazing! Unparalleled! Unbelievable!" Linton, at the end of his available adjectives, gasped.

Railton's face set grimly under the ink.

He was collecting himself, having already collected the ink. His jaw squared in a way that boded ill to the author of the booby-trap.

He cleared the ink from his eyes, turned on the light in his study, and stared round him.

He did not, of course, expect to find the culprit there. He was looking for some sign of him, some clue to the perpetrator of this unheard of outrage.

But there seemed no clue.

The flat tin pan lay on the floor, still very inky, though its contents had been shed on the Housemaster. Ink lay around in a pool. Ink streamed down Railton. Ink splashed the door. The atmosphere was redolent of ink. But that was all.

The tin pan had been lodged, one end on the door, the other resting on the door lintel. For that purpose the door had been left rather widely ajar—wide enough for the perpetrator to squeeze out, after setting the booby-trap. And he was gone—probably long gone—leaving behind him only the pan and the ink.

Railton's inky face set very hard.

"Some junior—" gasped Linton.

The Housemaster nodded. Obviously this was the work of a junior; it was scarcely possible to suppose that a senior had laid a booby-trap for his Housemaster. True, it was amazing that any junior should have ventured to rag Railton, especially in this awful way, but there could be no doubt on that point.

But it was an hour since junior bed-time. It followed that some junior had left his dormitory after lights-out and crept down stealthily to Masters' passage to carry out this iniquitous plot.

"Linton," Mr. Railton's voice was like a knife. "Linton, will you kindly visit the junior dormitories without delay—something may be discovered. I must wash off this ink at once."

"Certainly, sir, certainly."

Mr. Linton whisked away to Common-room, to call other masters to his assistance. Mr. Railton made a direct line for the nearest bath-room. He wanted to discover the delinquent, but still more he wanted hot water and soap—plenty of hot water and plenty of soap!

In a steaming bath-room Mr. Railton rubbed and scrubbed, and scrubbed and rubbed. He looked at his reflection in the glass and rubbed and scrubbed, and scrubbed and rubbed again and again.

But it was not for nothing that that ink had been advertised as indelible. There is plenty of ink on the market which, advertised as indelible, will come out in the wash. This particular brand of ink unfortunately was the genuine goods, and lived up to its reputation.

When Mr. Railton was tired of rubbing and scrubbing, and his skin felt tender and sore, he was still inky! Much was gone, but much remained. He had streaks and spots which would not come out, which had to be left to the hand of time. In places he looked like a zebra. In other places he looked like a leopard. And when he emerged, at long last, from the bath-room, breathing hard and deep, the expression on his striped and spotted countenance might have stricken terror to the heart of the evildoer.

## CHAPTER 6.

### No Clue!

**T**OM MERRY opened his eyes and blinked.

The light had flashed on in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

Mr. Linton stood in the doorway looking in.

Tom rubbed his eyes and sat up in bed. Other fellows awakened and sat up and stared sleepily, in surprise, at their Form master.

Mr. Linton advanced into the room.

"Something's up!" murmured Monty Lowther, under his breath.

It was clear that something was up. It was very unusual for the fellows to be awakened by a Form master after lights-out. And the expression on Mr. Linton's face was grave, not to say portentous.

"Merry! I see you are awake," said Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"Are you aware whether any boy has left this dormitory since lights-out?"

Looking up and down the row of beds Mr. Linton could see that every one was occupied. If a Shell fellow had been out, he had returned and gone back to bed.

"No, sir!" said Tom in amazement. "Nobody's been out that I know of! Of course, I haven't been awake!"

Mr. Linton nodded and walked along the row of beds. Two or three fellows were still asleep, or, at least, had their eyes closed, and Mr. Linton called each of these, awakening him. They all sat up in bed and blinked at the master of the Shell.

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"Has any boy here left this dormitory?"

There was no answer.

"If any boy has been out of the dormitory I command him to say so at once!" said Mr. Linton in a deep voice.

"No takers!" murmured Monty Lowther, sotto voce.

There was silence.

"Has anything happened, sir?" ventured Crooke of the Shell at last.

"Yes, Crooke. Something very serious has happened," answered Mr. Linton gravely. "I hope and trust that no boy in my Form is concerned in it; but it is necessary to make sure."

He did not tell the curious fellows what had happened. He scanned the long row of sleepy, startled faces.

"I'm sure nobody's been out of this dorm, sir," said Crooke.

"Have you been awake, Crooke?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Crooke hastily. "but fellows would have woke up if anybody had started moving about."

"No one has heard anyone moving since lights-out?" asked the Form master.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Very well," said Mr. Linton, "I think—I feel—that the delinquent must have come from another dormitory. You may go to sleep again, my boys. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Mr. Linton left the dormitory, turning out the light. He had told the fellows that they could go to sleep again; but they were not disposed to go to sleep promptly, after that surprising interruption of their slumbers. He left the dormitory in an excited buzz.

He went along to the Fourth Form dormitory. The light was on there, and Mr. Lathom was in the room. The Fourth were all awake, sitting up in bed, as surprised and curious as the Shell.

"Have you found anyone absent, Mr. Lathom?" asked the Shell master.

Mr. Lathom shook his head.

"No one, sir! My boys are all present. Of course, I expected to find them all present. But in your Form—"

"My boys are all in bed, as I naturally expected to find them," said Mr. Linton coldly.

"Possibly a boy in the Third Form—" said Mr. Lathom.

"Possibly! Let us go to Mr. Selby."

"But what's happened, sir?" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Yes, Blake! You will hear about it in the morning," said Mr. Lathom. And he left the dormitory with the master of the Shell and closed the door.

The two masters proceeded to the Third Form dormitory, where they met Selby, the master of the Third, coming away. They gave him inquiring looks.

"My boys are all in bed and they deny that anyone has been out since bed-time," said Mr. Selby. "I am certain that that is the case."

"What makes you so certain of that, Selby?" asked Mr. Linton.

Selby gave a sniff.

"I am assured that no boy in my Form would venture to



Never had Victor Raitton had such a surprise! He knew that he was drenched with something dark and horrible!

assault a Housemaster," he said. "To my mind, it is impossible."

"That is exactly what I think about the Shell!" remarked Mr. Linton. "It is incredible that this outrage was the work of a Shell boy."

"While it is, of course, impossible that a Fourth-Form boy can have done anything of the kind!" observed Mr. Lathom.

The three masters looked at one another.

Unless the culprit was a senior, Fifth or Sixth, it was certain that he was in the Shell, the Fourth, or the Third. There was no getting away from that. Nobody supposed that the culprit was a senior man. But each of the masters felt certain about his own Form. Each was very sensitive on the subject. A rag on a Housemaster—an assault, as Mr. Selby called it—was an awfully serious matter. In all probability it would lead to an expulsion. Discredit would be reflected on the Form master to whose Form the young rascal belonged. The three gentlemen were very anxious to escape that discredit. Hence their implicit belief in the innocence of their own Forms.

"We must be sensible!" said Mr. Selby acidly. "This outrage was perpetrated by a junior boy. That is absolutely certain."

"Granted," admitted Mr. Linton. "But surely a very junior boy—not a boy old enough to be in the Shell. Such utter thoughtlessness—"

"There was more ruffianism than thoughtlessness in the act, in my opinion," said Mr. Selby. "And I understand that a number of boys, belonging to the Shell and the Fourth, were punished by Mr. Raitton to-day. There was some sort of a riot in the juniors' quarters, in which no boys of the Third Form were concerned. The inference is clear."

Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom drew a little together. They were both up against the inference drawn by the Third Form master.

"Do you imply that this—this rag was an act of revenge,

sir, for the punishment inflicted by Mr. Railton on certain boys?" exclaimed the master of the Shell.

"To my mind, sir, it is an absolute certainty," said Mr. Selby tartly. "Some revengeful boy has done this."

"Highly improbable!" said Mr. Lathom. "I am convinced that no boy in my Form would nourish feelings of revenge—"

"I am convinced that no boy in my Form would dream of avenging a punishment received from his Housemaster," said Mr. Linton.

"Yet the outrage has occurred," said Mr. Selby sarcastically. "The motive is clear to me, if not to you. I imagine that it will be equally clear to Railton."

"I cannot believe—"

"I cannot credit—"

"We had better report to Railton, at all events," said Mr. Selby. "The matter is for his judgment."

Mr. Selby whisked away. Lathom and Linton glanced after him with dislike and then glanced at one another, doubtfully.

"An unpleasant suggestion on Selby's part!" murmured Mr. Lathom.

"Very!" said Mr. Linton. "Selby is not a pleasant man, Lathom. To my mind, this extraordinary prank shows a thoughtlessness of mind only to be found in a very young boy—such as a member of the Third Form."

"I agree with you entirely," said Mr. Lathom. "I cannot doubt that the culprit will be found in Selby's Form."

And they followed Mr. Selby down to Railton's study.

In that study, the three masters had to wait a little while; Railton being still busy with soap and water. While they waited, Linton and Lathom chatted amicably, being quite united now. Mr. Selby maintained a dry and sarcastic silence, his looks speaking volumes. There was rather a strained atmosphere, till Mr. Railton came in—newly swept and garnished.

"Have you discovered anything, gentlemen?" asked the Housemaster.

"Nothing, sir," said Mr. Linton. "Every boy in my Form was in bed and had evidently been fast asleep until awakened by me."

"The same applies precisely to my Form," said Mr. Lathom.

"And mine!" snapped Mr. Selby.

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"The boy, whoever he was, had ample time to return to his dormitory and affect to be asleep," he said. "The matter can go no farther to-night; but in the morning it will be gone into very thoroughly."

"I suggest, sir—" said Mr. Selby.

Railton gave him an inquiring look.

"I suggest, sir, that this outrage was an act of revenge on the part of some boy punished by you to-day," said the Third Form master.

The Housemaster, rather to the chagrin of Linton and Lathom, nodded.

"That has already occurred to me," he said. "I think it is very probable. The young rascal must have had a motive for such a daring and dastardly act; and that, doubtless, was the motive."

Mr. Selby gave his colleagues a superior smile. Linton and Lathom bit their respective lips; looking as if they would rather have bitten Selby.

"However," added Mr. Railton, "we will investigate the matter in the morning—for the present, good-night, gentlemen."

The three Form masters left the study and went their ways. Mr. Railton, spotted and streaked, sat down to correct Greek papers. But his thoughts wandered many times from the Greek papers; and the glint in his eyes, the grim set of his lips, boded ill to the unknown culprit when he should be discovered.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Trimble, the Tattler!

"MY beloved 'earers!" said Monty Lowther oracularly. "Something's up!"

The fellows did not need telling that.

Most of them had known, or guessed, overnight, that something was up; and immediately after rising-bell in the morning, there could be no doubt about it. After prayers, all the school knew that something very seriously was up. The New House knew it as well as the School House, and in view of the evident seriousness of the matter, rather rejoiced that they were well out of it.

Mr. Railton, who seldom missed chapel, cut it that morning. Possibly he was anxious not to display his streaked

and spotted complexion in public before the same became unavoidable.

More hot water and soap, more rubbing and scrubbing, that morning had helped; but had not wholly delivered Railton from streaks and spots. He was still zebra-like in places, leopard-like in other places.

He breakfasted in seclusion in his own study.

Exactly what had happened, no one knew as yet, or few; but there were many surmises and theories. The Sixth Form prefects, of course, knew, and looked duly solemn and portentous. The masters knew; and their united gravity outdid that of the ancient Roman Senate on the celebrated occasion when Brennus butted in. Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House, was heard to mutter that such things never occurred, he was glad to say, in his House. Fellows who heard him wondered what things, and burned to know.

Only Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, had news before morning school; Baggy being a fellow who always had news. That it was something to do with Railton, and that it was serious, all were aware; and some of the fellows were troubled about it—these especial fellows being D'Arcy's especial friends! And they might have been observed, occasionally, darting questioning and dubious glances at the thoughtful countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Trimble weighed in with the news that Railton had been shot by a burglar over-night.

This, if true, would have relieved the minds of D'Arcy's friends; though, of course, they would have been frightfully sorry for old Railton.

But nobody believed it was true. On demand Baggy Trimble modified his yarn; Trimble was accommodating in such matters. So long as he got listeners, he was not particular what they listened to. On second thoughts, as it were, the cheerful Baggy revealed that Railton had not been shot by a burglar, but had been knocked down by a tramp.

It being pointed out to Baggy that, in either case, the police would have been on the scene, instead of masters and prefects going about like a lot of boiled owls, Baggy further modified his story, and announced that Railton had been knocked down by a St. Jim's man.

Feeling that details were required to bolster up a story twice modified to suit demands, Baggy declared that Railton's eye had been blacked, and that his nose was swollen to the size and ripeness of a rich, red tomato.

That was why he was keeping out of sight, Baggy declared; his eye and his nose in that startling state were, so to speak, for private consumption only.

"Bai Jove! Have you seen Waitton with a black eye??" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, staring at the inventive Baggy.

"Of course I have." Baggy Trimble was nothing if not an eye-witness. "And I can tell you his nose is as black as the ace of spades—I mean his eye—"

"You silly ass!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Well, wait till you see him!" said Baggy. "From what I hear, he was knocked down by a prefect—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Whether it was Kildare or Darrell or Rushden I can't say for certain," said Baggy modestly. "They're keeping it rather dark. It may have been Knox of the Sixth. Railton, I fancy, caught Knox breaking bounds at night—"

"Oh, ring off, fathead!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as a fabwicatin' ass, Twimble."

Baggy Trimble snorted and rolled away in search of other hearers. Figgins & Co., of the New House, tackled him in the quad, curious to know what was the matter in the other House. Baggy was more than willing to oblige them.

"You see, this is how it was," explained Baggy. "From what I hear, Railton caught Knox of the Sixth breaking bounds after midnight—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Figgins. "Straight?"

"Oh, quite certain! Knox turned on him like a tiger, and hit him fairly in the eye."

"Knox of the Sixth did?" gasped Kerr.

"Yes, and Railton went down like an ox! When they picked him up—"

"Who picked him up?" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Linton and Lathom! They saw the whole thing, and rushed up and picked up Railton! Blood was streaming from his nose—"

"Because he was hit in the eye?" ejaculated Figgins.

"I understand that Knox got in a second punch. Railton's nose wasn't just squashed—I think it was actually broken!"

"Great pip!"

"Knox, so I hear, will be sacked," said Baggy. "Of course, there's nothing else the Head-can do."

"Well, this beats the band!" said Figgins & Co., in amazement. And they were going back to their House with the amazing news when Knox of the Sixth strolled by, looking his usual self, and evidently not a fellow to be sacked.

Whereupon, Figgins & Co., realising that Baggy had been imposing on their simple innocence, collared Baggy, to jam his head against one of St. Jim's ancient elms. In vain Baggy hurriedly exonerated Knox, and named Cutts of the Fifth as the delinquent. Figgins & Co. jammed his head on the tree, and left Baggy roaring.

Except for Baggy Trimble, who drew cheerily on his fertile imagination, nobody knew what was "up." But doubt and uneasiness was growing in the minds of several School House juniors. Blake and Herries and Digby looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with dubious dismay. Something had happened to Railton, and only the evening before Gussy had been barely restrained by his faithful friends from ragging Railton. His friends wondered dismally whether what had happened to Railton had any purple ink mixed in it. The masters' visits to the dormitories the previous night showed that some fellow was suspected of having gone down after lights-out; and it might have been Gussy. Up to bed-time his friends had kept a careful eye on him, but after lights out, naturally, they had gone to sleep, and the swell of St. Jim's had been left to his own devices.

They were worried—all the more because Gussy was looking very unusually thoughtful that morning. What was he thinking about so seriously? His friends wanted to know.

"Blessed if I like it!" Blake muttered to Herries and Dig. "Can the born ass have been up to anything last night?"

"Did he bag that bottle of ink, after all?" asked Herries. "You know he stopped behind and we had to go back and collar him."

"Has Railton been inked?" muttered Dig.

The Terrible Three bore down on them with serious faces. They had just heard the order that Fourth and Shell—the School House sections of those Forms—were to assemble in Hall, instead of going in to their Form-rooms as usual for first school.

"That means that a Fourth Form or a Shell man has been up to something!" said Blake, when they told him.

"What about Gussy?" asked Tom hesitatingly. "Was he ass enough—"

"He's ass enough for anything!" groaned Blake. "We watched him till dorm, but after that goodness knows."

"Better ask him," said Manners. "Railton's not been seen yet, and something's happened to him. Let's ask Gussy."

"Here he comes!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joined the group. His noble brow was reflective, his expression very serious. They gazed at him.

"I have been thinkin', you fellows," said Arthur Augustus soberly.

Lowther did not ask him what he had done it with. Even the humorous Monty was not feeling humorous just then.

"Somethin' has happened to Waitton, and some Fourth or Shell fellow is mixed up in it," said D'Arcy. "Pewwaps you fellows wemembah that last night I was thinkin' of waggin' Waitton."

"Yes, you ass!" grunted Blake.

"I was feelin' vevy wild, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "But on reflection, I realised that Waitton was not weally to blame. He was wathah an ass, of course; but a fellow must not expect too much sense from a House-mastah. I was vevy w'ong to think of waggin' him. I am vevy glad that you fellows butted in and pvented me."

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Now that somethin' has happened I feel it all the more," explained Arthur Augustus. "It would be wathah howwid to be the fellow that the Beaks are aftah now, wouldn't it?"

"Thank goodness you had nothing to do with it, whatever it was, you ass!" said the captain of the Shell.

"Yaas, wathah!" assented Arthur Augustus.

Wildrake of the Fourth came along. His face was grave.

"You fellows coming in?" he called out. "Time for Hall. I say, have you heard what's happened?"

"Only Trimble's silly rot."

"I've seen Railton!" said the Canadian junior. "Spotted him looking out of his study window! It's pretty serious, I think."

"What's happened to him?"

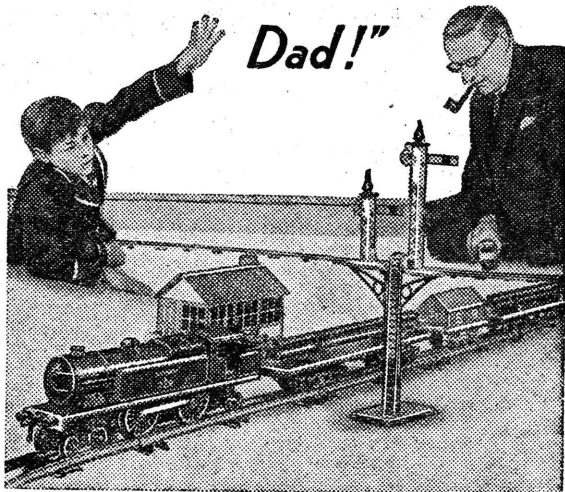
"His face is all marked with spots and stripes—ink of some sort—"

"Ink!" said six voices faintly.

(Continued on next page.)

"Of course she'll take another."

Dad!"



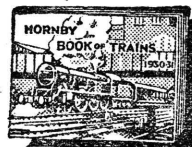
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(Continued from previous page)

Wildrake looked at them. He was rather surprised by the unnerving effect of his words on Tom Merry & Co.

"Yes, it was ink, I guess," he said. "Not ordinary ink, or Railton could have washed it off. Some sort of purple indelible ink."

Tom Merry & Co. stood dumb.

"Well, better come, or you'll be late," said the Canadian junior. "You don't want to be late this morning. The Beaks are awfully solemn."

And Kit Wildrake walked off to the House.

Tom Merry & Co., heedless, stood in frozen silence! Ink—purple indelible ink—on Railton! They gazed speechlessly at Gussy.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That is wathah curious, if Wildwake is wight! I wonder who can have inked Wailton?"

"You—you—you wonder?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas."

"Oh dear!" groaned Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not a very observant youth. But he observed now that something seemed to be afflicting his friends. He turned his eyeglass from face to face with a puzzled expression.

"Is anythin' the mattah, deah boys?" he asked.

Jack Blake groaned. There was no other way of expressing his feelings. The other fellows stood silent.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Get into Hall, you fags!" called out Kildare of the Sixth.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at D'Arcy, looked at one another, and started for Hall. They said nothing; their feelings were too dismal for words.

### CHAPTER 8.

#### Before the Beak!

"RAILTON ragged!"

That was it!

The whisper passed from mouth to mouth in Hall, where the two Forms were gathered.

The moment Mr. Railton entered, the mystery was cleared up so far as concerned what had happened.

His countenance spoke for itself.

The proverb declares that the leopard cannot change his spots, nor the Ethiopian his skin. And Mr. Railton was in the same unfortunate state as the leopard and the Ethiopian.

What had happened to him was apparent at a glance. It leaped to the eye as it were.

Fellows stared at him and whispered. Six fellows felt their hearts like lead in their bosoms. Gussy had done it! Three Shell fellows, and three of the Fourth, had no doubt whatever about that.

How could they doubt?

They had known D'Arcy's intentions, and, knowing them, had put a stop to them up to bed-time. But those intentions, obviously, had been carried out. Purple indelible ink marked the victim of the rag. Somebody had inked Railton. Who but Gussy?

Strangely enough, Arthur Augustus seemed perfectly calm and self-possessed, indeed unconcerned. If Gussy was guilty, it seemed that he possessed a nerve of iron.

Not entertaining the slightest doubt of Gussy's guilt, Tom Merry & Co. could only hope that it would not come to light. They could make allowances for the exasperation and general fatheadedness of the noble Gussy, which the school authorities were not likely to make.

The Head was not present. As a purely House matter, it was being dealt with by the Housemaster. But Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom came in with Mr. Railton, as the masters of the Forms concerned.

Mr. Railton's face was stern. Its dignity was somewhat marred by streaks and spots and smudges, which would have had a rather comic effect at a less thrilling moment. But its sternness was unmistakable.

His eye, as it travelled over the assembled Shell and Fourth, resembled the eye of Hamlet's stately pater—an eyes like Mars, to threaten and command. Some of the fellows felt as if it bored into them. Fellows whose consciences were not very clear, like Crooke and Gore, of the Shell, and Mellish and Trimble of the Fourth, felt very uneasy under that searching, penetrating eye, and dropped their own.

Whispering died away. There was a dead silence, and a pin might have been heard to fall, till Mr. Railton spoke.

He spoke briefly. In a few words, he told the assembled Forms what had happened in his study the previous night. Some boy had crept down secretly from his dormitory, to set a booby-trap in his Housemaster's study, at a time when, no doubt, he knew that the Housemaster would be in Common-room. There was little doubt that the boy in question was a member either of the Fourth or of the Shell.

The previous day, Mr. Railton went on, he had occasion to punish a number of juniors for a riot in the junior studies. One had been caned; one given a very heavy imposition; others smaller impositions. It had occurred to him that the outrage in his study was possibly the outcome of some reckless feeling of revenge. He hoped not, he trusted not; but so it seemed to him. The facts had to be ascertained. The culprit was given a chance of owning up. If he did so immediately, he would be taken to the headmaster and flogged with the utmost severity. If he did not, he would be expelled from St. Jim's as soon as he was discovered.

Pause!

It was a thrilling pause.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther simply could not help looking round at the Fourth, to watch the expression on Gussy's face. They observed that Blake, and Herries, and Digby were doing the same.

But Gussy's face was quite unconscious.

In the silent Hall it was impossible for Gussy's friends to speak to him to urge him to take his chance while it lasted. They longed to hear him speak. A Head's flogging was bad enough; but it was a mere nothing compared with the "sack." If only Gussy had sense enough to stand forward and take the tide while it was at the flood, as it were—

Gussy made no movement.

Blake, standing by his side, pressed his arm, as a hint. D'Arcy's glance turned on him in mild surprise. He evidently did not understand the hint.

Silence reigned unbroken for a long long minute. Then the deep voice of Victor Railton was heard again.

"For the last time, I call on the guilty person to stand forward and admit what he has done."

### Potts, The Office Boy!



Silence once more. The guilty person, whoever he was, obviously had no intention of admitting what he had done. A Head's flogging had no attractions for him, even as the alternative of a possible expulsion.

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, between compressed lips, "the matter now passes out of my hands. Investigation will undoubtedly reveal the guilty party, and he will be dealt with by the headmaster."

Silence again. The juniors wondered breathlessly what was coming next. It was plain that they were not to be dismissed yet.

"I shall now," said Mr. Railton, "question the boys to whom punishment was given yesterday. Merry!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Do you know anything about this matter?"

Tom hesitated a brief moment. The question was an awkward one, as he had no doubt whatever that he knew who the culprit was.

"I had nothing whatever to do with it, sir!" he answered.

But Railton's keen eye had noted that hesitation, brief as it was.

"That is not a direct answer to my question, Merry," he said. "I asked you whether you knew anything about the matter."

Tom Merry coloured. "I can only speak for myself, sir," he said firmly. "I never even knew anything had happened till Mr. Linton woke us up in the dormitory last night."

"I may explain to you, Merry," said Mr. Railton quietly, "that you are bound to state anything you know. This matter is too serious—much too serious—for anything to be kept back. It amounts to an assault upon a member of Dr. Holmes' staff. Until it is cleared up, every boy present will be under suspicion. I quite understand that you desire to say nothing that could be construed into what the boys would call 'sneaking.' But in this serious matter you must trust to your Housemaster's judgment in that. I command you to tell me anything you may know of this matter."

"I know nothing, sir," said Tom steadily. "I have my own opinion; and that is all. I can't mention a fellow's name on that."

"You know nothing for certain?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir."

"Can you tell me anything about this matter?"

Six pairs of ears hung on D'Arcy's reply. When it came, it came like a thunderbolt to them.

"No, sir!"

"I caned you yesterday, D'Arcy, and you were impertinent enough to express the opinion that your punishment was unjust."

"Yaas, sir; but on reflection I have altered that opinion, sir," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "I still think it was wathah thick—"

"What?"

"Wathah thick, sir! But on the whole—"

"Were you concerned in what happened in my study last night?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know anything about it?"

"Nothin' whatevah, sir."

Blake drew a deep, deep breath. Digby turned his face away. George Herries stared at Gussy almost open-mouthed. If the swell of St. Jim's was lying, he was lying

with a wonderful nerve. His face was perfectly calm and equable.

The Terrible Three exchanged dismal glances. Arthur Augustus, whom they had always believed to be the soul of honour, had told Railton that he knew nothing whatever about the ragging. It was difficult for the chums of the Shell to believe their ears. Certainly, a fellow could not be expected to give himself away. But a direct falsehood—from Gussy! It was simply staggering to Tom Merry & Co.

"Crooke!" There was a movement of surprise when Crooke's name was called by the Housemaster. Crooke was not one of the fellows punished for rioting in the Shell passage the previous day.

Crooke was observed to start. But he answered quietly:

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know anything of this matter, Crooke?"

"No, sir."

Nobody supposed that Crooke knew anything about it, but some remembered that he had been caned the day before for smoking, which was doubtless the reason why Railton questioned him.

There was a pause. Mr. Selby's suggestion that the ragging was an act of revenge, rather than an unthinking prank, was certainly working in the Housemaster's mind. He had questioned the two fellows who had been caned, and the fellow who had been given a heavy imput. Their answers were the same. They knew, or declared they knew, nothing. The juniors shifted uneasily, wondering if the inquisition was to go on. It was some moments before Mr. Railton spoke again.

"That the culprit is here present, I am assured," he said, "and I strongly suspect that his identity is known to other boys. For the present you are dismissed; but I may say that I have not the slightest doubt that a discovery will shortly be made, and the boy who was guilty of the outrage in my study will then be expelled from the school."

The Housemaster made a sign of dismissal, and the Forms filed out. The juniors broke into an eager buzz of discussion on their way to their respective Form-rooms. But there were six fellows who were grimly silent—three in the Fourth, and three in the Shell. For that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the guilty party—they had not the slightest doubt—and they were feeling absolutely sick about it.

CHAPTER 9.

A Rift in the Lute!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY jammed his eyeglass into his noble eye, looked at Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, and looked again.

It was morning break. Shell and Fourth were out in the quad, most of them discussing the "outrage" in the Housemaster's study, and asking one another the question that was now a burning one at St. Jim's—"Who ragged Railton?"

The Terrible Three, with thoughtful and rather dismal faces, were coming down the path under the elms, when Arthur Augustus appeared in the offing.

They coloured uncomfortably as they saw him, and turned aside.

Hence the surprised stare of the swell of St. Jim's. It really looked as if his friends in the Shell were

(Continued on next page.)

A "Feint" Resemblance!



avoiding him, and that was so surprising, that Gussy could scarcely credit the evidence of his celebrated eyeglass.

Such a matter could not be left in doubt. Gussy changed his own direction so as to intercept the Terrible Three. They turned aside again.

This really left no doubt on the subject. Colour flushed into the aristocratic face of Arthur Augustus.

He quickened his pace, and arrived in front of the three. They had to become conscious of his existence then. They stopped.

"Pway," said Arthur Augustus, his voice trembling with suppressed anger and indignation—"pway, what is the meanin' of this?"

Tom and Manners and Lowther looked very uncomfortable.

"If I am in cwah," said D'Arcy, with quiet dignity, "I beg you to set me wight. But it appeahed to me that you were avoidin' me."

"Um!" murmured Tom Merry.

"I have not the slightest objection to dwoppin' your acquaintance, if that is your desiah," said Arthur Augustus, Olympian in his indignant loftiness. "But I requiah to know the weason of this vevy extwaordinawy action on your part."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom. "We're not chucking you, if it comes to that. But—well, you know it's too thick."

"Too jolly thick!" grunted Manners.

"There's a limit!" snapped Lowther.

"I am quite in the dark as to your meanin'," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "If I have done anythin' that you disapprove of, I shall be glad to heah what it is."

"Do you expect us to approve of dashed lies?" demanded Manners bluntly.

"Lies?" repeated D'Arcy.

"Yes! What else do you call it?"

"Am I to undahstand that you accuse me of lyin'?"

"Yes, if that lump of lunacy you call a brain can understand anything," said Monty Lowther. "It was a difficult position; but you got yourself into it. You had no right to lie yourself out of it."

Arthur Augustus' face set hard.

"I have no ideah to what you are alludin'," he said, "and I do not desiah to know. I gathah that you wegard me as a liah. That bein' the case, of course, our acquaintance cannot continue."

"Please yourself about that!" said Tom Merry shortly.

"I have always considered you my friends," said Arthur Augustus. "I am disappointed in you. I am forced to wegard you with contempt."

"You cheeky ass!"

Gussy waved his hand.

"That will do! Fwom this moment, I cease to know you!" he said. "You will oblige me by nevah speakin' to me again!"

With that the swell of St. Jim's turned on his heel and walked away, his noble nose in the air.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another.

They were intensely exasperated, and disposed to follow the lofty Gussy, up-end him, and rub his noble nose in the quad. It was really too "thick" for him to attempt to carry off the matter in this lofty way.

"The cheeky fathead!" breathed Lowther. "After lying to Railton—lying like Trimble or Crooke or Mellish, it—"

"He knows we know he did it," said Manners. "He must know that. Of course, he got that bottle back last night, and—"

"Of course," said Tom. "It's plain enough. He jolly well knows that we know he did it! I've a jolly good mind—"

"Say, young 'uns!" It was Wildrake of the Fourth, and he strolled up with a puzzled look on his face. "Excuse my hornin' in, but is anything the matter?"

"More or less," said Tom.

The Canadian junior smiled.

"I guess that's a polite way of telling me to mind my own business," he remarked. "All right, if you like. But you seem to be edge-wise with the one and only, and I'm sure sorry to see it. You've been friends a long time, and I guess you're rather jays to let any little misunderstanding break it up."

"It's not a misunderstanding," said Tom.

"When a fellow tells lies——" began Manners, and broke off.

Wildrake looked at him.

"Is that what you've got against D'Arcy?" he asked.

"We don't want to talk about it," said Tom.

"That's all right; but Manners said—"

"Better forget what I said," snapped Manners, "and don't mention it to anybody!"

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"I guess you know I'm not a chatterbox," said Wildrake quietly. "But though you guys would rather I shut up and stepped off, I'm going to make a remark. If you think Gussy has been lying, you're making a silly mistake. He hasn't."

"You don't know anything about it."

"I know a lot about Gussy," answered Wildrake. "He's some ass, in a good many ways; but he's just as straight



A flying 6 past Tail passage, was no Herries, o it was!

as a die. He would no more tell lies than he would rob a blind man. You're off the mark."

"Well, let it go at that," said Tom. "We can't talk about it, without risking getting him into bad trouble—so there's an end."

"If you'd tell a man, perhaps I could help you get it clear," suggested Wildrake.

The chums of the Shell were silent.

"Well, I'll only say, then, that you're the three prize boneheads from Bonehead Town," said Wildrake, "and if you're going to cut Gussy, I guess you can cut me, too, and be blowed to you!"

And Kit Wildrake walked away, frowning.

"Cheeky ass!" said Manners.

"Well, I suppose it's natural, as he doesn't know anything about it," said Tom Merry. "I'd never have believed it of D'Arcy before to-day. But is there a doubt about it?"

"None at all!"

"It's beastly—but there it is!" said Lowther. "We did everything we could to stop D'Arcy, and we couldn't stop him. He ought not to have done it, and he ought not to have told lies about it. It leaves a nasty taste in a fellow's mouth."

Tom Merry nodded, and the Terrible Three resumed their walk round the quad with glum faces. When the bell rang for third school they passed Arthur Augustus going into the House. They glanced at him as they passed, but Gussy seemed quite unaware of it. He looked straight before him, and there was no more expression on his aristocratic face than on a wooden image. Whether the Terrible Three were "cutting" Gussy or not, there was no doubt that Gussy was cutting them!

**CHAPTER 10.  
Chucked Out!**

**J**ACK BLAKE gave a grunt of sheer discomfort. Blake and Herries and Digby were in Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

D'Arcy had not yet come in; but they were expecting to hear his step in the passage. And they were feeling very uncomfortable.

"It's rotten!" growled Blake.  
"Beastly!" agreed Dig.

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t Blake,  
t Digby—  
D'Arcy!



"Better not say anything about it," said Herries. "After all, what could Railton expect when he asked a fellow a direct question? A fellow isn't going to ask for a flogging."

"Well, no; but—" Blake shook his head. No doubt there were excuses for Gussy, but it was altogether too thick.

"A master shouldn't question a man and ask him to find himself guilty," argued Herries. "I know it's thick, but—"

He broke off as Arthur Augustus came in. Blake & Co. were uncomfortably silent. They were trying to feel the same as ever towards their noble chum, but they knew that they could not.

"I've got somethin' to speak to you fellows about," Arthur Augustus sat down. "Pwobably you have noticed that I have not had anythin' to say to those Shell fellows to-day. I think I had better explain, so that you will know what to do. I am takin' it for granted, of course, that you are standin' by me in the mattah."

Blake & Co. regarded him silently.

"I have dwopped Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah."  
"Eh?"

"They have insulted me."

"Oh!"

"But for the fact that we have been fwiends so long I should feel that I had no wesource but to give them a feahful thwashin' all wound," said Arthur Augustus. "But I am lettin' them off that on the grounds of formah fwiendship. But, of course, I cannot continue their acquaintance."

"What the merry thump are you driving at, you ass?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Those fellows won't give you away, if that is what you mean," grunted Herries.

Arthur Augustus raised his eyebrows.

"I am unawah that there is anythin' concernin' me that they could give away," he answered.

"Oh crumbs!"

"If you will kindly explain your meanin', Hewwies—"

said Arthur Augustus, with quiet dignity.

"Oh rats!" growled George Herries.

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible answah, Hewwies. Howevah, to wesume, those uttah wottahs have accused me of lyin'. For what weason, I cannot undahstand—"

"Eh?"

"But such an accusation bweaks off all fwiendship, of course."

Blake drew a deep breath. Herries and Dig stared at D'Arcy blankly.

"I disdained to inquiah their weason," said D'Arcy. "Pwobably they have some sillay bee in their bonnet. But until they withdawah their wotten words and apologiae, of course I cannot speak to them again."

"My only hat!" gasped Blake.

"You silly ass!" roared Herries, exasperated. "Did you expect them to believe you when you told Railton you knew nothing about the ragging?"

"Of course."

"But you did it!" yelled Dig.

Arthur Augustus stared at him and rose from the table.

"Are you pottay, Dig?" he inquired.

"I think you must be!" hooted Digby. "Do you think that we don't all know that you ragged Railton?"

"You heard me tell Wailton that I did not, Dig?"

"Yes; and I can tell you it made me feel pretty sick."

"Bai Jove!"

"Me, too!" said Herries. "There's a limit."

D'Arcy gazed at them.

"Is it possible," he asked slowly, "that you fellows are undah the impresson that I wagged Wailton?"

"Didn't you?" shrieked Blake.

"Certainly not! I have already said so."

"Oh, great Scott!"

"Then who did?" gasped Herries.

"I have not the faintest ideah."

"Draw it mild!"

"If you doubt my word, Hewwies, I shall have no wesource but to add you to the numbah of fellows to whom I do not speak."

"Oh, come off!" exclaimed Blake. "Didn't you pick up that beastly bottle of ink last night under the study window?"

"I did not."

"Then who did?" yelled Blake.

"How should I know, deah boy? The wottah, whoever he was, has not confided in me."

"Rotter is the right word," said Dig. "It was a rotten trick to play on old Railton."

"I agwee," said Arthur Augustus, "and as I mentioned to you this mornin', I am sowwy that such an ideah came to my mind. I was feelin' vevy wild, or I should not have thought of it. I am vevy thankful that I nevah cawwied it out."

"But you did!" howled Blake.

Arthur Augustus' face set very sternly.

"Do you mean that Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah believe that I did it, and that they think I was lyin' to Wailton?" he asked.

"Of course they do."

"And do you mean," went on Arthur Augustus, with a slight tremble in his voice, "that you hold the same opinion?"

"Of course we do."

"Aftah I have told you—"

"What's the good of telling crams? We know you did it, and you know we know, so what's the good of gammon?"

"Bai Jove!"

"You had that beastly marking-ink all ready to rag Railton, and Herries chucked it out of the window. You went out to look for it, and we came with you to stop you. You hung back when we came in for lock-up, and we had to yank you back to the House. You'd picked it up, and never said a word about it. You went down from the

dorm while we were asleep, and ragged Railton. And I call it rotten!" roared Blake.

"It would certainly be wotten if I had done it," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I am vevy glad indeed that I nevah did. This is vevy shockin' and painful to me. I have already been forced to wogard my fwienids in the Shell with contempt, and to dwop their acquaintance. It is vevy painful to me to have to take the same line with you fellows. But there is no othah wesorice."

"You—you—you—" gasped Blake.

"There cannot be fwienidship without twust," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I am sowwy, but there it is!"

"We've got to believe dashed lies because you tell them—is that it?" gasped Herries.

"You have got to believe that I am uttahnly incapable of tellin' a lie, if our fwienidship is to continue," answered Arthur Augustus calmly.

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!"

"George Washington Junior!"

"I am willin'," said D'Arcy, with stately dignity, "to give you a chance! If you immediately expvess your wegwet for this wotten suspision and wank distwust of a fwienid—"

"I don't think!"

"Then you will kindly note that you are on the list of persons to whom I do not speak!" said D'Arcy. "Pway do not address me again!"

"You cheeky idiot—"

"That is enough! Pway leave this study."

"What?" roared the three together.

D'Arcy pointed to the door.

"You can scarcely expect me to continue to share my study with fellows with whom I am not on speakin' terms

—fellows whom I wogard with uttahnly contempt and aversion," he said. "Pway go!"

"Isn't it our study?" shrieked Digby.

"Not now, Digby! I wefuse to share this studay with you any longah, and I wrequest you to wotire fwom it!"

"My hat! Why, you frabjous, fozooling fathead—"

"That will do!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I shall not bandy words with fellows I dislike and despise. Get out!"

"You—you—you—"

"Are you goin'?"

"Going!" said Blake dazedly. "No, you footling frump, wew're not going; though I've a jolly good mind to land you in the passage on your cheeky neck!"

"I should pwefer you to go quietly," said D'Arcy. "But if you do not go, I shall thwow you out!"

"You—you—you'll throw us out?" gurgled Herries.

"Yaas, wrihah!"

"Oh crikey! Why did they send that chap to St. Jim's if there was a vacancy in any lunatic asylum?" gasped Blake.

"Are you goin'?"

"Fathead!"

"For the last time—"

"Idiot!"

Arthur Augustus pushed back his spotless cuffs. Grim determination was in his noble face. Like the Alpine gentleman in the poem, his brow was set, his eye beneath flashed like a falchion from its sheath.

He advanced to the astonished three.

"I am sowwy to have to use wuff measures with fellows who wew're once my fwienids," he said. "But you are goin' out?"

And Arthur Augustus started on the necessary—but difficult—task of throwing three fellows out of the study.

Arthur Augustus was of the stuff of which heroes are made, and he never counted odds! But the odds, though not counted, wew're unfortunately there.

Three pairs of hands fastened on the swell of St. Jim's. Blake & Co. wew're in a state of exasperation, which was not to be wondereed at, in the circumstances. There was a struggle, a crashing of chairs knocked over, a clatter as the study table went rocking.

"Hallo! What's this game?" asked Talbot of the Shell, putting an astonished face in at the doorway.

"I am chuckin' these fellows out!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Wha-a-at?"

A flying figure spun past Talbot, and landed in the passage with a bump and a yell.

But it was not one of the three! It was Gussy!

He sat up dizzily in the passage.

"Oh cwumbs!" he gasped. "Oh cwikey!"

"My dear chap," exclaimed Talbot, in sincere concern, "what—"

"It's all wight!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He scrambled up, and charged back into Study No. 6 like a whirlwind. Again there was a struggle, and again a flying figure shot through the doorway and landed beside Talbot. Again it was Gussy!

"My dear fellow—" gasped Talbot.

He assisted Gussy to his feet, and helped him away. Even Gussy realised that it was futile to charge into the study again; and he lacked the necessary wind!

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove!"

And Talbot gently led him away, gasping and spluttering.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Did D'Arcy Do It?

"ROT!"

"Rubbish!"

"Silly asses!"

Those comments, and many more of the same sort, wew're freely made in the School House.

The murder was out, so to speak.

Blake & Co. and Tom Merry, and his friends never said, and never meant to say, a word that might bring home to Gussy the guilt of the rag on Railton. In such a matter silence was golden.

It was Gussy who talked, and he fairly talked from the housetops!

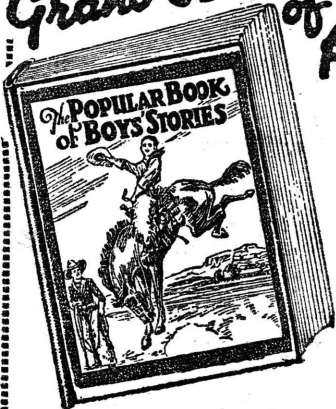
All the House knew that D'Arcy was no longer on friendly terms with the Terrible Three; and that, more serious and startling to relate, he was at daggers drawn with his old chums in the Fourth.

All the House knew he had been chucked out of Study No. 6.

Naturally, they wanted to know why.

Six juniors wew're grimly silent on the subject. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made no secret of it.

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D'Arcy told the House—in fact, he told the world.

His friends—that is to say, his former friends—suspected him of being the man who had ragged Railton. They suspected him of having uttered a falsehood when he denied it. Every fellow who wanted to know about it, knew!

D'Arcy, thrilling with an indignation which his former friends could only suppose to be assumed, explained freely. He had dropped those six fellows—dropped them like hot bricks! Henceforth, they were trifles light as air, which he regarded not.

The general opinion of the House was that D'Arcy was in the right. A fellow who was guilty would hardly make the matter the talk of the school like this! Prefects heard about it, and looked curiously at Gussy. Obviously, the masters would hear about it. D'Arcy plainly did not care if they did!

It was rather hard on Tom Merry & Co. They could not give their reasons without producing what was practically proof of Gussy's guilt, and getting him sacked from the school. That was not to be thought of.

So, though plied with questions, they maintained a stubborn silence. They hoped the matter would die away before Gussy was lagged!

But it showed no sign of dying away.

The Beaks were still hunting for the man who had ragged Railton. As soon as they heard this they would concentrate on Gussy! That was a cert.

It was dismal enough for the six! They were intensely exasperated with Gussy; but they did not want to hurt him, they wanted to save him. They wanted to keep his misdeeds dark. Why he made the affair the talk of the whole House was a mystery to them.

"If he had the sense of a bunny rabbit," said Lowther, "he would keep his silly head shut about it!"

"But he hasn't!" said Manners.

"He's asking for it!" said Tom gloomily.

Trimble rolled up to the Terrible Three, his fat face eager.

"I say, D'Arcy says—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"But he says you say he ragged Railton! Did he?" gasped Trimble. "I say, you might tell a fellow! How do you know he ragged Railton?"

"Kick him!" said Tom.

"Yaroooh!"

Baggy Trimble retired with his curiosity unsatisfied.

But the chums of the School House could not kick the whole House. They were worried with many questions. As they had nothing to say—at least, as they refused to say it if they had—opinion went strongly against them.

"You fellows are simply fatheads!" Levison of the Fourth told them. "Gussy never had anything to do with it."

"Would he be shouting it all over the House, if he had?" demanded Clive.

"Oh, rats!" was Tom Merry's answer.

They were more polite when Talbot of the Shell tackled them on the subject. But they had nothing to say. What they knew was as good as proof against Arthur Augustus, and they were going to keep it dark.

Blake and Herries and Dig were in the same uncomfortable position.

Their knowledge had to be kept secret, for D'Arcy's sake; and at the same time D'Arcy was taking up the attitude that he had cut them because they entertained a wrongful suspicion of him.

It was really hard to bear.

They really could not understand why Gussy wagged his noble chin on the subject. From every motive of caution he should have been silent.

"I—I suppose it's not possible that he never did it?" Blake hazarded. He was almost driven to doubt what seemed a dead certainty.

"Well, we know he did!" said Herries.

And Blake nodded! There could be no doubt! How could there be, when Gussy had been barely restrained from that very act earlier in the evening, and it had happened as soon as their eyes were off him?

After tea Blake & Co. walked in the quad. They joined Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, who were looking worried and glum.

"Getting thick, isn't it?" asked Blake.

"As that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say, the thickfulness is terrific," answered Monty Lowther.

"I'd never have believed it of Gussy! Telling awful whoppers, and making out that we've got up a suspicion against him—"

"He must have done it!" said Tom.

"Who the dickens else? It was his bottle of ink, and we knew he meant to souse Railton with it. Of course, he picked up the bottle when he stopped behind in the quad last night—"

"It's clear enough!"

"If we hadn't stopped him he would have done it last evening. As it was, he did it after lights-out."

"The silly ass!"

"I don't mind him being a silly ass—I'm used to that—but telling these fearful crams—" Blake snorted.

Arthur Augustus, walking loftily in the quad, came on the six juniors. He passed them with averted eyes.

They glared at him. He passed their glare unregarded. D'Arcy's noble nose was in the air—so much in the air, in fact, that he trod on a banana-skin without seeing it, skidded violently, and finally came to rest in a gasping heap at the feet of Kit Wildrake of the Fourth.

Wildrake grinned.

"Well met! If you're not too busy giving the marble eye to your old pals, D'Arcy, I'd like to speak to you."

"Oh! Ah! Certainly, dear boy!"

D'Arcy picked himself up and walked away with Wildrake, Tom Merry & Co. staring after him morosely. Kildare of the Sixth came out of the House, looked round, and came towards them.

"What's this about D'Arcy and that ragging?" he asked. No reply.

"From what I hear, D'Arcy is saying that you fellows accuse him of having ragged Railton!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"We haven't accused him," said Tom. "We've said nothing, and don't want to say anything."

"You've nothing to tell me—as a prefect?"

"Nothing!"

"I fancy you will have to tell Railton!" said Kildare, and he went back to the House.

Blake gave a groan.

"The fathead! The ass! Why couldn't he shut up? If he'd said nothing it could have been kept dark. Now—"

"Railton will screw it out of us!" said Tom. "He will know that we know, and we can't tell him lies."

Considering that they were no longer friends of the great Gussy, Tom Merry & Co. might have been expected to care little what happened to him. But it was clear that they cared a great deal.

And when, some time afterwards, the summons came to go to the Housemaster's study they repaired thither with heavy hearts. The fat was in the fire now, and they felt that it was all up with Gussy.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Wildrake on the Trail!

"SPILL it," said Kit Wildrake.

Arthur Augustus looked surprised.

"Spill what?" he asked.

"I mean, give it a name! Tell an old pal all about it," said Wildrake. "Look here, Gussy, there's some idiotic misunderstanding somewhere. Let me help you clear it up!"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"There is no misunderstanding, Wildrake. My former friends have doubted my word! That is all."

"You mean, you've told them that you never ragged Railton, and they don't believe you?"

"Yaas."

"But why do they think you did?"

"I weally cannot imagine, Wildrake! It is uttaly inexplicable to me! If you will excuse me, I would wathah not discuss so vevy painful a mattah."

"Well, I won't excuse you," said Wildrake cheerfully. "I tell you I'm going to help you sort it out. Dash it all, D'Arcy, you know I'm your friend, and a friend of those chaps, too. Give me a chance to clear it up."

"But there is nothin' to clear up, dear boy. They have pwactically accused me of lyin'. That is all."

"They believe that you did it," said the Canadian junior.

"They must have reasons—good reasons, they're not fools, and they're your friends. They won't tell me anything, because they're afraid of damaging you by letting things out. What is it they know, or think they know?"

"Nothin'!"

Wildrake breathed a little hard. But he was a patient fellow, and he was determined to set matters right if he could.

"What put the idea into their heads?" he asked.

"Pwobably because I was thinkin' of waggin' Wailton, aftah he licked me yestahday," said Arthur Augustus, after some thought.

Wildrake started.

"Oh, my hat! You were thinking of it?" he ejaculated.

"Yaas! You see, I was vevy waxy. I was goin' to dwench Wailton with that markin'-ink, for givin' me six for nothin'. But those fellows butted in, and latah on, aftah wlection, I changed my mind."

Wildrake gazed at him.

"And you're surprised that they suspect you?" he gasped. "Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy innocently. "You see, I have told them I did not do it. Surely that was enough?"

Wildrake judiciously did not argue that point.

"It was your marking-ink that Railton got?" he asked.

"Oh, yaas! I suppose so."

"That means that some other fellow bagged it and ragged Railton with it?"

"I pwesume so."

Wildrake regarded him dubiously. Arthur Augustus had admitted enough, more than enough, to justify the belief of Tom Merry & Co. The Canadian junior felt his own belief waver. Yet the fact that D'Arcy admitted so much, without a second thought, indicated innocence.

"You can't guess who might have got hold of it?" asked Wildrake.

"I have no ideah!"

"Where did you leave it?"

"I did not leave it anyhow, deah boy. That ass Hewwies thwov it out of the studay window."

Wildrake started again, as he remembered.

"Was that what you were hunting for last evening, just before lock-ups—you and the others?"

"Yaas."

"You didn't find it?"

"No."

"But they must think you did if—"

"You see, I was vovolved to find it, and I stayed back when they went in. And then they came back and dwaggled me away. The uttah asses think I found it then, and had it atfahwards."

"My only hat!" said the Canadian junior. "I never saw a clearer case. Can't you see that they're bound to believe as they do?"

"Weally, Wildwake—"

"You can bet your silk socks that Railton will think the same, if he gets on to it," said Wildrake.

Arthur Augustus became frigid.

"If it means that you agree with these wottahs, Wildrake, I shall thank you not to speak to me any furthah!"

"I don't," said Wildrake cheerily. "They can't help thinking as they do, knowing that you meant to rag Railton. But I'm coming to the thing from a different angle. I guess I'm taking it that you didn't pick up that ink-bottle. But somebody must have, if it was the same one used on Railton. The question is, who picked it up?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"You've no idea?"

"None, deah boy."

"Nobody about, so far as you know, when Herries chucked it out of the study window?"

"Only the fellow it dwopped on."

Wildrake jumped.

"By the great horned head!" he ejaculated. "You tell a story in a queer way, Gussy—from the instalment system, I guess. For goodness' sake, let me have the whole caboodle! The bottle dropped on some fellow's napper?"

"Yaas. You see, he yelled."

"You didn't see who it was?"

"No."

"He was gone when you came down after the bottle?"

"Yaas."

"If the bottle tapped him on the head, that would account for the fall not breaking it. Must have left a mark, falling from the height of the study window—smart tap!" said Wildrake. "We want to find a fellow with a mark on his napper under his thatch."

Arthur Augustus shrugged his shoulders.

"We can't go wound both Houses, deah boy, scwatchin' fellow's heads," he remarked.

Wildrake grinned.

"Nop. But if we get at him, a bruise on his roof will clinch it," he said. "Look here, Gussy, if you didn't pick up that bottle of purple ink and rag Railton with it, it looks as if the fellow who got it on his napper did it. He may have known your game, and figured that suspicion would fall on you, and see him clear. Some mean swipe with a grudge against Railton, and no friend of yours, either."

"But I had not told anybody."

"The way you keep secrets, old bean, would put the world wise," said Wildrake. "Look here, sooner or later Railton will get this story, and jump on you. He will screw what your friends know out of them, and you will be a goner. We've got to stop that." The Canadian junior looked very determined. "We want that guy!"

"Yaas. But don't you think Waitton will take my word?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Against all that evidence?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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"Wake up, old-timer!" said Wildrake. "There are plenty of fellows who would lie themselves out of such an awful scrape, and Railton will think that you're one of them."

"Bai Jove!"

The Canadian junior thought hard.

"Somebody picked up that bottle," he said. "Nobody's mentioned doing so, which looks as if he wanted to keep it dark. Most likely it was the chap it dropped on; he was on the spot. Who's the chap? It's pretty late to look for sign; but there's a chance. Come on!"

Kit Wildrake dragged the swell of St. Jim's away, to the House wall under the windows of Study No. 6.

"Weally, Wildwake—" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Can it, while I get a look—see?" said Wildrake.

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus watched the Canadian junior with mild interest as he proceeded to make a meticulous examination of the ground at the foot of the wall, and especially between the two thick buttresses.

Wildrake had learned trailing on the Boot Leg Ranch in Canada, and his skill had often made the St. Jim's Scouts open their eyes wide. But that Wildrake would be able to pick up any "sign" here seemed a wild impossibility to D'Arcy. So far as Gussy's noble eye could see there was absolutely no clue to the fellow who had been standing in the darkness under the high window when the ink-bottle was tossed out.

But the gleam that came into Wildrake's eyes seemed to indicate that he was finding something.

"By gum!" he ejaculated.

He turned to D'Arcy at last.

"Did Crooke know anything about your stunt?" he asked.

"Cwooke?" repeated D'Arcy. "Not that I know of."

"Sure?" persisted Wildrake.

"I wemembah he looked into the study while I was speakin' to the fellows, and the ink-bottle was on the table, but—"

"Fathead! Let's go and see Crooke."

"But what are we goin' to see Cwooke for?" asked D'Arcy, in bewilderment.

"To ask him what he did with the bottle of marking-ink that dropped on his head on this spot yesterday evening," answered Wildrake.

The Canadian junior walked away, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy followed him like a fellow in a dream.

## CHAPTER 13.

### Crooke's Last Chance!

GERALD CROOKE removed a cigarette from his mouth as a tap came at his study door. He held the cigarette under the table, as he grunted:

"Come in!"

The study door opened, and Kit Wildrake entered. After him came the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Crooke stared at them. He was on friendly terms with neither of the Fourth-Formers, and certainly not expecting a visit from them in his study. His cigarette came into sight again, and he replaced it in his mouth.

"What the thump do you fellows want?" he asked.

"Just a chin!" answered Wildrake. "I've just got it from Trimble that Tom Merry and his friends have been called to Railton's study."

"What the deuce has that to do with me?"

"Lots! Railton's going to put the screw on, and get out of them what they think about D'Arcy and the ragging. It's high time that the real guy owned up," explained Wildrake.

Crooke gave an almost convulsive start. His angry eyes dropped under the clear, steady gaze of the Canadian.

For a second terror gripped Crooke.

But he pulled himself together. He told himself savagely that Wildrake could know nothing, whatever he might suspect.

"You seem to me to be talking out of your hat," he said carelessly, but with a crack in his voice. "What has it to do with me?"

"Heaps! You're the guy!"

Crooke rose to his feet.

"If that's a joke, I don't like your brand of humour," he said. "Get out of my study!"

"I guess I'll get out, if you like, so quick that you won't see my heels for dust," answered Wildrake. "But if I do, I go straight to Railton. I'm not seeing D'Arcy sacked to cover you, you scallywag."

"I—I think you're mad," said Crooke huskily. "What do you mean, if you mean anythin'?"

"I am giving you a chance," said Wildrake, very quietly.

"If you own up to Railton, you get off with a Head's flogging. If you wait till you're found out, it's the long jump. Better take the chance."

Crooke struggled for breath. Arthur Augustus looked on, in the silence of utter wonder.

"What makes you think I know anythin' about it?" asked Crooke at last, his voice husky and strained.

"I'll tell you! Just after dusk yesterday evening, you went out for a smoke. You sneaked into that quiet corner between the buttresses, under the windows of the Fourth Form studies. You smoked a cigarette there. Herries chucked a bottle of marking-ink out of the window, and it fell on your head. You yelled; and after that, for reasons of your own, you kept quiet. I guess if I scratched your hair, I'd show up the place where the bottle hit you."

Crooke's hand went involuntarily to his head.

He withdrew it instantly; and Wildrake smiled.

"Yep! The mark's there," he said. "You bagged that bottle of ink and kept it, figuring that what you aimed to do would fall on D'Arcy if it fell on anybody. I guess you wanted to get back on Railton for licking you for smoking. You sneaked down from your dorm after lights out and planted that booby-trap in his study. Your best guess is to go and tell him so before you're found out."

"I—I never—"

Wildrake turned to the door.

"Hold on!" breathed Crooke. "I—I tell you I was not there. If you think you saw me, it was some other fellow—in the dark—"

"Some other fellow wearing your dandy grey jacket? Can it!"

Crooke trembled.

"Hang you! If I'd known you were nosing about—" He broke off. "How did you know? You rotter, if you saw me—"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Cwooke—" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Hang you!"

"I wufuse to be hanged—I mean—"

Wildrake broke in.

"Are you going to Railton, Crooke? If you're not, I am—and at once! This is your last chance."

"I'm going!" said Crooke, his face livid. "But I'll make you pay for this some day, you sneaking, spying—"

Wildrake made a stride towards him, and Gerald Crooke broke off, and dodged round the table.

"You miserable scallywag," said the Canadian junior, "you make me sick. You played that dirty trick on Railton, and you were willing to let D'Arcy get it in the neck for you. By gum! I guess I've a mind to take you to Railton by the collar, and not give you a chance—"

"Hands off!" yelled Crooke shrilly.

He escaped from the study.

Wildrake and D'Arcy followed him downstairs. Crooke lost no time. He had a last chance of eluding the "sack" by a confession; and he hurried to Mr. Railton's study. From a little distance the two juniors watched him tap at Mr. Railton's door and enter.

Wildrake gave a sniff.

"Let's get out," he said. "That fellow leaves a bad taste in the mouth."

They went into the quad.

"Bai Jove, you know," said Arthur Augustus slowly. "I am vey glad you butted in, Wildwake; but if you saw him, why did you not say so befoah?"

Wildrake laughed.

"I never saw him," he answered. "I never thought of Crooke till I picked up sign under the study windows."

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Are you sewious, deah boy?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"But I did not see any sign," said the bewildered swell of St. Jim's. "I weally do not undahstand how you found out it was Cwooke."

"It was easy enough, fathead! Come along and I'll show you."

They returned to the spot between the two buttresses under the high window of Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass firmly into his eye, and took a survey of the surroundings. But the "sign," if sign there was, was invisible to his noble eye.

"I can see that somebody was standin' here," he said. "The ground is damp fwm the wain yestahday, and wains the twaces. But we knew that already."

"Open your eyes a bit wider, old bean," said Wildrake fcod-humouredly. "Begin at the beginning! A fellow picked out this cosy corner after dusk last night to stand here. Why?"

"I weally cannot guess."

"Well, I guess he had a reason," said Wildrake, "and I

guess the reason was that he wanted a hidden corner for a smoke."

"Oh!"

"Open your peepers a little wider still, and you'll see a cigarette-end that's been stamped into the ground."

"Bai Jove! I did not notice that."

"Crooke smokes," said Wildrake, "and Crooke had been caught smoking in the House yesterday and caned for it. He took his next smoke out of doors."

"But there are othah smokay wottahs besides Cwooke," said Arthur Augustus dubiously.

"They don't wear dandy grey jackets, though," said Wildrake. "Run your eyes over the wall—close—and you'll see, where the stone is rough, that exactly seven tiny strands of grey, from a grey tweed jacket, were left there. Crooke had a grey tweed jacket on last evening—I believe he's the only fellow in the House who wears one—the only junior, anyway."

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy was silent for a moment.

"And Cutts of the Fifth often wears a gwey tweed jacket," he said.

"Quite so! But look at the height from the ground—Cutts' jacket would have left that sign nearly a foot higher."

"Bai Jove!"

"It was a junior," said Wildrake, "and I reckoned it was Crooke! Then you told me he had seen you with the ink bottle in your study. I knew Railton caned him yesterday; and I knew he was a revengeful scallywag—when revenge can be had safe! He gave it away when I tackled him, that he had a bruise on his head, where the bottle tapped him. So it all boiled down to Crooke."

Arthur Augustus was silent for a moment or two.

Then he nodded.

"Wight as wain," he agreed. "I was wathah surprised at first—but now I see that it is perfectly simple. I suppose I could have worked it out myself if I had taken the twouble, as it is vey easy aftah all!"

Wildrake chuckled.

"I shouldn't have explained," he said, "then you'd still think it jolly wonderful. Let's go and see if the fellows are through with Railton."

"I do not desiah to see those fellows—"

"Rats! Come on!"

"Weally, Wildwake—"

"Come on, fathead!"

And Kit Wildrake grasped Arthur Augustus' reluctant arm and marched him back to the House.

## CHAPTER 14.

### All Serene!

TOM MERRY & CO. stood dismally before their Form master.

They were feeling in the lowest possible spirits.

Mr. Railton's brow was stern. His keen eye ran from one gloomy face to another. If Railton had doubted before that the half-dozen juniors knew the secret of the mysterious ragging, he could not have doubted it now. Their dark and dismal countenances betrayed them.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Tom.

"When I questioned you to-day, I had an impression that you knew more than you desired to state. I am now assured of it."

Tom Merry shifted uncomfortably.

"I require you to tell me what you know!" said the House-master quietly. "The others will do the same."

Six pairs of lips set firmly. Friendship might be over, or fancied to be over; but the chums of the School House were not going to give away an old pal.

"I have already told you," said Mr. Railton, in a deep voice, "that this is a serious matter—a very serious matter. You will speak freely to me, or I shall take you to the Head."

"We've nothing to say, sir!" mumbled Blake.

"I think you have much to say if you choose," answered the School House master dryly. He glanced at the study clock. "I will allow you five minutes to consider the matter. If you have not spoken out frankly by that time, I shall take you to Dr. Holmes, and leave the matter in his hands."

Mr. Railton turned to a heap of papers on his table and busied himself with them.

Six dismal juniors looked at one another.

They were not going to speak! At the same time, they knew that when they were before the Head, they would have to speak. It was a situation of the most excruciating discomfort.

The minutes crawled by.

Mr. Railton, calmly marking papers, his streaked and spotted visage bent over his work, took no notice of the juniors.

They shifted from one leg to another. They exchanged dismal glances. They could have groaned.

Tap!

Mr. Railton glanced up.

"Come in!"

Crooke of the Shell entered.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at him without much interest. But they wondered what made Crooke look so white and sick. The black sheep of the House, obviously, was not in his usual high and palmy state.

"What is it, Crooke?" Mr. Railton eyed the wretched Crooke very curiously.

Crooke cleared his throat.

"I—I—I—" he stammered.

"Well?"

"I—I've come to make a—a—a confession, sir!"

Mr. Railton started a little.

"Indeed! You may proceed, Crooke."

"It—it was I, sir—"

"What was you?"

"I—I did it, sir!" Gerald Crooke seemed scarcely able to get the words out. "I—I did the ragging, sir!"

There was silence. Tom Merry & Co. almost staggered.

Not for one moment had they thought of Crooke. It had been so fixed in their minds that D'Arcy had carried out his intention, that they had not thought of looking further.

Crooke's confession fairly took their breath away.

"It was you, Crooke?" Mr. Railton's voice was like ice. "It was you fixed up the trap with a pan of purple ink in my study?"

"Ye-ees, sir! It—it was only a lark!" groaned Crooke.

"I—I was sorry afterwards—"

"And you have come here to tell me so?"

"Yes, sir!" Crooke recovered his courage a little. After all, he was owning up; and it was possible to put a good complexion on it. "I—I felt that I had to, sir, after—after I heard that another fellow was being suspected."

Tom Merry & Co. almost fell down. This—from Crooke!

"You heard that another boy was suspected, Crooke?"

"Yes, sir! Tom Merry—all these fellows here—thought it was D'Arcy. I—I was afraid you'd hear of it, and—and

think so, too! So—so when I heard you'd sent for them, I—I came—"

Crooke, scared as he was, had evidently not lost his cunning.

Mr. Railton gave him a very keen, penetrating look. But knowing nothing of Wildrake's intervention in the affair, he had to give Crooke credit.

"You are aware, Crooke, that you will be flogged for this?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I can't help that! I—I had to come. I—I couldn't let you think—"

"Very well! I hope your motives are as you state, Crooke." There was a lingering doubt in Mr. Railton's tone "Certainly I am very glad that you have made this confession, and that this unpleasant matter may come to an end. In the circumstances, I shall deal more leniently with you. I shall cane you myself instead of reporting you to the Head for a flogging."

He turned to Tom Merry & Co.

"You may go!" he said.

And they went—gladly.

As they went down the passage there was a sound of swishing, and a sound of lamentation, from Railton's study. Gerald Crooke was suffering for his sins.

"Say, you guys," Kit Wildrake hailed them, as they came out into the sunset in the quad. "This way!"

"Weally, Wildwake, I do not know those fellows!" objected Arthur Augustus. "Pway let go my arm!"

"Rats!" said Wildrake cheerily.

Tom Merry & Co. came up. They eyed the swell of St. Jim's rather sheepishly. Arthur Augustus eyed them in return, with lofty frigidity.

"Crooke's owned up," said Tom, with a jerk. "It was Crooke who ragged Railton. He's owned up—frightfully decent of him!"

"Oh, frightfully!" agreed Wildrake, with a grin. "And it would have been still more frightfully decent, if I hadn't found him out and made him!"

And Kit Wildrake proceeded to explain to the astonished Tom Merry & Co., and Blake & Co. exactly how he had been the means of forcing Crooke to confess to Mr. Railton, with the result that D'Arcy and the rest of the School House juniors were once more the best of friends.

THE END.

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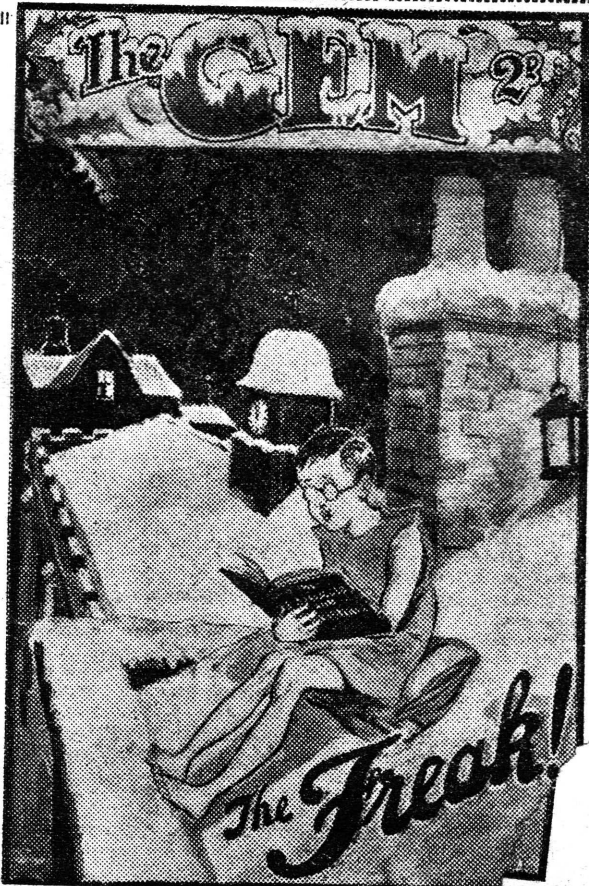
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# YOUNG THUNDERBOLT

by Arthur S. Hardy



## CHAPTER 1.

### The Birthday Plane!

"YOUNG 'un," said Mr. Harland Jackson, "what would you like me to give you for a birthday present?"

"I'd like a Butterfly, dad," Clifford Jackson shot back, his eyes ablaze with enthusiasm.

"H'm! All right! Only I don't want you to go and break your neck. As soon as you can fly you can go to the works and choose your own bus."

"Is that a bet?"

"It's a promise, young 'un."

"I say, you're not going to the works till this afternoon, are you, pater?"

"No; there's a deputation coming up from the town. They want me to be mayor. I'm going to turn it down, though. I don't want to rest under any obligation to the town, or the town to feel that way about me. You think over what you want for your birthday, Clif."

Clifford's eyes danced as he left the breakfast-table, and, seizing a cap, raced through the grounds to the gate. A brisk run brought him within view of the Butterfly Works, and as he scanned the lines of the great workshops, saw the smoke belching from the tall stacks, and the planes ranged and scattered on the testing-ground, his cheeks flamed with excitement to a deeper red.

His dad had built this place; the prosperity of the town was due to him. His dad had invented the famous Butterfly engine and designed the Butterfly Minor, the Butterfly Major, the Hawk Butterfly, and the Eagle Butterfly—the finest flying machines in the world.

The boy made for the huge-domed show building, and going up to McFarlane, the show-room manager, said, as he pointed to a wonderful red-and-gold bus which had a special stand of its own:

"I say, Mac, that's the best baby you've got, isn't it?"

"Ay! She's the bonniest machine if you want to carry a passenger or twa, d'ye ken," answered Mac, eyeing the boy with undisguised approval. "But the wee Minor is smaller; she carries one."

"I'll have that one, then," said Clif; and he told Mac all about his father's promise.

"All verra weel," said Mac. "But you canna fly yet! You'll ha'e tae learn first."

Clif laughed.

"I learnt weeks ago, Mac—the moment I came home from school. I got Hank Parsons to take me up and show me how. I was flying by myself in a week. Then Hank took me over to the Stag Lane Aerodrome, and I got my A certificate. Since then I've passed every test, and I'm a fully qualified pilot. Look!"

Mac examined the certificate, and gasped.

"You're a wonderful boy," said he.

Clifford turned away with a laugh.

"It's all right then. I'll get Hank and the boys to take the bus out and fill her with juice. I'm gonna fly back home."

"You canna do that wi'out I have your father's permission," protested Mac. "I'll just ring him up on the phone."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Mac," said the boy. "That'll spoil everything. I want to surprise dad."

"Oh, verra weel," said Mac, giving way. "You'll surprise him richt enough."

And I suppose I'll get mysel' intae trouble."

Clif beamed as he helped Hank and the mechanics to run the Butterfly out on the testing-ground; and as soon as they had filled her with fuel he swung the engine into action. He climbed up to the pilot's seat and settled down in the cockpit. Hank followed him, but Clif waved him back.

"No, Hank. I'm flying her home alone."

"But she's runnin' green," objected the pilot. "Let me help you handle her. She'll want a bit of nursing."

"I can nurse her all right, Hank. You just get the boys to pack up and take the sections of a Butterfly shed over to the house and set it up near the lawn. I want the best, mind. I'm going over now. So long!"

Before Hank had time to shout good luck Clif had started. Taxiing easily along the ground, he circled, came into the

## CLIF JACKSON SAVES A FOOTBALL CLUB

And gives his father the greatest advert of a lifetime!

wind, and the next moment was mounting grandly. He deliberately took a risk, too, by driving straight at the factory buildings, clearing the roofs by a few yards, and then diving between the towering stacks. A fluttering hand showed over the side. Hank could see the kid looking down—imagined that he could almost see his grin. As the Butterfly sped straight for the town Hank took off his cap and scratched his head.

"Apart from the wonderful knack he has of scoring goals I can see now why the boys at St. Clement's nicknamed him 'Thunderbolt,'" he said, turning to the group of men who watched, admiringly, the rapid retreat of the finest Butterfly Minor yet built in the works. "Young Thunderbolt's got the nerve of Old Nick."

At home Clif's father found it pretty hard work to fight the deputation who had come to ask him to accept the office of mayor of the town. He had said "No" for the fiftieth time, and they were still pegging away at him. One after the other they advanced some argument in favour of Mr. Harland Jackson's acceptance of the honour. They were still going at it when an aeroplane whizzed round the house, flashed across the lawn, rose high in the air, came back, looped the loop, swooped down till it almost hit the roof, then soared again.

The din it made drowned the speakers' voices. They rushed to the window.

"Great Scott!" shouted Clif's father. "It's some reckless fool in a Butterfly Minor! Why—why—it's my show machine! Whoever's taken it from the show-room and brought it here will get the sack—even if it's Hank!"

Round swooped the Butterfly again to soar above the trees, slow down as it circled back, and make a perfect landing in the middle of the lawn—not even a single flower-bed or border being damaged.

"By George, that was above a joke!" Clif's father tore down to the lawn and was just in time to see a boyish figure climb down from the pit. It wasn't Hank—it wasn't any of the men he employed on the testing-ground. Why, the man looked like a boy—a mere kid.

Stepping neatly down the youngster jumped the last few feet and swung round.

"Geel! It was Clif!"

"Why, young 'un," stammered Clif's father, looking confused. "What's all this?"

"I went to the works and selected this bus, dad," said Young Thunderbolt, with a grin. "And she's a beauty—she's—she's—grand!"

"But, young 'un, I said— Why—well—what have you been doing—flying?"

"Use your common, pater," answered the boy, with a reproachful glance. "I haven't been training silkworms."

And he handed his astonished but admiring father a whole bundle of flying certificates.

CHAPTER 2.

Closing Down!

THAT was in mid-August. Since then the football season had opened with a big bang, and the usual crop of sensations. Some clubs which had been reckoned good enough to run away with a League championship had failed utterly, whilst others, considered by the experts to possess a very poor side, had started winning from the first match and gone on doing it. Thunderbolt loved football, and his favourite League team was the City. He used to go to see them play when he was a tiny kid, and whenever he was unable to play a game himself he went to see them now.

But the City had a rotten side. The gates had been bad for years, and since the season opened they had lost every match away and at home, and were down at the bottom of the League table.

Games played, 12. Games won, 0. Games drawn, 0. Games lost, 12. Goals for, 11. Goals against, 64. Points, 0. What a record! It gave Clif a pain every time he looked at it.

And Clif, who played centre-forward for the Butterflies—the Works' team, who had a wonderful ground attached to the factory—reckoned that the Flies were almost good enough to knock spots off the City.

Young Thunderbolt had scored 6 goals against Springdale in Saturday's match, and 6,000 wildly excited enthusiasts had cheered him on. The gate at City Road, the City's ground, had totalled a beggarly 3,500, and when the last of the seven goals had been scored against the City there were hardly enough of these left to line the rails.

On Monday morning Clif thought he would take a walk along City Road and take a peep in at the ground if the gates were open. A dismal drizzle was seeping down when he got there, and he saw a sour-looking man blocking up the wicket. Clif buttoned up the collar of his mac and stepped up to him.

"Any of the players here, Snarler?" asked Clif, as he came to a stand.

"No! It's Monday! They're not likely to come Tuesday or Wednesday, or Thursday. The team's rotten, the club's broke. The directors are sick of finding fresh money. We're going to shut up shop, and a good job, too—and if you call me Snarler again, I'll wring your neck, you cheeky young cub!" said the man, aiming a cuff at Clif's head.

Clif ducked, and drew back as Snarler, who was the City's trainer, pinned a notice on the gate and then slammed the wicket. This is what Clif read: "Notice. City Football Club. The directors of the City Football Club deeply regret to announce that next Saturday's Reserve match against East Side Rangers in the Town League will be the last game played on the City ground."

Phew! Young Thunderbolt read the notice through twice, and then, as some working men drew near to have a look, he tore it down and put it in his pocket.

The men came up

"Hi, nipper, what was that bill you took down?" said one of them, eyeing Clif suspiciously.

"It was a joke," he answered. "Snarler, the trainer, put it there."

"Snarler gives me the pip with his sour face," said the other man. "Reckon he's gotta lot to do with the way the team plays. Say, you're Young Thunderbolt of the Butterflies, aren't you? Why don't you play for the City? You'd make a corking fine centre, you would."

Clif's active brain was working rapidly, evolving schemes.

"Maybe I will some day," he said.

The other man jerked a thumb at the gate.

"There's a board meeting going on in there now. The boys haven't had any wages for three weeks. They think the club's gonna shut down."

Clif walked on, and as soon as the men were out of sight, he doubled back, leapt at the gate, slung himself over the top, and dropped inside the ground. He knew every inch of it, and, racing past the rusting stand, made for the office building at the far end. As he ran up the steps he saw Snarler barring his way. He explained, and the trainer sneered.



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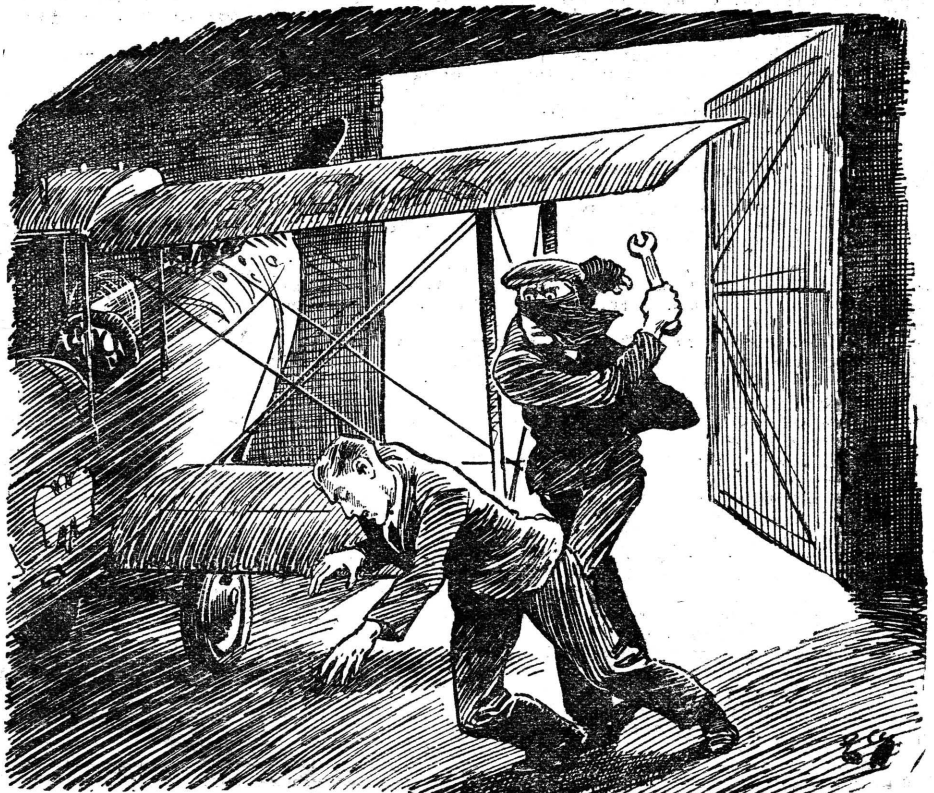
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"What? Want to interrupt the board meeting, do yer?" he snapped. "You've got some cheek breaking into the ground, you have, and if you don't hop it quick, I'll set my boot behind yer! Now beat it—and make it snappy!"

Clif looked over Snarler's shoulder into the hall. A murmur of voices echoed from behind the board-room door. If he could only get in there! While he was thinking, Snarler gripped him roughly by the shoulder and whirled him round. Then he sent Clif spinning and launched an ugly kick at him. But Clif squirmed, and Snarler missed by a mile. Then the boy swung round and kicked the unbalanced trainer's legs from under him. The next moment he had leapt over Snarler's sprawling body, and was banging at the board-room door.

The door opened, Clif slid by, and the next moment was standing beside the chairman. Young Thunderbolt had scored again.



As Clif strode in, the man rose and struck him on the head with the spanner!

CHAPTER 3.

Football—and Airplanes!

"WHO are you, and what the deuce do you want?" asked the chairman, glaring at Clif.

"It's young Thunderbolt, who plays for the Butterflies' team," said the manager, answering the question.

"A boys' team attached to an airplane works," jeered the chairman. "This is young Clifford Jackson, I presume. Boy, how dare you interrupt the meeting?"

"I heard that the City was about to bust up, and I wanted to save the old club—that's all."

"You save the club?" The chairman was amused. "How would you do it?"

"Give the team a rest. Find plenty of money to pay wages and discharge old debts and to help carry on. Find a fresh team, and put the City bang up on top of the League." Clif spoke as if all that was not only easy, but an accomplished fact. Someone laughed.

"Turn that boy out, and let's get on with the business of winding up the old club!" snapped another director.

"And you'd do all this yourself, eh?"

The chairman's lips curled in a sneer.

"I'd do the best I could; my dad would do the rest."

The chairman leant forward.

"Very well, then, you go and ask him, boy. And tell him this. He's the only man who can save the City. We are all backing out and cutting our losses. We have put the whole team on the transfer list. We play our last game here on Saturday. Your father can be chairman, manager, and the whole board of directors if he likes. All we want is our money. The club owes us £20,000—and we'll walk out for half—"

Clif nodded and rushed away.

When he burst into the private office he found his father engaged in talking to Sandy McFarlane, and for once his father was annoyed.

"You mustn't bother me now; I'm engaged on an important business proposition, Clif," he said.

"And I reckon I know what that is," replied Young Thunderbolt. "Clippers have got that Brazilian order for 200 planes, and the works loses a big contract. It's a shame, because the Butterfly's much the better air bus. Clippers advertise better than we do, though. What we've gotta do is get back in the limelight. And I know a way we can do it."

"Bless my soul, listen, to the laddie!" cried Sandy, polishing the glasses of his specs and lifting up his hands. "It's a most time you had him in the beesness, chief."

Mr. Harland Jackson smiled. Thunderbolt's go-ahead ways appealed to him.

"What's your plan, young 'un?" he asked encouragingly.

Clif banged the notice he had torn from the gate of the City ground down on the table and talked for five minutes breathlessly, never letting the others get a word in.

"There it is, guv'nor!" he cried. "The City directors are going to chuck in their hand. The players are going to be scattered. The best football club the town ever had is going west, and you can save it. Everybody will start talking about you, and, of course, they'll talk about the Butterfly plane. And listen, Snarler's a rotten trainer. He's tired the players right out. They're so outa form that I reckon the Butterflies could beat 'em and—"

Clif's father put aside the statement he had been studying and set some blue prints in a drawer. His eyes were bright as he looked hard at his son.

"They didn't call you Young Thunderbolt at school for nothing, Clif," he murmured. "The moment you played for the Butterflies we began to win matches. The side's the talk of the town. The board meeting is still sitting at the City ground, you say?" He used the telephone, and was soon talking to the City chairman. While he talked Clif listened. "All right, you have no objection to my taking the reins if I pay you fellows off and elect another board. H'm. You want a lotta money. I'll drive right over and see you now," he concluded.

Clif went with his father to the City ground, and sat in the car waiting while his father was discussing matters with the City directors in the board-room.

In an hour his father came back, and Clif saw that he was smiling.

"Young 'un," said Harland Jackson, as he climbed into the car, "the City club will carry on. I shall pay these men out and run it on my own with people I can trust. You are going to help me put the City back on the map—"

"Not forgetting the Butterfly plane," grinned Young Thunderbolt. "We mustn't let Clippers beat us to a big deal like that Brazilian contract a second time."

CHAPTER 4.

Young Thunderbolt's Great "Ad."

HARLAND JACKSON did make things hum. The directors had their money the next day. Then he paid the players a month's wages, and told them that they would be sent to the seaside for a rest after they had played Saturday's League match and another

engagement which was fixed for Wednesday next week. The players were both pleased and at the same time mystified.

"If you play the Reserves instead of the first team," said Grover, their captain, "you'll go from bad to worse."

"I'm not going to play the Reserves," smiled Harland Jackson. "I have no settled plans—yet."

"What team do we meet on Wednesday, sir?" asked Grover.

"My Butterflies," replied the new chairman.

"A team of kids from the plane works," laughed Grover.

"I've heard that your son, Young Thunderbolt, is a corking good little player, Mr. Jackson, and that he scores a lotta goals. But it'll break his heart playing against our chaps. I can't see what use it is and how anybody's coming to see the game. We'll play on the Works' ground, I suppose?"

"No. At City Road. Thunderbolt prefers it!"

Grover grinned.

"Well, I will say the kid has an iron nerve," he admitted.

"What have you got behind this, Mr. Jackson?"

"I consider my boy is clever enough and good enough to lead the League team, Grover. I want him to be properly tested, and if he does well enough I am going to give him the chance."

When Snarler, the trainer, heard, he went nearly mad.

"I can see Harland Jackson's idea!" he snapped. "He's all out for advertisement. He must be off his rocker to think that his kid, Young Thunderbolt, is any class outside a Works' team. Some of you boys may think the City is saved, but you mark my words, Jackson will get sick of the expense in a few weeks and shut down. And the works won't be long following it. Clippers are beating the Butterfly Company. I've got a cousin in the Butterfly Works. Clippers have beaten the Butterflies on a big contract, he says, and soon they'll be paying off hands."

Grover swung round on him with eyes ablaze.

"Shut your croaking, Snarler!" he cried. "You always were a nasty piece of work. I like what I've seen of Young Thunderbolt, and they tell me he did marvels at football at school."

Already Cliff noticed the papers were full of references to Mr. Harland Jackson having stepped in and saved the City. Incidentally, they all talked about the Butterfly planes. On Saturday there was more talk.

That afternoon the League team played away at Birmingham, and were beaten by six goals to one—the best show they had put up for a long time. The Reserves also lost at City Road.

But at the Butterfly Works' Ground the 'Flies piled up no fewer than thirteen goals against the Town Banks' team, of which grand total Young Thunderbolt scored nine off his own boots.

Snarler's cousin, "Crook" Garside—he was called "Crook" because he had had the bridge of his nose broken in a street fight—went to the Works' ground to see the Butterflies play, and reported that night to Snarler.

"You can change your mind about the kid, Snarler!" he cried. "I know football. Young Thunderbolt is as clever

as paint. They couldn't tackle him, or obstruct him; his feet twinkled everywhere the other one's weren't, and the way he crashed the ball into the net was a licker! Take it from me the League team won't have any walk-over on Wednesday; they'll be lucky if they win!"

Snarler scowled as his cousin drank up the drink he had been tasting, and left the bar in which they had met without saying a word.

In the morning, when Young Thunderbolt went soaring up into the blue in his Butterfly Minor, Snarler was lurking out in the lane.

Whatever was Snarler hanging about in the lane for, Cliff wondered; but Snarler was such a funny sort of man that he presently put the fellow out of his mind. But Snarler went away with an idea. He would like to burn up all the airplanes. Well, why not burn up one?

On Wednesday Young Thunderbolt would be full of the game in which he was going to play. Mr. Harland Jackson would be busy at the Butterfly Works till lunch, and then motor straight to the City ground. Mrs. Jackson was away. Only the servants would be left in the house, and it would be easy to creep to the garage to force the door and put a match to the petrol he would pour on the floor.

He would slip out through the shrubbery. He knew a way to get to town without being seen. He would be at the City ground early enough to prove an alibi. And he'd see to it that Young Thunderbolt got to know that his plane was burnt up before the game was very old.

That would upset the kid, he reckoned.

And so, at the very time when thousands of excited football fans were streaming towards the City ground, promising the biggest gate of the season, for it was early-closing day, Snarler, who had hidden himself in the grounds, crept unseen to the garage in which Cliff's Butterfly Minor was stored, and forced the lock with a jemmy.

After casting a sharp look round he crept inside. Covering his face up to the eyes with a silk neckerchief, he pulled his cap down and went to work, pouring petrol over the floor of the shelter and getting the match ready.

But it happened that Young Thunderbolt had made up his mind to startle the football crowd, and give his dad's Butterflies a smashing advertisement by flying to the ground, and just at that moment he was hurrying to the lock-up to get the air-bus out and tune her up ready for the fight. Snarler heard his step just as he struck the match, and, blowing the flame out, crouched jemmy in hand.

As Cliff strode in, Snarler rose and struck him several times over the head with the jemmy, and kicked the boy as he went down.

Spurning the lifeless figure with his boot, Snarler then beat it for safety, getting to the gates of the football ground just before some of the turnstile entrances were closed.

(Continued on page 28.)



The ball travelled at such a pace that the goalie did not see it until it was too late.



## Opening Chapters of a Stunning New Serial!



# The RANGERS' RECRUIT!

BY  
**HEDLEY SCOTT.**

### CHAPTER 1. Hot Words!

**"MONSTROUS!"**

James Hartley's lower jaw jutted out aggressively, his eyes narrowed to fine pin-points of rage, and, to give outlet to the overwhelming anger that burned within him, his gnarled, work-scarred fist crashed heavily on the flimsy lacquer table that separated him from his son.

"Incredible! Ugh!"

Hartley junior, six foot of brawn and muscle, seemed to tower over his father. With steadfast, blue eyes that offered a mild reproach, he waited for the storm to subside. This was not the first occasion James Hartley had plunged off the deep end. He was an irascible old gentleman given to outbursts of this nature, but it was generally agreed, even by Hartley's worst enemies, that his bark was worse than his bite.

"Well, hang it, Bill!" He shot the words like a stream of bullets from a machine-gun. "Have you nothing to say? Have you lost your tongue?"

Bill's shoulders shrugged.

"What is there for me to say, guv'nor, except I'm sorry?"

"Sorry—sorry!" stormed old man Hartley. "Does that give me back the hard-earned money I've spent on you? Does that make up for this terrible disgrace? Sent down from Oxford! Disgraced!" He glared at his son. "Why, you don't even look ashamed!"

Bill's lips tightened. For half an hour or more he had listened to this tirade. Never had he seen his father in such a rage. There was cause for it, he reasoned with himself—just cause for it. Old man Hartley, one of Nature's rough diamonds, self-made, and proud of it, had expected great things from his nineteen years' old son. With commendable self-sacrifice he had toiled night and day to build up a business that would ensure a prosperous future for Bill. All that he had accomplished, as was proved by the busy chimneys of Hartley's Iron Foundry, and a six figure bank balance.

Old man Hartley knew the value of money. He had slaved to accumulate it from the distant days of his youth. Thus it was something of a wrench for him to provide the necessary fees and allowances when Bill went up to Oxford. He had consoled himself with the thought that Bill would amply justify such "extravagance" when the time came for him to take his place in the world of commerce.

Now, in his second year at the 'Varsity, Bill's career, as his father dreamed it, was finished. They didn't want his boy at Oxford. He had been "sent down," or, in the language with which Hartley senior was more familiar, he had been "sacked." For a moment a flicker of pain shadowed the stern old face, and Bill involuntarily made a movement forward. Then he drew back. Old man

Hartley was himself again on the instant.

"I've spent thousands of pounds on your education, my boy," he said harshly—"thousands! Thousands wasted! Thrown away! Ugh! I was a fool, and you an ungrateful cub!"

"But—" Bill had time only to utter that one word of remonstrance. Then old man Hartley was "off" again.

"Silence!" he barked. "I'm disappointed in you! You're a waster! When I was your age we knew the value of money! We didn't waste our opportunities, or

**SIX FOOT OF BRAUN AND MUSCLE  
... TWOPENCE IN HIS POCKET ....  
BUT HE'S "GINGER FOR PLUCK"  
AND THAT'S WORTH QUIDS!**

our parents' money!" He chuckled mirthlessly. "We had to work!"

"Dad"—Bill's voice was very quiet, in striking contrast to his father's bull-like roar—"you haven't asked me yet why I was sent down—"

"Confound it, sir!" bellowed Hartley senior. "Am I interested in that? Isn't it enough that you are here, that they don't want you at Oxford? A son of mine—What will they say at the foundry when you start there?"

It was Bill's turn to laugh mirthlessly.

"You needn't worry about that, dad. I'm not starting there."

"What?"

Father and son faced each other. The likeness between them at that moment was most pronounced. The same keen blue eyes, the same thrustful jaw and tight, set lips, the same flaming red hair, which even with the passing of fifty years had not dimmed in the case of Hartley senior.

For seconds there was a silence broken only by the monotonous movement of the pendulum in the grandfather clock.

"So"—James Hartley was the first to capitulate—"so that's how you talk, is it? That's your modern idea, young man. Well, you can take it from me that you're not skulking here, living on my money—"

"Your money?" There was a heap of scorn in the words. "I've heard nothing else but money since I was a child. That's all you live for, gov'nor. But rest easy. I'll not cost you another farthing."

"Eh?" James Hartley was obviously taken aback. "What are you going to do?"

Bill strode towards the door. With his hand on the knob he turned and faced his father.

"I'm going to earn my living," he said quietly. "Don't worry. Perhaps later on you'll think better of me. Good-bye, dad!"

Some impulse stirred James Hartley to retract most of what he had said. Some whispering voice told him that he had condemned his son unheard. As Bill swung out of the room James Hartley made an involuntary move forward. He checked just as suddenly and bit his lip. With chin sunk upon his chest he stood, a living statue of stubbornness, but the statue moved instinctively as the front door of the house closed, and the crunch of moving footsteps over the gravel drive came to him. In two strides he was at the window, plucking the curtain aside. His anxious eyes saw Bill, carrying a suitcase, striding out resolutely towards the open road, and at the sight something of old man Hartley's stubborn composure fled from him. Unknowingly his hand brushed away a tear that coursed its way down a weather-beaten cheek; unconsciously he swallowed the lump that rose in his throat.

"He's a good boy, really." The words were strangely soft. "I was too hard on him. I must—"

But a turn in the road completely blotted out Bill's figure. He was gone.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Bill Forgets Himself!

COMMUNING with himself, Bill swung along at an even pace. He was telling himself already that his parting from his father had lacked dutiful decorum. And in the midst of this self-censure he came face to face with the daughter of his father's old friend.

"Bill!" Irene Marshall's pretty face lit up. "This is a surprise!"

Bill's rugged face became suffused with a crimson blush that almost rivalled the colour of his hair. By Irene's wholehearted greeting it was evident that she knew nothing of Bill's change of affairs. He muttered an embarrassed greeting in reply and stood silent, overwhelmingly conscious of the girl's presence.

"You've not heard the news?" he asked suddenly.

Irene's face flashed concern.

"Ted's all right, isn't he?"

It was natural that her first thought should be of her brother, for to Irene, Edward Marshall meant very nearly everything in the world.

"Oh, Ted's all right!" answered Bill. "At least, he was all right when I left Oxford."

"Left Oxford?" Irene's eyes knitted in perplexity.

"Why—"

Bill forced a smile.

"I've finished there," he said. "I got into a mess, and—well, they fired me."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Irene did not display that curiosity for which her sex is so noted. "I'm awfully sorry! Poor old Bill!"

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Bill laughed. Now that he had told Irene he felt better. And looking at her then he told himself that everything had been worth it. Even taking the shame and disgrace that was by right Edward Marshall's was worth it. Never from Bill Hartley would Irene know of her weakened brother's escapade; of his pitiful appeal to Bill to help him; of Bill's self-sacrifice that had spelt ruin to a brilliant career. Back into Bill's mind swept a picture of Edward Marshall, almost tearfully beseeching him to help him out of his latest folly. Well, for the sake of his charming sister, Edward Marshall had been given another lease of life, and the cost was the ruination of the chum who had stood by him from prep days through thick and thin. It had been a heavy price to pay; but now Bill did not mind. Irene had been spared—that was all that mattered.

"Poor old Bill," said Irene softly. "And what are you going to do now?" She noted the suitcase.

"I'm going to work," said Bill, with a lighthearted smile. "I'm going to make my fortune."

"Where?"

"Eh? Oh—er—London!" replied Bill, somewhat vaguely. And he picked up the suitcase and squared his shoulders.

In the silence that followed screeched the Klaxon horn of a motor-car. Next moment there was a theatrical application of brakes, and a small two-seater car skidded to a standstill beside them. At the wheel sat a fellow of about Bill's age, sleek, and well-groomed, with pretensions to handsomeness that a superfluous eyeglass somewhat discouraged.

"Morning, Miss Marshall!"

The newcomer detached himself from the car and lounged towards Bill and the girl. He seemed unconscious of the former's presence until Irene reminded him of it.

"Oh—er—good-morning, Hartley!"

Bill's lips set in a tight line. Instinctively he disliked Marchant Buxton; his effeminacy, his gushing plausibility and man-about-town air which clothed him like a garment. Furthermore, Bill knew in his heart of hearts that Buxton was a wrong 'un.

The dislike was mutual.

"Just back from Oxford," drawled Buxton. "I say, it's awfully bad luck about Hartley, isn't it?"

Bill felt an overwhelming desire to kick the sneering dandy, but he nobly restrained it. Buxton prattled on.

"Why on earth didn't you come to me, old fellow, when you found yourself hard up?" he said, more for Irene's benefit than Bill's. "I'd have helped you out."

Irene shot Bill a shrewd glance. The innuendo conveyed by Buxton had been enough, as doubtless that young man intended.

"Why can't you keep your mouth shut?" snapped Bill, with rising anger.

Buxton affected pained surprise.

"But I naturally thought Irene knew that you'd got the bullet from—"

Smack!

Something seemed to snap within Bill. With a roar of rage his fist shot out and Buxton collapsed in a near-by puddle, victim of as clean a straight left as boxing has ever seen.

"You worm!" snapped Bill. "I've wanted to do that for years. Get up, you crawling snake in the grass, and have some more."

Regardless of Irene's horrified gaze, Bill towered over Buxton. In his heart welled a great rage. Here was the schemer that had played on Edward Marshall's weak character Bill felt sure. Always had he frowned on Marshall's association with Marchant Buxton and tried to wean the weak-charactered Ted away from him. But of this Irene knew nothing.

"Hang you!" Buxton, nursing his chin, rose to his feet. "Hang you, you confounded thief! How dare you lay your filthy hands on me!"

And that was all Marchant Buxton had time to say, for Bill steadied him with a right, and then returned him to the puddle with a full-powered left.

"Bill"—Irene's face expressed her horror and condemnation—"Bill—"

Bill, breathing hard, realised too late the presence of a member of the fair sex. Unconsciously he glanced at his barked knuckles, then at the hapless, sprawling figure of Marchant Buxton. Apologies flew to his lips, but they were stifled as Irene Marshall turned her back on him and went to Buxton's assistance.

With a scornful smile creasing his mouth Bill picked up his suitcase, and, without another glance at the pair behind him, strode off in the direction of the railway station. A feeling of exultation surged through him; he could feel afresh the impact of his fists against the supercilious face of the one man in the world he really loathed. What he did not realise then was that he had lost, by his ungallant

behaviour, the friendship of the girl he admired most in the universe, and that in the muddled figure clambering out of the puddle with a damaged nose and a discoloured eye he had finished creating an enemy who would affect his future to a marked degree, even as he had been instrumental in disgracing him in the past.

"Ere, wot's your graft?"

The coffee-stall keeper came out from behind his narrow counter and squared up to Bill Hartley threateningly.

"Easy, old man," said Bill, with a grin.

"Not so much of the 'ole man' or your glib tongue!" growled the proprietor of the "gutter hotel." "Which we don't like the likes of you rawnd 'ere!"

Bill sighed.

Just a month had elapsed since his farewell to his father—a month of bitter disillusionment, short commons, and uncomfortable sleeping quarters. Now, with but twopence 'twixt him and starvation, Bill really found the great metropolis, as so many other unfortunates had found it, a city of disillusionment.

The few pounds he had possessed had gone. His watch and chain, now safely housed in a very obliging gentleman's pawnbroking establishment, had furnished him with a couple of pounds. These had rapidly dwindled to the twopence he jingled in the pocket of his shabby trousers.

"Clear outa 'ere, before I sets the boys on yer!"

Having delivered himself of that dark threat, the coffee-stall keeper returned to his business behind the counter.

Bill stood where he was.

For the last three days and nights he had patronised the coffee stall, eking out his small change in rationed portions of sausage and mash and stewed tea. That he was not popular with the coffee-stall proprietor and his clientele had been very evident from the first, for despite his shabbiness and apparent poverty Bill Hartley was a very different being from the stall's usual habitués. And as such he was viewed with suspicion and dislike.

To-night when he had approached the proprietor for a cup of tea Bill had been jostled by the rest of the customers. Amid a low murmuring of protest Bill had fronted the counter and prepared to spend his last twopence.

"You clear horf!" The coffee-stall proprietor was obviously out to protect his regular customers. "We don't want a nark rawnd 'ere! Now I've said it!"

A "nark"! Bill smiled to himself. He had heard the term before as being the underworld description of a spy in the pay of the police, or a plain-clothes man himself, but never had he expected to be taken for one. The situation was ironical. Why, even a nark possessed enough to provide him with a supper and a place to rest his head.

"You misjudge me, old chap," said Bill, with an engaging smile. "I'm no nark. I'm a down-and-out, if you like, but no nark."

"Haw, haw! We've heard thet before!" chuckled the proprietor. "They always give us that yarn. Now you clear orf while you're safe. D'you hear?"

Bill's eyes glistened. He had suffered this outspoken coffee-stall keeper for a long time. A hasty temper had always been reckoned one of Bill's weaknesses, and that, allied to an empty stomach and a feeling that the entire world was taking a kick at him while he was down for a count, brought an irresistible yearning to take the cheeky coffee-stall proprietor by the scruff of his neck and shake him for the rat he was.

It only wanted the irritating smile of the conqueror that dwelt on the man's face for a fraction of a second to bring Bill's yearning to a head. With a roar he darted forward and cleared the counter in an effortless leap.

"You little worm!" he snapped. "Why, I could break you in half!"

"Jerusalem!" The coffee-stall keeper let fall a well-filled tureen of tea he was boiling or stewing, and the scalding liquor swamped over two of his best customers lounging against the other side of the counter.

In a moment the air was filled with roars of rage and fury. Fists from right and left were flourished in the face of Bill Hartley.

"Lemme go!" howled the coffee-stall keeper. "Lemme go, darn yer! Ah—"

His voice broke off in a note of triumph as from out of the crowd of customers shot a hand firmly gripped round the neck of a bottle. Then, before Bill Hartley knew anything about it, the bottle descended on his unprotected head, giving him a brief vision of flashing lights, to be finally blacked out in a curtain of darkness.

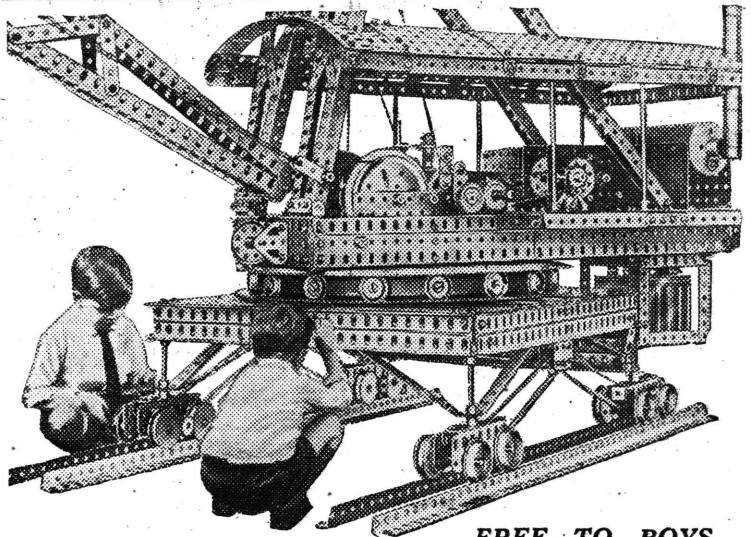
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# YOUNG THUNDERBOLT!

(Continued from page 24.)

When Grover led the City team on to the field most of the gates had been closed. In the Butterflies' dressing-room the Works team was waiting for Young Thunderbolt to turn up, and wondering what was keeping him.

"Where is my son?" cried Mr. Harland Jackson, striding in. "I'm told he hasn't turned up!"

"He hasn't, sir," replied Cliff's big pal, Dribbler Hanson, so called because he was a dandy at working the ball. "He said he would be here early. I reckon there's something wrong."

The Butterflies waited in the dressing-room until the crowd began to stamp and shout, and then went out to play—ten men, a team without a captain, minus Young Thunderbolt, the football genius who had made the side, and they all knew that they didn't stand a chance, and that the game would prove a flop. Their chief, Mr. Jackson, would become a laughing-stock. The City club would receive another nasty, jarring blow. Young Thunderbolt would lose his popularity.

Dribbler Hanson could not raise a smile as he called to Grover's spin of the coin. He lost, and the Butterflies faced a tearing wind. And then, just when the referee was about to blow the whistle, a red-and-gold bus—Thunderbolt's Butterfly Minor—hurtled down out of the clouds and circled for the playing pitch.

"She's gonna land!" yelled Grover, leaping out of the way.

As the players scattered, the bus drove her nose for the turf, and 50,000 people read on the streamer that tailed out behind her the legend—"When you Fly—Fly a Butterfly!"

As Dribbler raced to the stopping plane Young Thunderbolt stumbled out of her and down the steps to the turf. He was wearing his football things. His face was scarred and cut and his head bandaged.

"Help me fold the old air-bus up, Dribbler, and wheel her off the pitch!" he gasped. "Someone tried to brain me and burn my Butterfly. I only recovered just in time to change—and fly here—but I'm gonna play!"

Play! Young Thunderbolt played the game of his life that afternoon. Though he had to duck every time the ball came to him in the air because of the cuts the spanner had made, there was nothing wrong with his twinkling feet.

With Dribbler playing grand football beside him, and always slipping the ball through, he was able to beat the tired and listless pros, who had almost forgotten how to play the game, and his shots at goal sent the ball in at such a pace that the goalkeeper sometimes did not see which way it was coming until it was too late.

Cliff's Butterflies team was trained to the minute. They played for sheer love of the game. In speed, pace, and trickiness they were better than the City men, and Grover admitted, when his team retired beaten by five goals at the end, that the City hadn't had a chance.

"But we're not done yet, sir," he told Cliff's father. "Give us a rest, and try us again, and I bet we produce the goods."

Snarler was silent as the crowd marched through the gates singing.

"Do you know who the scoundrel was who attacked you, Cliff?" asked Mr. Harland Jackson, as he drove his boy home, while a gang from the works packed up and trolled home the Butterfly Minor.

"No; he was masked," answered Young Thunderbolt. "But it doesn't matter, gov'nor. My head will soon mend—and what did you think of that advertisement I gave your Butterflies?"

The father tightened his hand on Cliff's arm. "Young 'un," he answered, "there are no words."

THE END.

(Look out for next week's GEM, and another topping story of "Young Thunderbolt"—you'll vote it a real corker, chums.)

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