

"THE BOY WHO DEFIED HIS FORM!" POWERFUL LONG COMPLETE WITHIN!
ST. JIM'S YARN

The GEM 2^d



Defying the Prefect!

The BOY WHO DEFIED



"You utter idiots!" hissed Page. "Why don't you speak?" Reilly chalked across the door: "You are in Coventry."
 "Oh!" exclaimed the new boy. "Well, I don't care! This is my study and I'm staying here!"

CHAPTER 1.

A Special Occasion!

"I CONSIDAH—"

"Have you seen my footer, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake, I considah—"

"Yes; but have you seen my footer?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye and turned upon Jack Blake of the Fourth Form a withering stare, which ought to have withered Blake up on the spot.

But it didn't! Blake was looking round Study No. 6 for his footer, and he did not even see the withering glance of the swell of St. Jim's.

"I considah, Blake—"

"I know I left it here," said Blake.

"Has that ass Digby taken it, or that fathead Herries? You might help a chap to look for it, Gussy."

"I wufese to do anythin' of the kind," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "I considah that upon an occasion of special importance a fellow has a wight to wely on his chums for assistance."

"Just what I was thinking," agreed Blake cheerfully. "That's why I think you ought to help me look for my footer."

"I weward you as an ass!"

"Here it is!" ejaculated Blake, fishing the football out from behind the bookcase and tossing it in the air. "I remember now, I put it there. I—"

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"Look out, you feahful ass!" shrieked D'Arcy.

But the warning came too late. The footer had swept Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's glossy topper from the table, where he had laid it after polishing it. D'Arcy had spent at least ten minutes in polishing that topper. Perhaps it was exasperating, after so much trouble, to see it swept away by Blake's football.

"You uttah ass! My hat—"

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Sorry, Gussy; I can't stop! You can wear my cap if you like."

And, with the football under his arm, Blake rushed out of the study. It was a Wednesday, and a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the juniors were mostly going down to the playing fields.

Blake was in a hurry to join them.

Arthur Augustus picked up his hat and looked at it. There was a deep dent in the side, and as it had rolled along the floor, and bumped against a chair, the nap was decidedly disturbed.

D'Arcy pressed out the dent in the topper, and took up the velvet pad and polished it carefully. The study was quite in a litter with garments belonging to the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a most extensive wardrobe, and he appeared to have made quite a raid upon it for an outfit that afternoon.

D'Arcy was always the best-dressed fellow in the School House, or the New House, either; but on special occasions he made special efforts. And this occa-

sion was evidently a very special one, to judge by the amount of clothes he had dragged out to select from.

Herries came into the study.

D'Arcy, Blake, Digby, and Herries shared Study No. 6 among them, and the four were very close chums. But there was sometimes a rift in the lute. Fellows had different tastes. Herries could not see what Arthur Augustus wanted with such a wardrobe, and he considered D'Arcy very unreasonable when he showed temper on the occasions when Towser, the bulldog, gnawed some of his trousers.

D'Arcy, on the other hand, could not see what Herries wanted a bulldog at all for.

Just now, however, D'Arcy was vey glad to see the burly Fourth Former.

"Hewwies, old man—" he began.

"Hallo!" said Herries, looking round the study, apparently in search of something.

"I want your advice, Hewwies, old man."

"Good!" said Herries. "Going to buy a dog?"

D'Arcy sniffed.

"No, you ass!"

"Well, you might do worse," said Herries. "What the deuce have you got all those blessed clothes out for? Have you seen my dog-whip?"

"I have not seen your wotten dog-whip! On an occasion like this, Hewwies, I considah that a fellow has a wight to expect assistance from his personal fwiends. It is wathah an

HIS FORM! By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

important occasion. Cousin Ethel is comin' to St. Jim's."

"Oh, good!"

"She's bwingin' a fwiend with her—"

"Yes; but where—"

"And I'm goin' to meet them at the station."

"I'll come with you, if you like," said Herries. "I want to take Towser for a run, anyway."

"You uttah ass! I shall certainly not take that fwihtful beast to meet Cousin Ethel. I want you—"

"Oh, rats! Where's that dog-whip? I believe it's under some of those blessed clothes."

"I want to look wathah nice, especially as Ethel is bwingin' a fwiend," said D'Arcy. "Which tie would you advise me to wear, Hewwies?"

"Toss up for it," said Herries.

"Good! Here's the whip! I knew it was under some of this rotten rubbish."

"I considah—"

But Herries left Study No. 6 without waiting to hear what D'Arcy considered.

Arthur Augustus gave an exasperated sniff. It was certainly rather hard that a fellow with three special chums should not be able to rely upon any of them for assistance upon such an occasion.

Deprived of the valuable advice and assistance of his friends, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sorted over the ties unaided, and after long thought decided upon the one he would wear.

He tied the tie, and surveyed the result before a large glass, and was satisfied.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I weally think that looks wathah wippin'."

And, with his silk topper in his hand, the swell of St. Jim's turned to the door. Undoubtedly he did look a picture!

He stepped from the study into the passage. At the same moment three juniors, in a terrific hurry, came racing down from the Shell passage. They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell.

As they came tearing down the passage, D'Arcy stepped from his study—right into their path!

There was no time to avoid a collision. Crash!

Right into the swell of St. Jim's the three racing juniors crashed, and Arthur Augustus went spinning along the passage.

"Bai Jove! Ow!"

Crunch!

The mournful sound came from Arthur Augustus' beautiful topper as he sat upon it. But he had no time to mourn its fate, for the Terrible Three were sprawling over him, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared under a sea of arms and legs.

CHAPTER 2.

Very Obliging!

TOM MERRY sat up dazedly.

He was sitting upon Manners, but he did not notice that for the moment.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Ow!" groaned Manners "Gerroff! Ow!"

"Groogh!" murmured Monty Lowther. "I'm dead! Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

Manners wriggled, and Tom Merry rolled off. The Terrible Three picked themselves up.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not equal to rising yet. He lay upon the ruins of his beautiful topper and groaned.

"Oh, deah! Ow! You asses! You feahful asses! Ow!"

"You chump!" roared Tom Merry. "What do you mean by buzzing out of the study all of a sudden like that?"

"Ow! You ass!" groaned D'Arcy. "What do you mean by wushin' by like a set of dangewous lunatics?"

"Ass!"

"Duffah!"

"Fathead!"

"Ow!"

"Oh, bump him!" said Monty Lowther.

"I wefuse to be bumped," said Arthur Augustus, staggering up, and groping wildly for his eyeglass. "Bai Jove! My monocle is bwoke! Look at my toppah! Look at my twucks! Oh, you awful asses! How can I possibly go and meet Cousin Ethel like this?"

The Terrible Three, who were making a concerted movement towards the swell of St. Jim's, paused.

"Cousin Ethel is coming?" said Tom Merry.

Supercilious, defiant, and a spoilt darling, Eric Page was bound to find trouble among the cheery chums of St. Jim's. But as he discovers, Tom Merry & Co. have an effective way of bringing a cheeky new kid to his senses!

"Yaas. Ow!"

"Oh, good!" said Lowther. "You can't go down to the station in that state, Gussy."

"Wathah not! Ow!"

"Never mind," said Tom Merry. "I'll tell you what we'll do. It's partly our fault—"

"It's all your fault, you silly ass!"

"Well, it's all our fault, then. In the circumstances we can't do less than go down to the station and meet Cousin Ethel for you."

"Good egg!" said Manners and Lowther simultaneously.

"You wottahs! I wefuse to allow you to do anythin' of the sort. I—"

"My dear Gussy, you can't keep a lady waiting at the station for you while you change your clothes," urged Tom Merry, "and you can't go like that. Look at the dust!"

"And your jacket's split up the back," said Lowther.

"And really, your chivvy wants washin'," remarked Manners.

"You feahful chump! You have wuined my toppah, and weduced my

clothes to a howwid and disreputable state. I wegard you as wuff hooligans."

"It's all right, if we go to meet Ethel instead of you," said Tom Merry. "Ethel will be just as pleased, and—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Better go at once. The train will be in, if she's coming by the next train," said Monty Lowther. "Are you coming like that, Gussy?"

"You—you feahful asses! I can't come like this," said D'Arcy, in great distress. "Pewwaps upon the whole you fellows had bettah go. Pway explain to Ethel that I was detained by an accident, and you are comin' instead. Ethel is bwingin' a fwiend with her."

"Oh, good! Who's the friend?" asked Tom Merry.

"I don't know. She just mentioned in her letter that a fwiend was comin' down with her. I wanted to look aftah them, but now you silly asses have mucked it up. I should give you a feahful thwashin' if I had time. But pway go, if you are goin'."

"Right-ho!"

And the Terrible Three, after a hasty brush down in the passage, hurried off in high spirits.

Arthur Augustus turned back disconsolately into the study, where he had spent so much time in preparing himself to make a really stunning impression upon Cousin Ethel and her unknown friend.

"What about the footer?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Oh, blow the footer! It's only a giddy Form practice. Blake can look after it."

"Good!"

The Terrible Three walked quickly across the quadrangle towards the gates. There was no time to lose if they were to be in time to meet the train Cousin Ethel and her friend were coming by.

Arthur Augustus had left it rather late, and some time had been lost in the collision in the Fourth Form passage. But the chums of the Shell were not destined to get away in a hurry.

As they reached the gateway, six juniors lined up in their path with cheerful smiles. They were New House fellows—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, otherwise known as Figgins & Co., and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, the scholarship juniors—all of the Fourth Form.

They planted themselves in a row in the way of the Terrible Three, and smiled, and Figgins held up his hand in a chiding way.

"Halt!"

The Terrible Three paused. At another time they would have charged, and broken a way through the New House fellows. But there was no time to waste now, and they did not want to arrive at the station with an assortment of swollen noses and thick ears for the inspection of Cousin Ethel and her friend.

"Pax!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Don't play the giddy goat now, Figgy; we're in an awful hurry."

"What's on?" demanded Figgins.

"We're going to the station."

"Well, people have been to the station

without breaking their necks about it," remarked Kerr.

"The train's coming in, you ass!"

"Well, trains have come in before now."

"Fathead! Cousin Ethel's in the train, and we're going to meet it!" roared Tom Merry. "Now, don't play the giddy goat; clear off!"

Figgins started. Figgins was very much interested in Cousin Ethel. Indeed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had sometimes complained that Figgins seemed to think that Ethel was his cousin, and not D'Arcy's cousin at all.

"Cousin Ethel!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Yes; we're going to meet her. Gussy's met with an accident."

Figgins grinned.

"Oh, you're going for Gussy!"

"Yes."

"Good! Then we're going for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Collar them!" yelled Figgins.

And in a second the New House fellows were "going for" the Terrible Three. With a rush they overwhelmed them, and the three School House juniors rolled on the ground under the weight of the six heroes of the New House.

Tom Merry roared and struggled.

"Yow! Lemme gerrup! You ass!"

"Leggo!"

"Chuck it!"

"Sit on 'em!" said Figgins serenely.

"Reddy, I depend on you to keep these School House youngsters out of mischief while we go to meet Cousin Ethel."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redfern.

"Anything to oblige!"

"What-ho!"

"Come on, Kerr! Come on, Wynn!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. marched off down the road. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence sat upon the three Shell fellows, and kept them down in spite of their desperate struggles.

"Let us go!" yelled Tom Merry.

"I'll—I'll—"

"Better take it calmly, my infants," said Redfern. "This is where you toe the line, you know. We'll let you go as soon as Figgins has had a good start."

"You New House rotter!"

"Order!"

"Yah! I'll lick you! We'll slaughter you! Leggo! Gerrup!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther struggled furiously. But the three sturdy Fourth Formers had the advantage, and they kept it. And there was no help at hand.

It was a sunny afternoon, and all the fellows were on the playing field. There was no rescue for the Terrible Three, and they could not get loose.

Redfern & Co. smiled down upon them serenely.

"One good turn deserves another, you know," said Redfern. "I can guess what kind of accident Gussy met with. Now you've met with another of the same sort. Take it easy."

"You—you New House rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

For fully five minutes the three heroes of the New House kept the Terrible Three pinned down. They would have kept them longer, but just then Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, came by.

Redfern & Co. jumped up in a great hurry, and strode away with the most innocent expressions in the world.

Mr. Railton glanced after them, and then glanced at the Terrible Three, who were sitting up, very flustered, and very red and very dusty.

"You will spoil your clothes if you

sit on the ground in that way, Merry," said the Housemaster, suppressing a smile. "You had better go and brush yourselves down."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

The Terrible Three went in. It was too late to think of overtaking Figgins & Co., but the chums of the Shell planned a reception for those cheerful youths when they returned.

CHAPTER 3.

Cousin Ethel's Friend!

F IGGINS chuckled gleefully as he walked into the quiet old village of Rylcombe with Kerr and Wynn.

Figgins was satisfied in every way. He had scored over the School House fellows, which was naturally very satisfactory to the chief of the New House juniors.

The rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's never slept—at least, as far as the juniors were concerned. But better than even the score over the School House was the satisfaction of having "bagged" Cousin Ethel.

"It's a fine afternoon," Figgins remarked. "I don't see that there's any hurry to get back to the school. I think very likely Cousin Ethel will like a drive round the country."

"Good egg!" said Kerr, grinning.

"Or we might have a picnic," suggested Fatty Wynn. "If you like, I'll stop at Mother Murphy's and get the things, while you chaps go to the station. We could put a big lunch-basket in a car, have a drive round, and stop for a feed somewhere. Then we could get to St. Jim's before dusk."

"Jolly good idea!" said Figgins. "Cousin Ethel's got a friend with her, too. It will make a ripping party!"

"Here's the tuckshop," said Fatty Wynn, pausing outside the little establishment of Mrs. Murphy. "You fellows had better hand over all your loose cash, and I'll pool it with mine, and we'll have a big spread."

"Good!"

Figgins and Kerr turned out their pockets and handed their spare cash over to the fat Fourth Former, who promptly disappeared into the tuckshop. Then Figgins and Kerr hurried on towards the railway station.

"Train's in," said Figgins, as they drew near the station and he observed two or three people, evidently newly arrived passengers, coming out.

"Yes, buck up!"

The chums of the Fourth rushed into the station, and almost dashed into a charming young lady, who was waiting inside. They halted just in time and raised their caps enthusiastically.

"Cousin Ethel!"

"Good-afternoon, Cousin Ethel!"

Ethel Cleveland smiled a greeting to the New House juniors, and shook hands with them in a very cordial way. Cousin Ethel always got on famously with Figgins. She glanced past them, however, towards the doorway.

"We came to meet you here," Figgins explained.

"Thank you!" said Ethel softly. "I was expecting my cousin."

Figgins coughed.

"He—he's been detained," he explained. "He's awfully sorry."

"Detained by his master?" asked Ethel.

"H'm! No. Detained by a slight accident," said Figgins.

Ethel looked at him.

"We didn't—I-I mean, Tom Merry told us," said Figgins, turning red. "He was coming to meet you instead

of Gussy, as—as Gussy had had an accident. Nothing serious, you know, only it prevented him from coming out in time to meet the train."

"Is Tom Merry here, then?"

"N-no! The—the fact is, he had an accident, too—so we came," said Figgins. "I—I say, I understood that you had a friend with you—"

"Yes, that is so," assented Ethel, looking towards the entrance to the platform.

"Good!" said Figgins. "I—I say, I—I was thinking that if you weren't in a hurry to get to St. Jim's, we—we might have a drive round, and—and a bit of a picnic, you know. It's fine weather—don't you think so?"

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"My friend—" she began.

"She will come, too, of course," said Figgins eagerly. "That will make it all the jollier. We shall be glad to have her, too."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"You are very kind," she said.

"Not at all," said Figgins. "It will be ripping. I—I say, you'll come, won't you?"

"But my friend—"

"Is your friend still on the platform?" asked Figgins, a little puzzled.

"Yes, looking after the box."

"The—the what?"

"The box."

Figgins wondered what on earth Cousin Ethel's friend had brought a box with her for. He glanced through the little gate upon the platform, but could not see any person of the gentle sex there.

A somewhat pale-faced boy in Etons and a silk hat was directing a porter, who was placing a box on a trolley, but there was no sign of a girl.

Figgins glanced carelessly at the boy in Etons, wondering whether he was a new fellow for St. Jim's. He had not a pleasant face. His features were certainly good-looking, but there was an expression about them Figgins did not like. His tone, as he spoke to the old porter of Rylcombe, was decidedly disagreeable.

"Uppish sort of cad!" said Figgins to himself. "If he comes to St. Jim's we'll soon take that out of him."

He turned back to Cousin Ethel.

"I can't see your friend here, Ethel," he remarked. "Let's wait. I—I say, you'll come for that little drive, won't you? Fatty Wynn's getting the lunch basket ready at Mother Murphy's."

"You are very good, Figgins, but—"

"Oh, you must come!" said Figgins.

"Think what a lovely afternoon it is!"

"Yes; but—"

"And the drive will do you good, after your—your journey," said Kerr.

"Yes; but—"

"And Fatty is laying in a ripping spread," said Figgins temptingly.

"You and your friend will be hungry, you know, after a journey."

"But Arthur is expecting us, and—"

"Oh, he won't be surprised if you don't come, when he knows that we've come to meet you," said Figgins innocently.

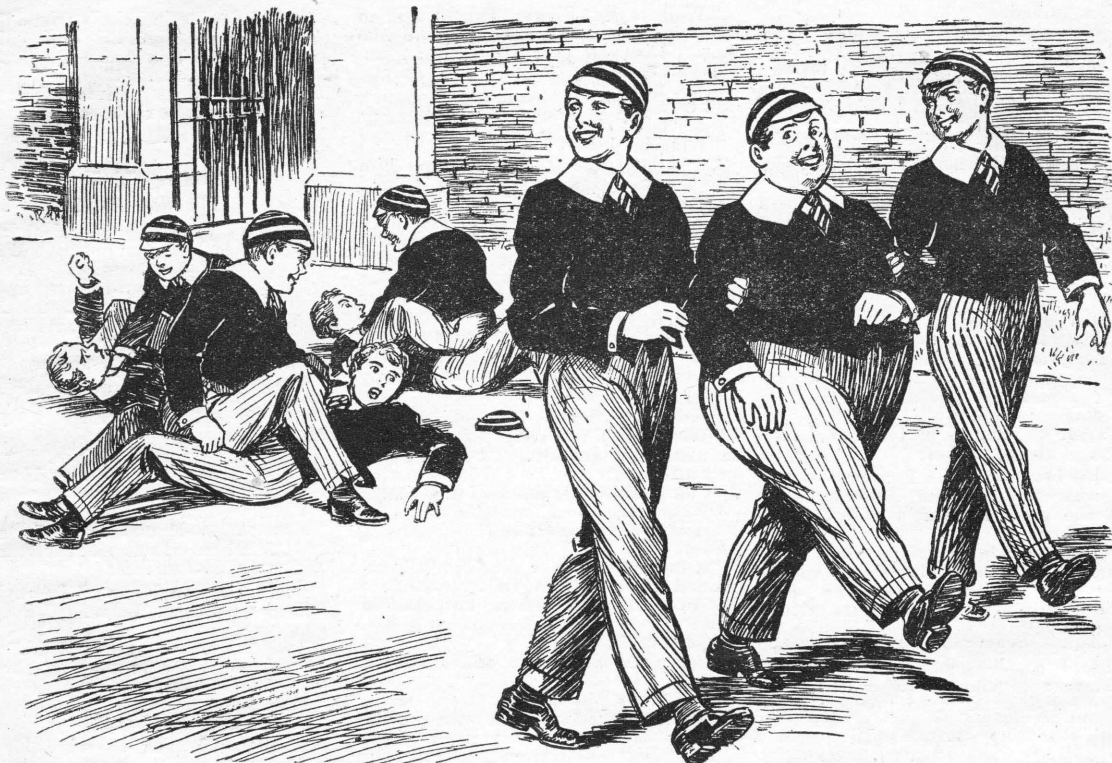
Ethel smiled.

"Yes; but—"

"It will be ripping, you know—"

"I am sure, it would, Figgins. But my friend has to go on to the school," said Ethel. "So I must go, too."

Figgins looked surprised. If Ethel had felt bound to go on to the school that would not have been surprising, but he could not for the life of him see



While Figgins & Co. marched off down the road, Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence held down the three Shell fellows in spite of their struggles. "Let us go!" roared Tom Merry. "I'll—I'll——" "Take it calmly, my infants," said Redfern. "We're just keeping you out of trouble while Figgy meets Cousin Ethel."

why Ethel's friend had to go on to the school.

"Is it somebody we know?" he asked.

"No, not yet."

"A relation of the Head's, perhaps?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, if you must go straight to the school, of course, you must," said Figgins resignedly. "I suppose you know best. Will you walk or drive?"

"Well, my friend will have to have the hack for the box, I suppose," said Ethel thoughtfully.

"Is it a big box?" asked the surprised Figgins.

"Oh, the usual size!"

"Usual size!"

"Yes; I think so."

Figgins was lost in wonder. It was very odd that Cousin Ethel's friend should bring a box with her at all, he thought; but Ethel spoke as if it were quite the customary thing, as she said the box was the usual size.

Figgins did not know in the least what to make of it.

The trolley came trundling off the platform, and the unhealthy complexioned youth followed behind the porter.

"Careful with that box, porter!" he rapped out, in a thin, petulant voice. "Don't bump it into everything!"

"Yessir!" said Trumble.

"I suppose there is a cab of some sort here?" said the youth, with a disparaging glance round the little old station.

"Yessir!"

"Well, put that box on it."

"Yessir!"

The youth turned towards Ethel Cleveland and her companions. He glanced at Figgins and Kerr with a kind of supercilious inquiring look that made both of them long to shake him, and they would undoubtedly have done

so, but for the presence of Cousin Ethel.

The stranger did not deign to take any further notice of their existence. To the great surprise of Figgins and Kerr he addressed Cousin Ethel.

"Ready, Ethel?" he asked.

Figgins and Kerr jumped. At the first glance they had set the young stranger down for a "bounder" of the most unpleasant type. What did he mean by speaking to Ethel and calling her by her Christian name? Figgins clenched his hands involuntarily. But he unclenched them again in sheer amazement as Cousin Ethel answered the stranger's question.

"Yes, Eric."

Figgins & Co. were so astonished that they stood almost open-mouthed.

Cousin Ethel turned to them with a somewhat tremulous smile.

"This is my friend, Eric Page," she said.

"Oh!" murmured Figgins.

He understood now.

"Eric, these are two of my friends from St. Jim's—Figgins and Kerr of the Fourth Form—the Form you are going into, Eric. I—I hope you will be friends."

CHAPTER 4
Quite a Toad!

ERIC PAGE condescended to look at Figgins and Kerr once more.

He was the last fellow in the world whom Figgins would have wanted to shake hands with of his own accord, but for Cousin Ethel's sake Figgy would have shaken hands with a cannibal.

Figgins held out his hand as cordially as he could. Page looked at it for a moment, as if it were a peculiar

zoological specimen extended for his inspection. Then he took it, and bestowed upon it a touch like that of a defunct fish.

Kerr did not offer to shake hands. He didn't want a handshake of that sort, and he did not mean to be condescended to, as he afterwards remarked, by a putty-faced bounder.

But Page did not appear to notice the omission.

There was an awkward pause for a moment. Page did not seem to feel awkward. He rapped out a sharp command to the porter not to bump his box as he placed it on the hack outside the station. He looked at the hack with a discontented expression.

"Goodness gracious!" he ejaculated. "Is that the thing we've got to drive in? Isn't there anything better than that?"

Kerr's eyes began to glitter. The station hack was good enough for other fellows who came to St. Jim's, and Kerr considered that it was decidedly good enough for this obnoxious youth; in fact, too good.

"You might phone to the Head to send his car," he suggested.

Kerr meant that remark for sarcasm, but Page appeared to take it quite seriously.

"By gad!" he said. "That's an idea! Is there a telephone in this weary hole?"

"My hat!" murmured Kerr, overcome.

Cousin Ethel's fair cheeks were a little pinker than usual.

"You must be satisfied with the hack, Eric," she said gently. "I am afraid the Head would not send his car for us. But perhaps you would rather walk."

Eric sniffed.

"Walking's a bore," he said.

"Then we must go in the hack."

"Well, I suppose there's room for two in the thing?" said Eric, going towards the ancient vehicle, and looking into it.

"Come on, Ethel!"

Figgins and Kerr exchanged a glance. They wondered where Page had come from; but wherever it was, it was evidently not a place where good manners were cultivated. How on earth Cousin Ethel came to have a friend like that was a deep mystery.

"There is room for four, Eric," said Ethel gently.

"Oh!" said Eric.

"It's all right; we'll walk," said Figgins hastily.

"You can come in the hack if you like," said Page.

"Thanks; we'll walk!"

"Then we may as well get off," said Page. "Ready, Ethel?"

Ethel hesitated; but Page was standing ready to hand her into the hack, and she gave Figgins a piteous look and stepped in.

Figgins made a step after her, changing his mind. But Page, apparently unconsciously, closed the door after him, and called out to the driver to go on.

Kerr grasped his chum by the arm.

"Hold on, Figgy!" he murmured.

"You're not going to chum with that rotten outsider, even to please Cousin Ethel!"

"Hush!"

The hack moved away. Cousin Ethel glanced out of the window with an indefinable expression upon her fair face. Page did not look out. He settled himself discontentedly on the old hard horsehair cushions.

"Good lord!" he remarked.

Ethel looked at him.

"Those some of the fellows you have told me about?" asked Page.

"Yes," said Ethel quietly.

"That long-legged chap Figgins?"

"The tall one is Figgins."

"Huh!"

"He is my best friend," said Ethel steadily. "A kinder, braver fellow never existed. I hope you will try to make him like you, Eric."

Page stared at her for a moment. Then he ejaculated: "Good lord!" and relaxed into discontented silence.

Figgins and Kerr stood on the kerb, gazing after the hack till it disappeared down the old High Street of Rylcombe.

Figgins was so dazed that he stood with his cap in his hand, forgetting to put it back on his head. He wondered whether he was dreaming.

Kerr tapped him on the shoulder, and Figgins started.

"Well," said Kerr, "what do you think?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Figgins. "I think I've been dreaming. What can Cousin Ethel think of an awful outsider like that chap?"

"That's the giddy friend," grinned Kerr. "It seems to me that we've both been done instead of doing those School House bouncers. Tom Merry would have been welcome to this."

"The cheek," said Figgins, "carrying off Ethel like that, after we've come to meet her!"

"I hope they'll put him into the New House," said Kerr. "We'll teach him manners."

Figgins was silent.

"I can foresee a high old time in front of that merchant at St. Jim's," said Kerr. "What do you think, Figgy?"

"He's Ethel's friend, Kerr."

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"Well, really, Figgy. Ethel ought to know better than to have a friend like that. Did you ever see such an unpleasant cad?"

"No, never!"

"He seems to be looking for trouble, doesn't he?"

"Well, he does."

"And he'll find it, if they shove him into the New House," said Kerr grimly.

"Let's get back."

The chums of the Fourth walked down to the tuckshop rather disconsolately. Fatty Wynn was waiting outside, with a large parcel in his hand. He was filling up the moments of waiting by munching tarts.

"Hallo!" he said. "Where's Cousin Ethel? Hasn't she come?"

"Yes, and gone!" grunted Kerr. "They went in the hack."

Fatty Wynn stared.

"Why didn't you chaps keep them?" he asked indignantly. "I've got the feed all ready!"

"Cousin Ethel's friend had to go on."

"What's she like?" asked Fatty.

"It isn't a she—it's a he!"

"Oh!"

"A new fellow for 'St. Jim's," explained Kerr. "The rankest outsider you ever saw. A rotten, unspeakable toad!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Come on, the feed's off!" growled Kerr.

The juniors walked back to St. Jim's. They did not follow the road. They took the short-cut, and arrived at St. Jim's before the station cab came in sight.

"Here they are!"

The Terrible Three were waiting in the gateway. They looked warlike as soon as they saw that Cousin Ethel was not with the New House fellows. But Figgins held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he said. "We've been sold!"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Didn't Cousin Ethel come? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, she came—she's coming on in the hack!" growled Kerr. "With her friend!"

"You've left them to come on alone?" asked Tom Merry, puzzled.

"They've left us. Her friend turns out to be of the masculine gender—a new chap for the Fourth Form here."

"Oh!"

"And an awful toad!" said Kerr.

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry warmly.

"If he's an awful toad, he wouldn't be a friend of Cousin Ethel's."

"Well, he is!"

"Yes, he is, right enough," said Figgins. "I can't understand it. I don't know why Ethel should have taken up such an outsider."

"We'd have bumped him for his cheek, but for Ethel," said Kerr. "They'll be along in a minute or two, and you can see for yourself."

And Figgins & Co. went in moodily.

The Terrible Three, puzzled and curious, waited in the gateway. The hack came in sight a few minutes later, and rolled into the gateway.

Tom Merry & Co. raised their caps to the fair face that looked out of the window, and Cousin Ethel nodded brightly.

"Don't stop, driver!" called out Page.

The hack rolled on.

The Terrible Three jumped back out of the way just in time. Then they stood almost transfixed. They gazed stonily after the hack as it rolled up the drive.

"Well!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"My hat!"

"So that's Cousin Ethel's friend?" "Kerr was right!" said Monty Lowther. "He's a toad—the toadiest toad that ever toadied!"

And Tom Merry had to admit that there was no doubt about it.

CHAPTER 5.

The New Boy!

"PWAY can I help you, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked the question. He had just come downstairs, and he found a youth in Etons in the Hall, looking about him in a rather lost way.

Arthur Augustus saw at once that the stranger was a new boy, and evidently at a loss, and, with his usual urbane courtesy, the swell of St. Jim's placed himself at once at the disposal of the stranger.

The new boy looked at him.

"I suppose this is the School House?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Two rotten Houses here, I understand?" said the new boy discontentedly. D'Arcy looked at him.

"There are two Houses," he replied. "This is the School House. New chap, I suppose?"

"Yes. I want to see the Head." "Pway allow me to show you to his study!" said D'Arcy.

"Thanks!"

"Not at all, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus led the way. He was not very favourably impressed with the new fellow, but he wanted to be civil.

"Just awvived?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"Comin' into the School House?" "I don't know. I'm going into the Fourth Form."

"That's my Form!" said Arthur Augustus graciously. "I'm in the Fourth!"

"Are you?" said the new boy indifferently, evidently not taking the slightest interest in the fact that D'Arcy was in the Fourth.

The swell of St. Jim's coloured a little. "Here's the Head's study," he said, rather abruptly.

He tapped at the door and opened it. The study was empty.

"Bai Jove, the Head isn't here!" he remarked. "You can't see him."

The new boy grunted.

"Beastly nuisance!" he remarked. "I want to know where my quarters are. I suppose I shall have a study?"

"You'll share a study with two or three othah chaps," said Arthur Augustus, inwardly hoping quite fervently that the study would not turn out to be No. 6.

"Two or three? How rotten! I want a study to myself!"

Arthur Augustus stared.

"Nobody undah the Sixth Form has a study to himself," he said.

"Oh! It's rotten to be crowded."

"Oh, it's all wight, you know! You'll soon chum up with the other fellows in your study."

"I don't know about that. I'm a bit particular whom I chum up with!" growled the new junior.

Arthur Augustus thought to himself that the new junior was looking for trouble, and would not have looked very long without finding it. But he did not say so. He wanted to be civil to a newcomer who very evidently did not know the ropes.

"I want to see the Head. Where can I find him?"

"The Head is pwobably at tea with

his family now," said D'Arcy mildly. "You can't see him. But if you're goin' into the Fourth, it's all wright. I'll take you along to Mr. Lathom's study."

"Who is Mr. Lanthom?"
"Master of the Fourth."
"Oh, very well!"

The new boy appeared to be quite unconscious of the fact that D'Arcy was obliging him in any way. From his manner, it might have been supposed that D'Arcy was paid a regular salary for guiding new boys about the School House.

The swell of St. Jim's suppressed his annoyance with some difficulty, and wished he had not been quite so obliging. However, he guided the newcomer to Mr. Lathom's study.

Mr. Lathom was at home. He blinked at the two juniors over his spectacles, and told them to come in.

"You are very good, D'Arcy," said little Mr. Lathom. "It is quite right, I was expecting you, my lad. Your study has been arranged; perhaps you will show the new boy to Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage, D'Arcy—the study next to you own? I shall see you again presently. I have no time to attend to you now, Page."

The new boy gave a slight grunt, and followed Arthur Augustus out of the study. He seemed very dissatisfied with his reception. It was easy for D'Arcy to see that he was a spoiled youth, and had been made very much at home, and had a vague expectation that he would be made very much of at St. Jim's.

That expectation was likely to be disappointed. Among more than two hundred and fifty boys, the addition of Eric Page was not likely to create much of a sensation.

"Shall I show you where your study is?" asked D'Arcy politely.

"Yes."

D'Arcy led the way in silence to the Fourth Form passage. He knocked at the door of Study No. 5, and opened it.

Reilly and Kerruish of the Fourth were there. Reilly was frying rashers of bacon, and Kerruish was washing a teapot—preparations that hinted that the two owners of Study No. 5 were preparing to have tea.

"New chap for this study, deah boys," said D'Arcy.

"Faith, and he can come in," said Reilly.

But Page did not come in. He stood on the threshold, sniffing. Apparently he did not care for the scent of frying bacon. The scent of the bacon was reinforced by smoke from the fire, and certainly the atmosphere of the study was a little thick.

The supercilious expression upon the new boy's face caused the cordial grin to fade from Reilly's countenance, and he frowned.

"Sure, and why don't ye step in?" he inquired.

"Is this a study?" asked the new boy.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Is cooking done in the studies? I should have fancied there was a kitchen for cooking."

"We usually get our own tea in the studies," D'Arcy explained patiently. "It's a pwivilege, you know. You can have tea in Hall, if you pwefer it."

"My hat!" exclaimed Kerruish. "He can have tea in Hall whether he prefers it or not. He's not coming into this study with his nose turned up."

"Faith, and ye're right!" said Reilly. "If that's a friend of yours, Gussy, I won't hammer him, but ye'd better take him away."

"And bury him!" said Kerruish.

"Ahem! He is a stwangaah to me!" said D'Arcy, who was by no means anxious to claim so extremely bad-mannered a youth as a friend. "I am just showin' him to his quartahs, you know."

"Well, you can show him to some other quarters!" growled Reilly. "I don't like the looks of him, intirely."

"Shut the door after you," added Kerruish.

Arthur Augustus hesitated. The new boy certainly deserved to be left to his fate, but Arthur Augustus knew what a boy would naturally feel like in a totally strange place, and this particular new boy was not likely to make friends.

The swell of St. Jim's felt a sentiment of compassionate concern for a fellow who evidently did not understand the manners and customs of the place he found himself in.

"I'll tell you what, deah boy," he said, as Reilly unceremoniously shut the door upon both of them. "I'll take you to tea in my study, if you like. I suppose you're pwetty hungwy, ahtah your journey?"

"Doesn't the school provide tea?" demanded the new boy.

"Oh, yaas."

"Then show me where it is."

"O h, v e w y well!"

"I shall complain to the Head," said the new boy, further. "I'm not going to be shut up in a poky little hole like that with two low bounders for company. At home, I have two rooms to myself, and each of them is six times as large as that."

Arthur Augustus smiled. At home Arthur Augustus himself had most palatial quarters, as he had the good fortune to be the son of a noble lord—but at St. Jim's he did not expect the same, and he realised that the new boy had lessons to learn.

In the kindness of his heart he resolved to teach him some of them.

"Pway allow me to give you a word of advice as an old hand," said Arthur Augustus. "If you turn up your nose at what you see here, you know, you will get the fellows' backs up, and that will be wotten for you."

"I don't care twopence for them!"

"They will take it as cheek, you know."

"They can take it as they like."

"I mean, you may get bumped."

"If I am bothered in any way I shall complain to the Head."

Arthur Augustus halted, and stared at him.

"Bai Jove, you mustn't do that, you know!" he exclaimed. "That's sneaking. Fellow who sneaks is sent to Coventry, you know!"

"When I want your advice I'll ask for it!"

Arthur Augustus clenched his hands hard and drew a deep breath. The new boy, at that moment, was perilously near to being used as a duster for the dusting of the passage floor. But the swell of St. Jim's contained his wrath; he would not lick a new boy on his first day at St. Jim's.

"There's the dinin'-woom," he said chokingly. "Good-bye!"

And he walked away hurriedly, feeling that if he spent many more minutes with the new boy he would not be able to keep his hands off him.

He met Blake, Herries, and Digby going up to Study No. 6 to tea, and confided to them that there was a new fellow in the Fourth—"an uttah wottah!"

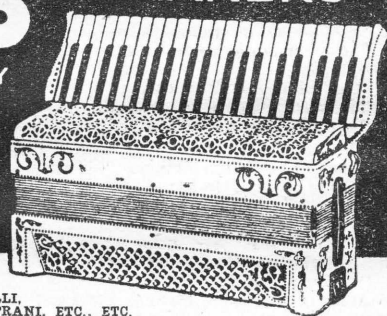
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CHAPTER 6.

Cousin Ethel's Request!

TOM MERRY looked into Study No. 6 after tea.

Herries and Digby had gone out, but Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were still there.

"Seen the new kid, Tommy?" asked Blake.

Tom Merry nodded. "Gussy says he's a rank outsider," Blake remarked.

"So he is," said Tom Merry. "I only saw him for a minute, but he certainly gave me the impression of being a rotter!"

"Uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy. "I shall wefuse to speak to him. He has not the slightest ideah of good bweedim'. If he hadn't been a new boy I'd have given him a feahful thwashin'!"

Tom Merry laughed. "Well, there's no need to have anything to do with him," he remarked. "I dare say he'll get put in his place sooner or later. I've looked in for you fellows. Are you coming?"

"Where?"

"Cousin Ethel wants to see us," explained Tom Merry. "Figgy has told me. I suppose she told him."

"Bai Jove! It's a wathah wemakable thing that Figgy—"

"Exactly. Cousin Ethel can't come to tea—she's had tea with Mrs. Holmes—but she wants to see us. Has something to tell us, I think. I thought I'd take you chaps along, if you'd like to come."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "I'm on. Where is Cousin Ethel?"

"Figgy says she's walking in the Head's garden."

"How does Figgy know, deah boy?" Tom Merry smiled.

"She must have told him."

"It is wathah wemakable—"

"Better not keep her waiting," suggested Blake. "You can give us your opinions of Figgins afterwards, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I fancy it's something rather important," said Tom Merry. "If there's anything we can do for Cousin Ethel, of course—"

"Of course, we shall be weady," said D'Arcy. "Wait a minute while I give my toppah a wub."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gave his topper a hasty rub, and the three juniors left the study.

Outside the School House they found Figgins waiting.

Figgins nodded very seriously. "Come on!" he said.

They crossed towards the Head's garden.

"How did you know that Ethel wanted to see us, Figgy?" D'Arcy inquired.

Figgins stared. "I—she told me," he said.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I've been to tea in the Head's house," Figgins explained, colouring a little. "Ethel and Mrs. Holmes—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Here we are," said Figgins, opening the gate. "March in!"

"Yaas, but—"

Jack Blake took his elegant chum by the arm and propelled him into the garden, and Figgins and Tom Merry followed.

Cousin Ethel could be seen in the little summerhouse.

The girl rose to her feet as the juniors came up. Her sweet face was very serious in its expression.

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"It is good of you to come," she said. "I—I want to ask a favour of you!"

"Anythin', deah boy—I mean, deah gal," said Arthur Augustus gracefully.

"We are quite at your service."

"Entirely," said Blake.

"Yes, rather."

Cousin Ethel looked a little troubled. "It's about the friend who came with me to St. Jim's this afternoon," she said.

"Oh!" said Figgins.

"I was so sowwy not to meet you at the station, deah gal," said D'Arcy.

"Just as I was startin' thwee awful duffahs bified into me, and—"

"It is all right; I was there," said Figgins.

"I do not wegard that as all wight, Figgy!"

Cousin Ethel smiled. "And I have not had the pleasuah of bein' pwsented to your fwiend, Ethel,"

went on Arthur Augustus, in a stately way. "I twust I shall see her!"

"My friend is a new boy for St. Jim's," said Ethel.

"Gweat Scott!"

"You have seen him?" asked Ethel anxiously.

Arthur Augustus looked dismayed. "Not a chap named Page?" he asked.

"Yes, Eric Page."

"Bai Jove!"

"Then you have seen him?"

"Yaas."

"We've all seen him," said Tom Merry, rather uncomfortably.

"And you do not like him?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"Ahem!"

"Well, I wouldn't say that," said Arthur Augustus cautiously. "I—I have spoken to him. Of—of course, you can't tell what a chap is like at first meeting."

Ethel's face was a little clouded.

"I understand," she said quietly.

"Now, that is the favour I want to ask of you. That is why I came down here with Eric to-day. Eric's sister is one of my best friends, and—Eric is not a bad boy, but he has been very much spoiled at home. His sister is afraid that at first he will have a very unpleasant time at school, as he is so used to having his own way in everything, and—as she knew I had some friends here, she asked me—"

Ethel paused.

"I see," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"She asked you to speak a word for the kid so that he gets some attention here, and be made to feel more at home. It's all right, we'll look after him."

"Certainly," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I know it's a great deal to ask," said Ethel, looking distressed. "But—but I really believe that all Eric's faults are on the surface, and—and if he is treated kindly he—he will soon find his place. But I know that new boys are sometimes ragged, especially if they are supposed to put on airs in any way, and so—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's not asking much," said Tom Merry. "Fellows fresh from home often want their corners knocked off. I know I was a little bit out of the common when I first came to school. Miss Fawcett used to dress me years younger than my age, and the fellows chipped me to death at first. We'll look after Page, and see that he isn't scalped."

Ethel smiled.

"Of course, I don't want Eric to know that I've spoken to you for him," she said. "He is very proud, and it would be very like him to quarrel with anybody he suspected of wanting to protect him."

"Oh!"

"But I promised his sister to do what I could; she asked me to," said Ethel. "That is why I came down with Eric. I should like to think that he was given a chance here."

"We'll give him a chance," said Figgins. "I shan't have much to do with him, I suppose, as he's a School House chap, and I'm in the New House. But I shall certainly do what I can."

"Yaas, wathah! You can wely on me, Ethel."

"And upon me," said Blake.

"Same here," said Tom Merry heartily.

Ethel looked relieved. "I'm so glad to hear you say so," she said. "It is very kind of you."

"Not at all."

"And I'll answer for the other chaps in the Shell," said Tom Merry.

"And I for the Fourth," said Blake.

"It will be all right. Page will have a chance to shake down and learn the ropes."

"Yaas, wathah! I should wefuse to allow him to be wagged."

"Thank you so much, all of you," said Ethel. "You are very kind. I was doubtful about asking you, but—"

"Wubbish, deah gal! You can ask us anythin' you like, and you'd always find us play up like anythin'," said D'Arcy.

"Yes, rather!"

There was a step on the garden path. The new boy, Eric Page, came into sight. He glanced at the juniors with the supercilious expression on his face that seemed to belong to it.

"I've been looking for you, Ethel," he said.

"Yes, Eric."

Tom Merry & Co. took their leave. They walked back into the quadrangle looking very thoughtful. In the quad they halted and exchanged glances.

"We must do our best to please Cousin Ethel," Figgins remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It won't be easy," Blake said slowly.

"I never saw a fellow I felt more inclined to hammer at first sight."

"He seems to make that impression upon everybody," said Figgins ruefully.

"I was surprised that Cousin Ethel had a friend like that. But, you see, he isn't really her friend; he's her friend's brother. I don't suppose she likes him any more than we do, but she's promised to put in a word for him."

"After all, he'll soon get licked into shape," said Tom Merry. "It's only a question of being patient for a bit. We'll do more than that for Cousin Ethel."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Better tell the other fellows," said Blake.

"Right-ho!"

And the Co. were duly informed of Cousin Ethel's request, and all the fellows agreed that they would be very patient with the new junior, and give him a chance.

But they did not know yet what demands would be made upon their patience.

CHAPTER 7.

Asking for It!

ERIC PAGE came into the Junior Common-room in the School House.

There were a good many fellows there. Most of the juniors had done their preparation, and were chatting before going to bed.

Tom Merry and Manners were playing a game of chess, and they finished as Page came in.

Page was looking surly and dissatisfied. After the way he had repulsed D'Arcy's advances, he was not likely to be treated with much friendliness, and his looks showed that he was feeling lonely and depressed.

A new fellow in a strange place naturally did not feel much at home at first, and even without Cousin Ethel's intercession, Tom Merry would probably have taken compassion upon him.

He rose from the chess-table, leaving Manners in the midst of an elaborate explanation as to why he had lost.

It appeared, from Manners' statement, that if he had moved a rook at a certain moment, instead of a bishop, Tom Merry would have been completely done in. He suggested going back to that interesting point in the game and playing it out again, just as an experiment. He sorted out the pieces, and Tom Merry grinned and left him doing it, and strolled over to Page.

The new junior was standing by the mantelpiece, leaning upon it, and looking about him with a very sour countenance.

"You're the new chap," began Tom Merry affably.

"I'm new here," said Page.

"Like the place?"

"No."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry, a little disconcerted.

"I think it's rotten!" said Page.

"We don't think it rotten," said Tom Merry, rather warmly.

Page shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you're more easily satisfied than I am," he remarked.

Tom Merry fully understood the feeling Figgins had mentioned to him—of a desire to hit the new boy upon the nose very hard.

But he refrained.

That proceeding would have been very satisfactory to his feelings; but it was hardly the way to start a friendship.

"You'll like it better when you've been here a bit," he said. "Perhaps I could do something to make you a bit more comfy. I'm Merry of the Shell."

"Are you?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, determined not to take offence. "Have you got a good study?"

Page sniffed.

"No. I've been put into a poky hole with two other fellows in it—and I don't like either of them," he said.

"There are some chaps here who aren't pleasant," agreed Tom Merry. "Who have you been put with?"

"I believe their names are Reilly and Kerruish."

Tom Merry frowned.

"They're both very decent chaps," he said. "Reilly is a kid from Belfast, and as good as gold; and Kerruish is from the Isle of Man, and we all like him."

"They may suit your taste."

"They do!" said Tom Merry.

"They don't suit mine."

Tom Merry was silent for some moments, nobly struggling with a desire to wipe up the floor of the Common-room with Eric Page. He conquered his inward longings, and went on with unshaken politeness:

"You might be able to change into another study."

"I've asked, and it seems that I can't have a study to myself," said Page. "There's only one empty study, and that's a room in an out-of-the-way corner, with stone walls, and I don't like it. It seems that it's only empty because nobody wants it, so it won't do for me."

"Oh, that's the room called Nobody's

Study," said Tom Merry, smiling. "You won't want that; nobody likes it. It's supposed to be a haunted room."

"What rot!"

"Ye-es, it's rot," agreed Tom Merry sweetly. "But if you don't get on with Reilly and Kerruish, you're not bound to use the study, you know. You can keep your books in a locker in the Form-room and do your prep in any other study—in the room of any fellow you happen to chum up with, you know."

"There's nobody here I feel inclined to chum up with."

"You know some of the fellows in Study No. 6, I think. They're great friends of Ethel Cleveland, who came down here with you."

"I don't know them."

"You'll like them," said Tom Merry. "I'm a friend of Miss Cleveland, too."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

Page's manner was not encouraging. Tom Merry turned over in his mind what to say next.

It was only too evident from Page's manner that he had been hopelessly spoiled at home; and although he was feeling lonely in the new school, he was determined to repulse any offer of friendship, from sheer ill-humour and superciliousness.

"Do you play chess?" asked Tom Merry.

"No. Rotten game."

Tom Merry might have asked him how he knew it was a rotten game if he never played it; but he did not.

"We've got a good footer team in the Lower School," he remarked. "You play footer?"

"No."

"Don't care for the game?"

"I hate it!"

"I suppose you're stronger on cricket?"

"I don't play cricket."

"What's your favourite game?"

"I don't care for games."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

"I shall be bored to death here!" said Page.

"What on earth did you come to St. Jim's for?" Tom Merry could not help asking.

"I didn't want to come. My father's just come home from India, and he sent me. My mother wouldn't have sent me; I don't get on with my pater."

Tom Merry was not surprised to hear it.

"I hear that you fellows sleep in a row of beds in a big room," said Page.

"Yes; every Form has a separate dormitory."

"I don't like the idea. I want a bedroom to myself. I don't want to sleep in the same room with a lot of rotters, you know."

"I shouldn't recommend you to call the fellows rotters," said Tom Merry gravely. "They are liable to cut up rusty."

"I don't care if they do."

"I mean you might get ragged."

"I should complain to the Head."

"That would be sneaking."

"I've been told that before by a cheeky young rotter—that ass over there with the eyeglass," said Page, with a nod towards Arthur Augustus. "I told him that when I wanted his advice I'd ask him for it. I'll do the same to you."

Tom Merry flushed.

"Very well, you won't get any more advice from me," he said. "I was only

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Manners: "No; what is it?"

Monty Lowther: "Well, one you stick with a lick, and the other you lick with a stick!"

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giving you a tip, as you're new to the place."

"Oh rats!"

Tom Merry contained his temper with an effort, and turned away.

He rejoined Manners and Lowther, his face flushed and his eyes very bright.

"Got on with him?" asked Lowther, with a grin.

"No. I'm glad he isn't in the Shell," said Tom Merry. "He wants a licking more than any other chap I've ever seen. He's just an unlicked cub—a cub from the toes up!"

"Suppose we give him a bumping, to begin with?" Lowther suggested.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I told you what Cousin Ethel asked us," he said.

"Yes; but that's the best way of helping him on," said Monty Lowther argumentatively. "A jolly good hiding to begin with would take some of the rot out of him, and then he'd have a fair start."

Tom Merry laughed.

"That wasn't what Cousin Ethel meant," he said. "Patience, my son. I suppose he will get licked before long, but he needn't have it from us. Hallo, here's old Kildare!"

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, put his head into the juniors' room.

"Bed-time, you kids," he said in his pleasant voice.

"Right-ho, Kildare, my infant!" said Monty Lowther.

And the juniors made a general move. Eric Page remained standing by the mantelpiece.

Jack Blake walked over to him.

"Bed-time," he said.

"I never go to bed early," said Page. "But it's bed-time—half-past nine," said Blake. "We have to go to bed at a regular time here, you know."

"What rot!"

"Kildare will be waxy if you don't come," said Blake gently, as the new junior gave no sign of moving.

"Who's Kildare?"

"The senior who just looked in; he's captain of the school. He's going to put lights out for the Fourth to-night."

"Well, I'm not going. My mater lets me stay up to what time I like."

"But your mater isn't here, you know," urged Blake. "Better come."

"I'm not coming!"

"But—"

"Oh, let me alone, do!"

Jack Blake swallowed his wrath, and followed the rest of the juniors out of the Common-room.

The Fourth Formers went into their dormitory, Blake the last of them.

"Where's the new kid?" asked Digby.

"He won't come up," said Blake, with a shrug of the shoulders. "He says his mater lets him stay up late—might have guessed that from his putty complexion."

"The ass! He will get a licking."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kildare came into the dormitory.

The juniors had turned in, but one bed was vacant.

The captain of St. Jim's glanced at it.

"Isn't the new kid here?" he asked.

"He hasn't come up yet," said Blake.

Kildare frowned.

"Go and fetch him," he said. "Tell him that if he isn't in this dorm in one minute, I shall come and look for him."

Blake hesitated. He did not want to carry a message like that to Page. But there was no help for it. Kildare's word was law.

Blake left the dormitory, and descended to the Junior Common-room.

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CHAPTER 8.

A Licking for Page!

PAGE had seated himself in an armchair, with his feet on a ledge above the fire, and he was staring moodily into the fire.

Blake came in, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Kildare sent me for you," he said.

"I'm not coming."

"He says if you don't come up at once he'll come and fetch you."

"Let him!"

Blake paused.

"Look here, Page," he said, as calmly as he could. "Don't be an ass! Kildare is head prefect of this House, and he has authority over all the juniors. Don't you understand?"

"Let me alone!"

"He will lick you!"

"Rot!"

"Won't you come?"

"No, I won't!"

Blake left him and returned to the dormitory.

Kildare stared at the Fourth Former as he came in alone, looking flushed and uncomfortable.

"Well, where is Page?" he asked.

"He hasn't come."

"Did you give him my message?"

"Yes."

Kildare knitted his brows and strode out of the Fourth Form dormitory. There was a chuckle from some of the Fourth Formers.

Kildare strode into the Common-room, and found Page in the armchair before the dying fire. Page did not even look round.

"Page!" rapped out Kildare.

Something in his tone made Page look at him. He cast a glance of dislike at the captain of St. Jim's.

"It is bed-time," said Kildare, feeling that he was called upon to be patient with a new boy. "Bed-time for all the junior Forms is half-past nine. Go up at once!"

"I don't want to go to bed yet."

"What?"

"I always stay up to what time I like at home."

"You'll find St. Jim's rather different from home, then," said Kildare grimly. "I give you one second to get outside that door!"

Page gritted his teeth, and did not move.

Kildare waited a good second, and then strode towards him. His grasp fastened upon the back of the junior's collar.

"Come on!" he said.

Page was hauled out of the armchair.

"Let me alone!" he roared.

"Will you come?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then I shall carry you!"

Page struggled and kicked, and Kildare gave a sudden gasp of pain as he caught the new boy's heel upon his shin. Then Page was swept off his feet, and bundled up in the arms of the St. Jim's captain and carried out of the Common-room as easily as if he had been an infant.

He struggled and yelled as he was borne along the passage and up the stairs. Kildare carried him into the dormitory passage, and met Langton, who was returning from putting lights out in the Shell dormitory. Langton of the Sixth stared at him.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he asked.

Kildare panted.

"This young beggar won't go to bed."

"My hat!"

"Lend me a hand with him!"

Page was scratching and kicking wildly. The two seniors grasped him by the arms and legs and carried him, between them, into the Fourth Form dormitory. He was tossed upon the vacant bed, and he lay there glaring and gasping.

"Now undress yourself!" thundered Kildare.

"I won't!"

"Take your things off!"

"I won't!"

"Then I jolly soon will!" said Kildare. "You've got to learn to obey orders here, my son! What on earth place were you brought up in, I wonder?"

"Faith, and it's a lunatic asylum he wants," said Reilly. "That's the spalpeen they're going to stick in my study!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus turned out of bed, a very elegant figure in his silk pyjamas. "Pway allow me, Kildare. The new chap doesn't know the wopes, you know; pway allow me to explain to him."

Kildare was a very good-natured fellow. He paused.

"Well, you can try," he said.

D'Arcy advanced to the savage-looking junior on the bed.

"Pway undress yourself, deah boy," he said. "Juniahs here have to obey the pwefects, you know. Kildare and Langton are pwefects, and they have the wight to give you ordahs, you know. It's a wule of the coll. Pway undress."

"I'm not going to bed!"

"Pway allow me to help you off with your boots," said D'Arcy persuasively. And he knelt beside the bed and took up one of Page's boots.

Page jammed the boot against his chest and knocked him over backwards.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Ow!"

Bump!

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake.

"Gussy, old man—"

"Ow! Gweat Scott!"

"Smash him!" roared Herries.

Arthur Augustus jumped up, gasping. He had clenched his fists, and he looked as if he was going to rush at the new junior. But he remembered his promise to Cousin Ethel.

"You are an uttah wottah!" he panted. "You are a feahful cad! I wegard you with despision—I mean contempt!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went back to bed, rubbing his chest, where a bruise was already forming. It had been a hard kick.

There came a snigger from Levison's bed.

"Yah! Funky!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wheeled round towards the cad of the Fourth.

"If you will have the gweat kindness to step out of bed, Levison, I will show you whethah I am funkay or not!" he exclaimed.

Levison did not accept the invitation. Page sat on the bed and glowered at the two prefects. After Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's experience nobody in the Fourth felt inclined to interfere on his behalf. The swell of St. Jim's was still gasping from the effect of the cowardly kick he had received.

"Will you undress and get into bed?" asked Kildare quietly.

"No!" said Page.

"I think you must be dotty!" said Kildare, as much amazed as angered by the obstinacy of the new boy. "Do you want me to thrash you?"

"I'm not going to bed! I hardly ever go to bed before twelve!"

"But don't you understand that you can't do here as you do at home?"

CHAPTER 9.

Page in a Rage!

WHEN Page appeared in the Fourth Form class-room on the following morning, many curious looks were cast at him.

His adventures in the dormitory, his defiance of the captain of the school, had become the talk of the House, and the New House fellows had heard all about it.

All sorts and conditions of fellows had come to St. Jim's at different times. But the fellows agreed that there had been nobody quite like Page before.

Spoiled youths were not uncommon; but they generally found their place sooner or later; and a fellow who expected the same indulgence at school as he had received from a fond and foolish mother at home, was something new in the experience of the St. Jim's fellows.

Page sat in his place in the Fourth Form with a sullen face.

When Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master, spoke to him he answered sullenly and as disrespectfully as he dared.

But the caning of the previous night had done him good, and he did not want to experience that again; so he kept his impertinence within bounds.

Mr. Lathom, who realised that he had a somewhat peculiar youth to deal with, was very considerate with him, and so Page's first morning in the Form-room passed off without trouble.

Blake & Co. had resolved to leave him alone for a time, in order to avoid trouble with him; but Page did not allow them to carry out their intentions. When the Form came out after morning

"No, I don't!"
 "I'll give you one more chance," said Kildare. "I'm going down to fetch my cane. If you're not in bed when I come back, I shall thrash you!"

Kildare quitted the dormitory.
 "Go to bed, Page," said Blake. "Don't be an ass! You can't back up against a prefect, you know. Go to bed, like a sensible chap."

Page did not reply. His face was white with anger and bitterness; it was only too evident that all the obstinacy of a passionate and sullen nature had been aroused, and that he would yield to nothing but force.

Kildare came into the dormitory, cane in hand. His brow darkened as he saw the new junior still seated upon the bed fully dressed.

"Now, then," he said. "Begin!"
 Page glared, and did not speak.

"Will you undress?"
 "No!" yelled Page.

Kildare wasted no more time in words. He grasped Page with his left hand, and lashed him with the cane in the right.

Page yelled and kicked and struggled, and Langton lent a hand to keep the junior extended on the bed. It was very seldom that Kildare really let himself go in inflicting punishment upon a junior; but on this occasion there was no resource but severity.

Lash, lash, lash!
 The new boy wriggled and shrieked. Kildare desisted at last.

"Now will you go to bed?"
 Page rolled off the bed, his face flaming. He caught up a jug from the nearest washstand, and raised it in the air.

"Stand back!" he said hoarsely.

There was a murmur of amazement from the juniors.

"Put that jug down, you idiot!" roared Blake.

Page did not even look at him. His eyes were fixed upon Kildare. There was no doubt that he meant to strike if the St. Jim's captain approached him; but Kildare did not pause. He strode straight at the new junior.

Whiz!
 Blake's pillow flew through the air and smote the upraised jug, and knocked it out of the hand of Eric Page.

There was a crash as it fell to the floor and smashed into a hundred pieces.

Page gave a sharp cry, and as he glared round wildly for another weapon, Kildare's grasp closed upon him.

Then the cane came into play again, and this time the captain of St. Jim's did not spare him.

The Fourth Formers looked on in grim silence. Page deserved all he was receiving; but it was a terrible licking. His yells died away into whimpering sobs.

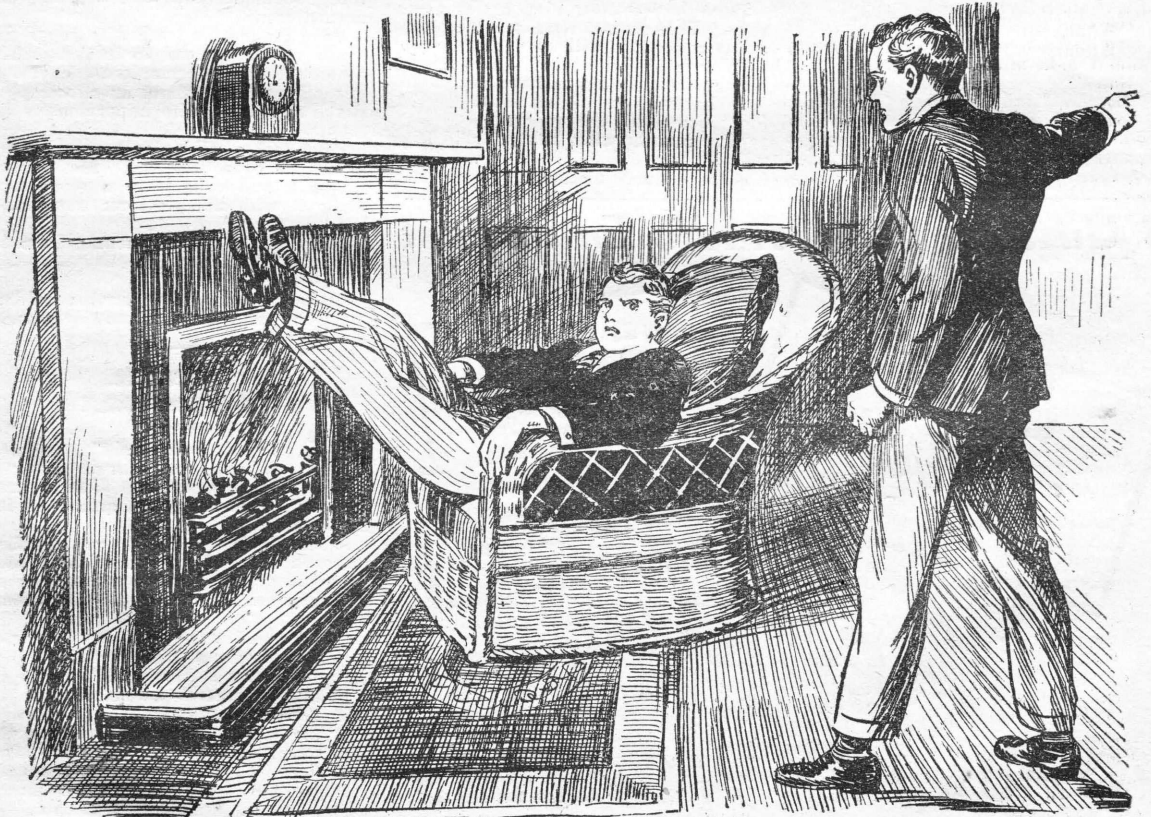
"Now will you go to bed?" asked Kildare quietly.

Page panted.
 "Hang you! Yes!"
 "Quick, then!"

And Page, quivering with pain and rage, but no longer daring to resist, undressed himself and turned in.

Without another glance, Kildare extinguished the light, and left the dormitory with Langton.

There was silence in the Fourth Form dormitory—silence broken only by the gasping sobs of the new junior.



"Page!" rapped out Kildare. "It is bed-time. Go up at once!" "I always stay up to what time I like at home," said the new boy obstinately. "You'll find St. Jim's rather different from home," snapped the head prefect. "I give you one second to get outside that door!"

lessons, Page strode towards Jack Blake.

Blake saw him coming, and read trouble in his face, but he assumed his sweetest and most disarming smile, thinking of Cousin Ethel.

"Coming out to footer practice?" he asked, as Page came up.

"Yaas, that's a vewy good ideah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I should be very glad to help," said Figgins.

Page scowled.
"Hang football!" he replied. "I've got something to say to you—Blake I think your name is?"

"That's my name," said Blake.
"Won't you come down to the footer?"

"No, I won't!"

"Come and have a ginger-pop at the tuckshop," suggested Blake.

"You threw a pillow at me last night," said Page.

"Oh, that was to keep you from getting into trouble!" said Blake cordially.

"If you had biffed Kildare with that jug, you'd have been smashed!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You threw a pillow at me," said Page. "Take that!"

Blake knocked his hand up and stepped back, turning very red.

"Don't do that," he said quietly.

"You will fight me!" said Page passionately.

Blake shook his head.

"I'm not looking for a fight this morning," he said.

"You are afraid?"

Blake laughed.

"Not exactly," he replied. "But I've got reasons for not wanting a row with you. I'm not going to fight you, and there's an end of it."

"Coward!"

Blake turned crimson.

"Oh, shut up!" he said irritably. "If I were to fight you, you silly young ass, I should make mince-meat of you!"

"Rats!"

"My hat!" said Herries. "Give him one on the boko, Blake. It will do him good. Look here, he's not going to get his ears up like that. If you don't lick him, I will!"

"Cheese it, Herries. Nobody's going to lick him!"

"Wathah not. He's undah our pwo-tection, Hewwies."

"Buzz off while you're safe, Page!" advised Digby.

"Mind your own business!"

"You ass—"

"I'm going to fight Blake, and if he does not fight me I shall thrash him!" said Page arrogantly. "Blake, you are a coward!"

"Oh, pile it on!" said Blake resignedly. "If ever I undertake not to lick a howling cad again, you fellows, you can use my napper for a footer!"

"Shut up, Page!" said Kerruish. "If you get Blake's back up, you fathead, he will mop the floor with you! Shut up while you're safe!"

"Coward!" repeated Page tauntingly.

"Fire away!"

Page's eyes blazed, and he ran at Blake, hitting out.

Blake dodged round the Terrible Three, who had just come out of the Shell Form Room.

"Save my life!" gasped Blake. "That terrible chap is going to lick me! I'm so nervous! Help!"

There was a roar of laughter in the crowded passage. It was evident to everybody, with the exception of Page, that Blake could have knocked the weedy, seedy new boy into a cocked hat without the slightest difficulty, if he had chosen to do so.

Page turned red with rage.

"Let me get at him!" he panted.

"Run for your life, Blake!" howled Monty Lowther.

"Wun, deah boy! Wun like anythin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake dashed out of the open doorway into the quadrangle.

Page dashed after him, as far as the steps. Then he met Kildare, who looked at his angry face with grim disapproval.

"You in trouble again?" he exclaimed.

Page scowled, but did not reply.

"What are you rushing about like that for?" demanded the senior.

"I'm running after Blake," said Page sullenly.

Kildare stared at him.

"Running after Blake?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I'm going to thrash him!"

"Eh? You're going to thrash Blake?"

"Yes!" snarled Page.

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"Well, run after him if you like," he said. "I should advise you to be careful not to catch him, you young ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

Page ran into the quadrangle, scowling. He ran towards Blake, who was strolling under the elms.

Page was not in good condition, and even the little run across the quad made him pant for breath.

Blake did not glance towards him, but he watched him out of the corner of his eye, and when he was almost within hitting distance, Blake suddenly darted away.

Page halted and panted.

"Stop!" he roared. "Come back, you rotten funk!"

"I'm afraid!" said Blake.

"Stop!"

"Oh, chase me!"

Page dashed after him again, and again Blake allowed himself to be nearly overtaken. But he darted off before the new junior could touch him.

He halted at a distance of a dozen yards, and looked back with a smile.

"Come on!" he said invitingly.

"The exercise will do you good. You need it."

"Coward!" yelled Page.

"Go it!"

"Cad!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Funk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter from the juniors who had followed them into the quadrangle, and were watching the absurd scene.

Page gritted his teeth with rage. He could not get close to Blake. The athletic Fourth Former could have run him off his legs without an effort. And Blake appeared quite impervious to his taunts.

Page cast a wild glance round, as if in search of a weapon. He stooped suddenly and caught up a stone, and flung it with all his force at Blake's head.

There was a yell of warning from all who saw the action.

"Look out, Blake!"

Blake started, and uttered a sudden, sharp cry, and fell prone to the ground.

CHAPTER 10.

A Bump for Blake!

"BLAKE'S down!"

"You awful cad!"

There was a rush towards Blake at once. The Fourth Former lay on the grass, quite still for a moment.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first to reach him. He raised Blake's head from the grass. There was a trickle of red upon the face under the thick, dark hair.

"Blake, old man—"

Blake blinked at him dazedly.

"Hallo! Ow! My head!"

"Bai Jove, there's a bwuise comin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, feeling over the damaged spot. "Gweat Scott! The awful cad! You might have been sewiously injahed."

Blake put his hand to his head. There was a stain of red upon his fingers as he drew them away.

"By Jove!" he said. "What a rotten cad—a regular wild beast! I was bowled right over."

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"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Why, you might have been killed!"
 roared Herries. "Look here, Blake,
 if you're going to stand that kind of
 thing, I'm not!"

"Hold on, Herries!"
 "Rats!"
 Herries rushed towards Page.
 The new junior was standing under
 the trees, looking a little scared at
 what he had done. In the anxiety
 about Blake, no one was taking any
 notice of Page till Herries came to-
 wards him.

"You know what you've done!" said
 Herries savagely. "You're spoiling for
 trouble. Well, put up your hands!
 I'm going to lick you!"

"Hold on, Herries!"
 "Rot!"
 "Weally, Hewwies——"
 "Shut up!"
 "I'll fight you, if you like!" said
 Page savagely. "I'll fight any of
 you!"

Snack!
 Herries' heavy hand came upon
 Page's cheek, and he staggered against
 a tree.

"Take that for a start!" said Herries.
 "Now come on!"

Page sprang at him like a tiger.
 There was a rush of the juniors to
 form a ring round them.

Page attacked Herries furiously, and
 Herries hit out at him right and left.
 The new junior did not succeed in
 planting a single blow on Herries'
 angry face. He was knocked to and
 fro like a punching-ball, and Herries
 did not spare him.

Whack! Crash! Biff!
 Page went sprawling on the ground.
 Herries pranced round him.

"Get up!" he roared.
 "Ow!"
 "Get up, you cad, and take your
 medicine!"

Page staggered up. He seemed to
 have courage of a wildest variety, and
 he came on again, clawing and kicking
 and scratching.

There was a yell of disgust from the
 ring of juniors.

"Yah! Cad!"
 "Hooligan!"
 "Knock him out, Herries!"
 "What-ho!" said Herries grimly.

Blake came towards the throng,
 leaning on D'Arcy's arm. Blake's face
 was very white, and he was dabbing
 at his forehead with a handkerchief,
 which was stained red.

The junior was still dizzy, and not
 quite himself.

"Stop it, Herries!" he said. "Let
 him alone! He's had enough!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 Herries snorted.

"He's not had half enough. I'm
 going to lick him within an inch of his
 life! He's got to learn not to chuck
 stones about."

"Faith, and ye're right!" roared
 Reilly of the Fourth. "If Herries
 doesn't lick him, I will! Mind your
 own business, Blake!"

Bump!
 Page went down again very heavily.

He was discovering by this time that
 he was no match for the St. Jim's
 fellow. He sat up, panting and gasp-
 ing, and put his hand to his nose, which
 was very much swollen.

"Gerrup!" roared Herries.
 "Oh!" groaned Page. "Ow!"

"Chuck it!" said Tom Merry. "Do
 let him alone, Herries! Remember
 what we promised Cousin Ethel."

"I didn't promise anything!" grunted
 Herries.

"Well, we did for you."

JUST MY FUN



Monty Lowther Calling!

Hallo, everybody! "Was Guy Fawkes
 a racketeer?" asks Figgins. Well, they
 certainly put him on the rack.

**Joe Frayne thinks rockets are too
 dear. Well, they are bound to go up.**

While Mr. Ratcliff was dining in a
 Wayland restaurant, several fireworks
 were thrown in among the tables. A
 "bang-up" feed!

"There are occasions when your front
 teeth need special protection," states a
 medico. Immediately after you have
 exploded a firework behind another fellow,
 for instance?

Dog breeders make a lot of money, we
 read. Especially when they sell pups.

**Old films are often boiled down to
 make glue. Not only the villain comes
 to a sticky end!**

Then there was the chap who said the
 future of English Rugby football seemed
 All Black.

Headline from Wayland paper: "Anti-
 Noise Council to Make Report." Only a
 very little one, it is to be hoped.

Then there was the fellow who was
 sent out to buy a trunk, and came back
 with an elephant.

A firework display went on for fifteen
 hours, we read. By that time the fire-
 work factory was completely burnt out.
 Oh, you heard about the absent-minded

"Look here! Is that cad going to
 be about to chuck stones at fellows'
 nappers?" demanded Herries.

"Well, no; but——"

"It's all right," said Blake. "Do let
 him alone, Herries!"

Herries snorted.

"You're an ass, Blake!"

Blake grinned faintly.

"That's all right! Only let him
 alone."

"Well, he's had a pretty good wallop-
 ing," said Herries, looking at Page's
 bruised face with considerable satisfac-
 tion. "Have you had enough, you
 cad?"

"Oh! Ow! I'll make you sorry for
 this!" groaned Page.

Herries laughed scornfully.

"You'll lick me, I suppose?" he said.

"Well, you're welcome to try. I only
 wish you would. I want another go
 at you!"

Page staggered to his feet. He did
 not offer to attack Herries again. He
 moved away, and a groan and a hiss
 from the juniors followed him.

"Bettah come in and bathe your nap-
 pah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus
 D'Arcy.

Blake nodded.

"Yes, rather! Keep round me, you
 fellows. For goodness' sake don't let
 anybody see this. There would be a
 row."

"The rotten cad would be expelled if
 this were known," growled Digby an-
 grily. "It would be a jolly good thing,
 too!"

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

"But we promised Cousin Ethel we'd
 do our best," said Blake.

professor who slept right through his own
 lecture?

They say that in Mexico a disappointed
 election candidate usually asks for the
 election to be shot over again.

Then there was the Scotsman who liked
 to hear jumping crackers, so he turned
 on the wireless and listened to the
 atmospherics.

**Reminds me of Gore, who says all
 he can get on his home-made wireless
 set is dust!**

Then there was the man who boasted
 he always had a boiled shirt for dinner
 every day.

Story: "There," said the heavyweight
 boxer, administering a k.o., "that ought
 to make him sit up!"

"And what," asked the artist, "do you
 think is wrong with my picture?"
 "Why," said his friend, "it hasn't got a
 funny joke under it!"

Story: "Is your nerve treatment
 successful?" asked the prospective
 patient. "Perfectly," replied the
 specialist. "The first person I treated
 immediately tried to borrow a fiver from
 me."

You heard of the weather expert who
 fastened his macintosh with a belt of
 high pressure?

**Quick one: "Yes," said the oldest
 inhabitant of the village, "I be ninety-
 five this year—and 'tis my belief, if
 it hadn't been for this puttin' back o'
 the clock, I'd have been well over a
 hundred by now!"**

Then there was the man who received
 a reference from his former employers,
 saying he was one of the best men the
 firm had ever turned out!

Story: "Fire at will!" commanded
 the sergeant. "Which is Will?" asked
 recruit innocently.

Last shot: "I feel like a two-year-
 old," said Gore. "Horse or egg?"
 asked Blake. Have a "crack-up" time,
 boys!

"Yes; but that doesn't include let-
 ting the brute bash stones at our
 coconuts!"

"N-no, but——"

"We'll leave him severely alone,"
 suggested D'Arcy. "It's uttably impos-
 sible to have anythin' to do with such an
 uttah wank outsidah; but for Ethel's
 sake we must let him alone."

"That's right," said Blake.

Blake went into the School House, his
 friends keeping close round him to con-
 ceal the fact that he was hurt; and he
 hurried into the bath-room to bathe his
 injuries.

There was a big black bruise upon
 his forehead, only partially concealed
 by the hair; and though he brushed
 the hair down over it as well as he
 could, it was of not much use. The
 bruise, which was growing bigger and
 blacker all the time, was very much
 in evidence when Blake took his cap
 off.

As soon as the Fourth Formers took
 their places in the Form-room that
 afternoon, little Mr. Lathom's eyes fell
 upon Blake.

He blinked at him through his spec-
 tacles, and came closer to inspect the
 bruise.

"Dear me, Blake!" Mr. Lathom ex-
 claimed, in a shocked voice. "What-
 ever is the cause of that dreadful bruise
 on your forehead?"

"I—I had a knock, sir," said Blake.

"Bless my soul! In what way?"

"It got knocked, sir," said Blake
 awkwardly. "I didn't do it on purpose,
 sir."

Mr. Lathom smiled.
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"No, I don't suppose you did, Blake. Dear me! It is a terrible bruise. Do you not feel a headache from the effects of it?"

"Yes, sir; my head aches a bit."

"I should imagine so. I will excuse you from lessons this afternoon, Blake; and you shall go down to Dr. Short, in Rycombe, and ask him to look at it."

Blake rose with alacrity. He was not sorry to miss an afternoon's lessons, to have a stroll down the lane to Rycombe.

"Thank you, sir!"

"Go at once, Blake!"

"Yes, sir; thank you."

And Blake departed, followed by some envious glances. Page had sat quite still and quiet. He had fully expected Blake to inform the Form-master of what had happened; and he wondered that Blake had not done so. In Blake's place, he would have made the matter as bad as he could for his adversary.

Surprised as he was, Page was very much relieved as well. He knew little of Public school life; but he could guess that the punishment for inflicting such an injury would be very severe.

And he was very much relieved, if not grateful.

Mr. Lathom glanced at Page once or twice, noticing the damage done to his face by Herries' heavy fists; but he made no remark upon it. And Page, who had his complaint all ready, was not afforded the opportunity of playing the sneak.

CHAPTER 11.

Fishy!

REILLY of the Fourth tapped D'Arcy on the shoulder in the Form-room passage after lessons. Arthur Augustus gave him an inquiring look.

"I want you!" said Reilly mysteriously.

"Yaas, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"What do you want?"

"I've got fresh herrings for tea," said Reilly. "They've been sent up specially. Will you come to tea, and bring the other chaps? Fatty Wynn is coming over to cook the herrings."

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy!"

"It will be ripping!" said Reilly.

"First chop. Nothing like good herrings, well cooked; and you know how Fatty Wynn cooks herrings."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And at tea-time the chums of Study No. 6 presented themselves next door, in Reilly's study, and found preparations for tea well advanced.

Fatty Wynn of the New House was there, in his shirt-sleeves, with a beautiful ruddy complexion, cooking herrings galore.

The smell in the study was very appetising, and decidedly thick. Reilly and Kerruish were dishing up the herrings, making the tea, and rendering themselves generally useful.

The four juniors walked in cheerfully. "Faith, and here you are!" exclaimed Reilly hospitably. "What do ye think of the herrings, darlings?"

The chums of Study No. 6 cast an appreciative glance at the big pile of herrings in the dish on the table. Fatty Wynn was cooking still more, and the supply seemed unending.

"Jolly good!" exclaimed Blake. "Have you discovered a gold-mine, and invested the proceeds in herrings?"

Reilly chuckled.

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"Sure, and it was a tip from my uncle in Belfast," he said. "Sit down and make yourselves at home, kids."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Sure, I'm sorry that I haven't got silver forks for ye—"

"Pway don't mention it, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with perfect seriousness. "I'm sure it's all right!"

And the juniors sat down to tea. They had just started when the study door opened, and Page came in.

Page sniffed at the smell of herrings smote him, and stood scowling at the cheerful tea-party.

"Top of the afternoon to ye," said Reilly sweetly. "Are ye

hungry? Find a chair."

Page sniffed again.

"Prime, isn't it?" said Kerruish, pretending to misunderstand. "Are you fond of herrings, Page?"

"I want to do my preparation," said Page.

"After tea will do."

"I don't want to wait!"

"Sure we haven't asked you to be a waiter, have we?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here! I don't like all this mucking in my study!" said Page savagely. "I don't see why you can't have tea in Hall!"

Reilly's eyes began to gleam.

"You can do your prep after tea," he said. "And you can either have tea, or get out of the study. Take your choice!"

"I want that table cleared!"

"Go hon!"

"And if you don't move that muck I'll soon pitch it into the grate!" said Page.

"Eh?"

"Do you hear me?"

The juniors gazed at Page in astonishment. It seemed incredible to them that the weedy, supercilious fellow should really imagine that he could treat St. Jim's fellows in this high-handed way.

"Oh, he's off his rocker!" said Kerruish.

"Pile in!"

"Faith, and he's dotty intirely!" said Reilly.

"Look here, Page, if you can't behave yourself, we won't have you in the study at all. You hear me?"

"I want that table"

"Oh, get out!"

Page strode towards the table, and caught hold of the edge of it, and raised it about an inch from the floor.

The crockery began to slide. Reilly jumped up in a fury.

"Leggo!" he roared.

"Shan't!"

"Will you get out?"

"No!"

"Leave go that table!" shrieked Reilly.

"Will you clear it, then, and turn out those fellows who don't belong to the study?" demanded Page.

"Bedad, and I won't!"

"Then here goes!"

Page jerked up the table, and the crockery, the dishes, the herrings, and all shot on the floor together.

There was a wild yell from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as greasy herrings alighted upon the knees of his beautiful trousers.

"Yawwooooh! My twousahs! Oh!"

"Yah!"

"Great Scott!"

"Stop the cad!"

"Collar him!"

The juniors simply hurled themselves upon him.

Page went with a bump to the floor, with two or three juniors sprawling over him. He roared and struggled.

Reilly sat astride of his chest, pinning him down. Everybody had hold



Page stooped suddenly, caught up a stone and flung it at all who saw the action, but it was too late. The stone

of him somewhere. Blake & Co. had completely forgotten their benevolent intentions towards him. They were as infuriated as the owners of Study No. 5.

"Bump him!"

"Squash him!"

"Hold on!" gasped Reilly. "He spoiled the feed. The herrings are all on the floor. He shall have them now, whether he likes them or not. Hand them over!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Reilly, regardless of the grease, took handfuls of herrings in both hands and jammed them over Page's face.

The other fellows lent their aid.

Page wriggled, and gasped, and yelled, and struggled. But it was in vain.

Herrings were squashed upon his features, and jammed down his neck between his shirt and his chin. He was fishy from head to foot in a few minutes, and smothered with grease. He was so fishy that they did not care to touch him.

The juniors released him, and left him rolling in herrings and grease. Page sat up.

"Oh, you villains!" he groaned.

"Ow! Grooo! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How do you like fish?"

"Have some more herrings?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

up, darlings!" he said ruefully. "Sure, it wasn't our fault!"

"Wathah not, deah boy!"

"Some of the herrings are all right still," said Fatty Wynn. "I think I'll go on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Faith, it's rotten!" said Reilly. "I won't have that cad in this study! If the spalpeen shows his nose here again, I'll knock it off. You fellows can have him in Study No. 6, as you seem to be fond of him."

"No fear!" said Blake promptly. "We've done our best, and I'm done with him for one!"

"And I for another," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I am afraid that it is quite impossible to stand by that uttah wottah any more!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "Look at my twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't wegard it as a laughin' m a t t a h. My twousahs a r e. uttally wuined. If you will excuse me, I will go and change them!"

And Arthur Augustus left the study, carrying a scent of herrings with him.

Meanwhile, the new junior had marched directly to the Head's study, which he entered without the formality of knocking at the door first.

Dr. Holmes glanced at him in surprise, and sniffed at the scent of the herrings.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "How came you in that state, Page? How dare you enter my study in that disgusting condition?"

"I've been mucked up like this by a gang of rotten hooligans!" howled Page. "I want them all punished!"

"Go and clean yourself at once!" rasped out the Head.

"I tell you—"
"That is not the way to address me, boy. Take a hundred lines for coming into my study in that state! If you have any complaint to make, come when you are cleaner! Go!"

And Page went. He retired to a bathroom; but it was a very long time before he was clean, and for the rest of the evening a lingering scent of herrings hung about him, and would not depart.

CHAPTER 12.

Tom Merry Interferes!

DURING the next two or three days Eric Page was left very much to himself.

Study No. 6, as Blake declared, had done with him.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy passed him without speaking when they came across him. They had done their best to please Cousin Ethel; but, as D'Arcy said, it was impossible to have anything to do with such an outsider.

The other fellows in the Fourth Form followed their example.

Reilly and Kerruish declined to have him in their study, and Page had to do his preparation in the Form-room by himself.

But probably he preferred that, as he was too sullen and moody to want to share a study with anybody else in the Form.

He had got into a sulky, sullen manner that never left him.

He had learned not to "cheek" the prefects, and he went to bed at bedtime with the rest; but he made himself as unpleasant as he could venture to do.

The Terrible Three had little to say to him. Tom Merry was still hoping to be able to do something for him, but Page was very difficult to help.

Figgins & Co. were as "fed up" as Blake was; but while Kerr and Wynn were quite out of patience, Figgins did not give in.

Figgins persisted in being extremely courteous to the new fellow, in spite of the rudest replies and most irritating ways.

Figgins persisted that, as he put it, there must be some good in the beast somewhere, and he was determined to bring it to light.

"You see, he must have a spark of decency, or Cousin Ethel wouldn't have spoken up for him," Figgins said argumentatively.

That was a conclusive process of reasoning to Figgins' mind.

But Kerr and Wynn were not so easily satisfied. Fatty Wynn could not possibly forgive a fellow who had mucked up a feed.

"A fellow who would waste good herrings would do anything," Fatty Wynn declared in the study in the New House. "He's simply an utter outsider."

"Utter!" said Kerr.

Figgins nodded.

"You're right," he said. "Only—"

"Only rats!"

"Only there must be good in the beast somewhere," said Figgins.

"How do you know?"

"Cousin Ethel thinks so."

Kerr sniffed. Fatty Wynn snorted.

"Look here," said Figgins, "suppose we had him here?"

His chums stared at him.

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Kerr.

"He doesn't get on in the School House. He might do better over here," said Figgins feebly.

Fatty Wynn gave a yell.

"What! Here—in the New House?"

"Yes."

"What awful rot!"

"We might take him right under our wing, you know," argued Figgins. "We could cure him with kindness. He might turn out quite decent."

"We're jolly well not having him in this study," said Kerr.

"Well, to please Cousin Ethel, you know," urged Figgins.

"Oh, blow—ahem! Cousin Ethel doesn't understand what a rotter he is, or she'd never have spoken for him."

"No fear!" said Fatty Wynn. "If he came into this study by the door, he'd leave it by the window—jolly soon!"

"But I say—"

"Rot!"

"I put it to you—"

"Bosh!"

And Figgins gave it up.

Tom Merry was the only fellow in the School House who tried to stand by Page. Lowther and Manners soon declared themselves fed-up. But Tom Merry emulated Figgins' noble



... at Blake's head. There was a yell of warning from Blake's head, and with a sharp cry he fell to the ground.

Page scrambled up. "I'll go straight to the Head like this!" he yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Head will know what you've had for tea if you do!"

"Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll go out of this study, anyway!" said Reilly, throwing open the door. "Get out before I kick ye out, ye—"

Page staggered through the doorway. Two or three feet lunged out to help him, and he rolled into the passage, leaving greasy marks upon the linoleum wherever he touched it.

Reilly slammed the door upon him. "Sure, and I'm sorry the tea's mucked

example, and tried to give the new junior another chance.

On Monday afternoon he met him coming out of the Sixth Form passage, clasping his hands painfully together, and with thunder in his brow.

It was evident that he was coming away from a prefect's study, licked.

Tom Merry stopped to speak to him.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

Page glared at him.

"It's Kildare!" he muttered thickly. "I'll pay him out!"

"What has he done?" asked Tom Merry, trying to look sympathetic, though he felt pretty certain that whatever the captain of St. Jim's had done, Page fully deserved it.

"He has caned me."

"What for?"

"Because I hadn't done my lines."

"Is that all? They are generally doubled if they're not done," said Tom Merry.

"I told him I wouldn't do them."

Tom Merry whistled.

"Oh, I see! You couldn't expect a prefect to take that, you know."

Page snarled.

"He'll take something else pretty soon," he said savagely.

"I—I—say, what are you thinking of?" asked Tom Merry, alarmed by the expression upon Page's face. "You can't go for Kildare, you know."

"Can't I? You'll see."

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Find out!"

And Page strode away.

Tom Merry remained looking very perplexed and troubled. It looked to him as if Page had some desperate thought in his mind, and after the incident of the stone thrown at Blake there was no telling what the new junior might or might not do.

Tom Merry followed the new junior into the quadrangle and saw him stooping under the elms.

He guessed what that meant, and he ran towards him. Page straightened up.

"What have you got in your hand?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Mind your own business."

"Is it a stone?"

"I shan't answer you."

"Look here, Page," said Tom Merry earnestly, "you can't do it, you know. If you were to chuck a stone at Kildare you'd be flogged, and perhaps expelled."

"All the better! I'd be glad to go!"

"What about your people?" said Tom Merry.

"Hang my people!"

"Oh!"

"They sent me here!" snarled Page. "I didn't want to come. I'd be glad to be sent away. My pater couldn't send me again, anyway!"

"You might be sent to a worse place."

"I don't believe there is any worse place. I hate this school. Let me alone. What does it matter to you what I do?" asked Page passionately.

"You're not going to throw that stone," said Tom Merry.

"I shall please myself."

"I tell you—"

Page swung away suddenly from Tom Merry. Kildare and Darrell had just come out of the School House, and were sauntering across the quadrangle.

Page's hand tightened upon the stone. Tom Merry sprang towards him, and grasped his wrist.

"You mad fool!" he exclaimed. "Drop it!"

"Let me go!"

"Drop it!"

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"I won't!" shrieked Page, struggling. Tom Merry's lips set.

"Then I'll make you!" he said grimly.

He squeezed the new junior's wrist. Page uttered a cry of pain, and a heavy, jagged stone dropped from his fingers into the grass.

Tom Merry kicked it away.

Then he released the young rascal.

"You'll be glad I stopped you when you're calmer," he said.

Page faced him, trembling with rage. "You cad!" he hissed. "You dare to interfere with me—to lay hands on me!" He struck out as he was speaking, and Tom Merry reeled back from the blow.

There was a shout from half a dozen fellows who saw the blow struck. They came running up to the spot from several directions.

Tom Merry took a quick stride towards Page, his fists clenched and his eyes flashing, but he did not strike.

"Smash him, Tommy!" shouted Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry remained still.

Page gave him a savage look and turned upon his heel, with a sneering smile, and strode away.

Tom Merry let him go.

"What are you doing?" yelled Manners. "Are you letting that chap punch you without hammering him?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Funk!" said Crooke of the Shell, with his unpleasant snigger.

Tom Merry turned upon Crooke. The cad of the Shell had spoken at an unfortunate moment for himself. Tom Merry was boiling inwardly, and he wanted to punch somebody. He strode up to Crooke with his fists clenched.

"I've promised not to lick that cad," he said, "but I haven't promised not to lick you, Crooke. Put up your hands!"

"I—I—"

"Put them up, I tell you!"

Crooke had to obey, and the next moment he was rolling in the grass. He stayed there.

Tom Merry thrust his hands deep into his pockets and stalked away.

"You're a silly ass, Tommy!" growled Lowther.

"I know I am. Shut up!" said Tom Merry.

And the subject dropped.

CHAPTER 13.

Putting it Plain!

ERIC PAGE looked a little more cheerful—or, rather, a little less sullen—that afternoon. His triumph over Tom Merry, as he regarded it, had had a solacing effect upon him.

He did not realise just then that he had alienated the last fellow in the School House who was willing to be on friendly terms with him.

Tom Merry followed the way of all the others now. After what had happened in the quad, he refrained from licking Page as he deserved, but he could not have any more to do with him.

Page had tea in Hall, as usual. About half the fellows were there, and not one of them spoke to Page. But he did not notice that particularly, for he seldom spoke to them, and he had been growing more taciturn than ever during the past few days.

After tea he went up to Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage. He was tired of doing his preparation in the Form-room in the evening. The evenings were dark and cold, and a big, lonely Form-room was not a pleasant place to work in in solitary state.

Page had thought the matter out, and decided to forgive Reilly and Kerruish, and condescend to share their study with them. He was about to make the painful discovery that it takes two sides to agree to a bargain.

Reilly and Kerruish were busy with their preparation when the new junior came into the study with his books under his arm.

They looked at him in a peculiar, fixed sort of way without speaking.

"I want some room on that table," said Page.

No reply.

"I'm going to do my prep here."

No reply.

"Will you make room?"

Reilly and Kerruish exchanged significant glances, but did not speak.

Page grew impatient. He began to push Reilly's books to one side, and laid his own upon the table. Then the boy from Belfast jumped up.

He did not speak, but he grasped the new boy by the shoulder, swung him round, propelled him towards the door, and pushed him into the passage.

Page staggered across to the opposite wall, and Reilly returned to the study table.

The astonished Page looked in the next instant, his face crimson with rage.

"What do you mean?" he roared.

No answer.

"This is my study as well as yours!" Silence.

"Why don't you speak?" shrieked Page. "Are you mad? What game are you playing now?"

Reilly looked very thoughtfully at the new junior. Finally he rose, took a chalk from his pocket, and chalked on the door:

"Go away!"

Page stared at the inscription.

It amazed him. He cast a glance almost of dread at the Irish junior, fearing seriously for the moment that Reilly had taken leave of his senses. Why a fellow who was endowed with the gift of speech should chalk upon a door instead of speaking was a mystery.

"Wh-what does this mean?" stuttered Page. "Are you dotty?"

Reilly pointed in silence to the inscription on the door.

"Why don't you speak?"

Reilly shook his head.

"Has anything happened to your tongue, idiot? Why don't you speak?" shouted Page, turning to Kerruish.

The Manx junior grinned and shook his head.

Jack Blake looked into the study in passing, and Page turned to him for explanation.

"What's the matter with these two fellows?" he asked. "They don't seem to be able to speak, or they've gone dotty."

To his surprise, Blake stared him straight in the face, and then turned away as if he had not heard him and went into his own study. The leader of Study No. 6 also seemed to have lost the power of speech.

Reilly and Kerruish grinned, but still in silence. Page turned upon them furiously.

"I suppose this is some rotten game!" Silence.

"Will you tell me what it all means?" Silence.

Page clenched his hands, but he unclenched them again. It was evidently useless to think of assailing two sturdy juniors, either of whom could have knocked him into the middle of next week without the slightest difficulty.

(Continued on page 18.)



**Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.**

HALLO, chums! I have an item of news this week which will, I am sure, be very welcome to all readers. I have asked Owen Conquest, whose stories of the chums of Rookwood have always been so popular, to get busy on a special new series of stories of Jimmy Silver & Co. Many readers have written to say that they would like to see these cheery schoolboys return to the pages of the GEM, and so, in a few weeks' time, you will once more be reading about their exciting and humorous adventures. Believe me, this wonderful new series will be the best that has ever been written about the chums of Rookwood, and the theme of the series will be different from anything you have ever read before. I will let you know more about it later.

Meanwhile, for next Wednesday, there is a bright and breezy long yarn of the chums of St. Jim's. It is called:

"D'ARCY THE 'TEC!"

The one and only Gussy is funny at any time, but when he tries to become a second Sexton Blake he's a perfect scream. Hard times descend on the chums of St. Jim's, and even Arthur Augustus cannot "spring" one of his famous fivers. So Gussy decides that it's up to him to "raise the wind" by doing a spot of work. He thinks he's best suited for tracking down bad men, but someone humorously suggests that he would earn more money by hiring himself out as a scarecrow! Nevertheless, Gussy is not to be put off by the frivolous remarks of his chums, and he gets to work in earnest. And that's when the fun starts! Look out for this ripping story. It will give you hours of amusing entertainment.

"THE BLACK HAND AT ST. FRANK'S!"

After laughs come the thrills, and you will find that next week's chapters of this great serial are one long thrill. With Nelson Lee facing Zangari's firing squad, on the point of being shot as a spy, it will require a desperate effort on the part of the four St. Frank's juniors to save him. Will the fire Nipper & Co. have started at Gallows Mere delay the fatal moment, and so give the boys time to attempt to rescue the schoolmaster - detective? You simply must not miss the next smashing instalment.

This tip-top programme is completed with another column of the Jester's prize jokes, and Monty Lowther is in fine form again with the best wit and humour of the week. Don't miss this grand number, chums!

NEARLY FOURTEEN MILES UP!

The altitude record for a balloon ascent, J. Jones, of Brixton, stands at 72,126 feet, which is roughly only 600 yards under fourteen miles. The ascent was made in 1934 by three Russian scientists, who were killed in the attempt. Their stainless steel gondola, which was eight feet in circumference, broke away from the balloon at a great height, and crashed to the earth, burying itself in the frozen ground. The three bodies of the airmen were found inside, and among the many smashed instruments was one which was intact. From this instrument was discovered the altitude the ill-fated balloon had reached.

In exploring the stratosphere, the region which extends above 40,000 feet, balloonists face many unknown dangers. Professor Piccard will long remember the last flight he made. It was a chapter of accidents, and the Belgian professor and his assistant were lucky to escape with their lives.

PERIL IN THE STRATOSPHERE!

Early one morning Piccard and his companion entered the circular aluminium gondola and busied themselves with the instruments preparatory to making the ascent. After a time they felt a swaying movement. He and his assistant looked out of a small observation window, to see that they were soaring away up into the air! The balloon had been released before they were ready, and the cover of the gondola was still open, allowing life-giving air to escape! Quickly the two airmen shut the cover, but in the struggle to do so, a small window was cracked. Air began to escape again!

By this time the balloon had ascended over nine miles, at which altitude the balloonists, of course, relied upon the oxygen apparatus for their supply of air. But with the supply being fast used up by escaping through the cracked window, the peril of Piccard and his assistant can well be imagined. Death from suffocation faced them unless something could be done with the cracked window. The professor then had a brain-wave, and, taking out a jar of vaseline, smeared some over the crack, thus making the gondola airtight again.

But their troubles were not yet over. The temperature became so cold that the air in the gondola began to freeze into snow. Then as they rose higher

the snow started to melt again, and the heat in the gondola became unbearable. They had risen into the full glare of the sun, and the temperature was at 104 degrees! The balloon was now over ten miles up, and the professor decided to descend. But when he and his assistant pulled on the valve rope to release the gas from the balloon, the rope broke in their hands! They couldn't descend! But for once fortune favoured them. Although they did not know it, gas was escaping from a small tear in the balloon. So they slowly sank lower, and after seventeen hours' struggle in the stratosphere, they eventually landed safely.

SOCCER'S MAN OF MUSCLE!

Let me introduce you to Morgan Mackay, the centre-forward of Bamsley's second team. He's not only a goal-getting forward, but also a man of muscle. His strength is amazing, for he has been known to break a heavy chain stretched across his chest by expanding his lungs! Another of his feats is to drive nails into a piece of wood with his hand! Opposing goal-keepers will have to look out when Mackay's anywhere near goal with the ball, for with all his strength he must have a kick like a mule.

QUEER DIETS!

If you want to live to the ripe old age of a hundred eat live frogs! Ugh! It's not a very appetising diet, but it's a diet to which a man who has reached ninety attributes his longevity. Ever since he was a boy he's been eating live frogs, and he gives this as his reason for never having had a serious illness.

In some parts of France the hind legs of certain frogs are eaten, but they are, however, cooked first. Snails also are relished by Frenchmen. But to eat frogs, all alive and kicking! I think I'd rather forgo a few years of life!

Another strange diet is that of a cow in Cape Province, South Africa. The animal is very fond of eggs, and spends most of its time searching for them. When it comes upon one, the cow eats it greedily, shell and all. And woe betide the chicken that dares to stop the cow from eating its eggs! Recently a hen did offer resistance, so the cow ate the chicken and then got on with its eggs.

PEN PALS.

Miss Blanche d'Alpuget, 90, Locket Road, Wealdstone, Harrow, **Middlesex**; girl correspondents; age 14-20; overseas; films.

Wilfrid Holland, 24, Harley Street, Beverley Road, Hull, **Yorkshire**; overseas. Bill Wilkinson, 130, Mortimer Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, **Canada**; age 15-17; Europe, Asia, South America.

Miss Joyce Ponting, 4a, Burghill Road, Sydenham, London, **S.E.26**; girl correspondents; age 16-17; London, France; films, sports.

William Draper, 17, Brent House, Devonshire Road, Hackney, London, **E. 9**; British Empire, U.S.A.

H. Gemmill Morgan, Kingarth, 82, Blackness Avenue, Dundee; overseas; stamps.

TAILPIECE!

Teacher (to dance of class): "How many ears has a cat?"

Dunce: "Two, sir."

Teacher: "How many eyes?"

Dunce: "Two, sir."

Teacher: "And how many legs?"

Dunce: "Say, teacher, haven't you ever seen a cat?"

PEN PALS COUPON

2-11-35

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"You utter idiots! Tell me what this means!" he hissed.

Reilly had recourse to the chalk again. He chalked across the door:

"You are in Coventry."

"Oh!" gasped Page.

He did not know much about schools, but he knew what being sent to Coventry meant.

Reilly pointed to the door. Page remained where he was, his hands clenched and his eyes blazing.

"I don't care!" he said. "This is my study, and I'm staying here!"

Reilly chalked again:

"Buzz off! You are sentenced by the House!"

"Blow the House!" said Page savagely.

Reilly and Kerruish pointed to the door solemnly.

"I won't go!" shrieked Page. "And if I'm shoved out of this study, I'll go straight to the Head and complain that I'm not allowed to work in my own study."

Reilly almost broke silence at that, but he restrained himself and chalked:

"Sneak!"

"Sneak or not, I'm going to have my own study to work in."

Reilly looked at Kerruish, and Kerruish looked at Reilly. If Page laid the matter before the Head, there was no doubt that they would be ordered to admit the new boy to the study and allow him to work there. They could not get rid of him if he chose to invoke the authority of the headmaster. But there was another resource.

Reilly chalked once more:

"You can stay here by yourself, then."

Page laughed angrily.

"I'd like that better," he said.

Reilly nodded.

The two juniors to whom Study No. 5 belonged gathered up their books and papers and solemnly quitted the study.

Kerruish went into Bishop's study, and Reilly into Study No. 6. Page was left in sole possession of Study No. 5.

He was satisfied with his victory. He had the whole study to himself, with a comfortable armchair, chairs, and a table, and a cheerful fire in the grate. He sat down in the armchair and toasted his feet at the fire. But he was not left long in peace.

Kerruish and Reilly, having deposited their books, came back for their other properties. At St. Jim's the fellows furnished their own studies at their own expense, only the chair, table, and a square of carpet being found by the school.

Page stared at the two juniors as they entered. He did not know anything about the ownership of the furniture, and he was far from guessing what they had returned for.

"So you've come back!" he sneered.

Reilly caught hold of the back of the armchair and signed to him to rise.

Page sat still.

Reilly waved his hand.

Page did not move.

"You're not going to take this chair, if that's what you mean!" said Page defiantly.

Out came the chalk again.

"This chair is my property," Reilly chalked on the looking-glass.

Reilly did not waste any more chalk on the subject. He tilted up the back of the chair, and Page shot out upon the hearthrug.

Reilly and Kerruish carried the armchair between them out of the study, and it shrieked along the passage linoleum on two castors and a half.

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Page picked himself up in a fury, breathing vengeance.

In three minutes the juniors came in again. They solemnly carried off the fender and the coal-box under the glowing eyes of the new boy.

Page made a furious movement towards them, and at that instant Reilly happened—or did not happen—to swing the fender round, and it caught Page behind the knees, and he doubled up and sat down.

They left him sitting there, and found him still sitting on the carpet, rubbing his leg, when they came in again. This time they brought Bishop and Herries with them to assist in the moving.

Each of the juniors picked up some article to carry off. One of them took the clock, and another the fireirons, another the bookcase, and another the remains of the fire in a dustpan.

The study was beginning to present a decidedly bleak and barren appearance by this time.

Page's victory was rather an empty one.

"Look here!" he roared, as the four juniors came in again with solemn faces.

"What are you taking those things away for?"

Silence.

"They don't belong to you!"

Silence.

"Where can I get some more coal, then?"

Silence.

"It's cold here without a fire. Where do they keep the coal? Is there a porter to bring it up here?"

Still frozen silence.

Page had a great mind to charge at the juniors and hit out, but the thought was hopeless. He could not have tackled one of them successfully, let alone four. He had to watch them with glowering eyes, unresisting, while they spoiled the study of everything it contained, excepting the study table, one rickety chair, and a square of extremely worn carpet. Then, with the remains of the fire dead in an untidy grate, and the stars peeping in at a curtainless window, Page was left to enjoy his victory. He did not enjoy it.

CHAPTER 14.

By Sentence of the House!

MOST of the School House juniors were in the Common-room, just before bed-time, when Eric Page came in.

Some of them looked at him, some of them studiously looked another way. Some smiled, and some frowned. But no one spoke.

Page came sullenly into the room, and walked towards the fireplace. Two or three fellows, who were leaning on the big, old-fashioned mantelpiece, elaborately detached themselves from it and moved away.

Page bit his lips. He had, until this day, assumed in his manner that he had St. Jim's at his feet; that he could speak as rudely and unpleasantly as he liked, and never want for an answer; that there were plenty of fellows to be friendly if he chose to extend friendship to them. He was finding out his mistake now.

Cousin Ethel's request had caused Tom Merry & Co. to be very patient with him; but they had reached, and passed, the limit of their patience now. And the other fellows disliked him so much that most of them were inclined to take more active measures than sending him to Coventry.

Page glanced at Tom Merry, and tried to catch his eye. The captain of the Shell turned away his head.

The new junior strode towards him angrily.

"Look here, Merry!" he asked. "What does this mean?"

Tom Merry's lips moved, when Lowther jerked him by the arm.

"Shut up!" he murmured.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Will you answer me?" shouted Page.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"What is this silly game?"

Reilly of the Fourth chuckled, and drew a stump of chalk from his waistcoat-pocket. He chalked on the wall:

"Buzz off! You are in Coventry! You are sentenced by the House!"

There was a yell of laughter from the juniors.

Page gritted his teeth. Hostile faces were on all sides of him; not from a single direction did he receive a friendly look.

"That means that you won't speak to me?" he demanded.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Well, I don't want you to. You've been trying to be friendly, and I won't be," said Page. "I suppose this is because I wouldn't have anything to do with you?"

There was a laugh. Reilly chalked again:

"Rats!"

Page turned towards him, clenching his fists. But he restrained himself, and strode out of the Common-room, stamping as he went with ill-temper.

A yell of laughter followed him into the passage.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"It's the only way," he said. "I'm sorry for him. The poor beast has been rottenly brought up, and spoiled, till he doesn't know what to do with himself. But he can't expect us to stand his airs and graces."

"Wathah not!"

"I think we've done our best for Cousin Ethel's sake," said Tom Merry.

"Everything we could," said Blake. "That chap's the limit. We simply can't stand him, and it's no good trying to."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors did not see Page again till bed-time. When the School House portion of the Fourth Form went up to bed, they found the new junior already in the dormitory. He seemed to have been spending his time pacing about the dormitory to keep himself warm. He bestowed a glare upon the juniors as they trooped in, and sat down on his bed to take his boots off.

After the trouble with Kildare on his first night at St. Jim's, Page had made no difficulties about going to bed at bed-time.

The juniors chatted after lights out, and called out good-night to one another.

Nobody spoke to Page, and nobody said good-night to him.

The new boy lay in troubled wakefulness long after the other fellows had fallen asleep.

It began to dawn upon his obstinate mind that he had made a fool of himself.

So long as fellows were trying to keep on good terms with him, he had held his nose high in the air, and compelled them to eat humble pie, or to leave him alone.

It had never occurred to him that the time must speedily come when their patience would be exhausted, and they would decide to leave him severely alone.

The time had come, and the prospect before him was dreary.

But Page's passionate and obstinate spirit was far from conquered yet.

He did not mean to admit himself in the wrong, or to ask pardon for wrongdoing. Besides, it was easier to achieve unpopularity than to undo it afterwards. He had made a bad beginning, and it was doubtful whether he would be able to set himself right with the fellows again.

He fell asleep at last, and slept uneasily till rising-bell. When the Fourth Form turned out in the morning the sentence of the House was rigidly enforced. No one spoke to Page; few even glanced at him. He might not have existed at all, for all the difference his existence made to the School House fellows.

Page went down to breakfast with a sullen brow.

At the breakfast-table it was the same, and as there appeared to be plenty of room at the table, the seats on either side of Page were left empty.

At morning lessons, when the New House joined the School House in the Form-room, Page was left sitting alone at the end of the form, fellows crowding up to give him plenty of room.

The New House juniors were evidently backing up the School House fellows in the matter. Page had made himself more obnoxious in his own House, of course; but the New House juniors had seen enough of him to dislike him, and the whole school knew of the stone-throwing incident.

Blake's big bump was still very much in evidence. During the last few days it had turned almost all the colours of the rainbow; and now it was diminishing in size, and seemed to have settled upon a pale purple for its final hue.

The only fellow who gave Page a compassionate look was Figgins.

Figgins was thinking of Cousin Ethel, and how disappointed she would be if she learned that Page had fallen into such bad odour at St. Jim's after her efforts on his behalf.

Figgins had a very tender heart, and Cousin Ethel usually occupied a great deal of his thoughts.

The other fellows felt that they had done all, and more than could be reasonably expected for the new boy, and now they had washed their hands of him.

Not so Figgins.

But Figgins kept his thoughts to himself for the present. His hint to Kerr and Wynn that they should take up the new fellow had been received so very unfavourably that Figgins hesitated to broach the subject again.

During the remainder of that day Page was made to feel fully the results of his own folly.

He was too proud and obstinate to make any overtures of peace, and the sentence of the House was growing into a settled thing now, and the fellows were falling into the habit of deliberately ignoring him.

In the Form-room, at the dinner-table, in the Common-room in the evening, it was the same grim silence.

Once or twice Page spoke to Tom Merry or Blake or D'Arcy; but they did not answer him, and he was left biting his lips with anger.

The following day was Wednesday, a half-holiday at St. Jim's. In the afternoon the juniors of both Houses went down to footer practice, but Page was not asked to join in it. He had said that he hated football, and that was one item in the long account against him.

He strolled moodily into the quad wondering what he could do with himself, and feeling bitterly the loss of the companionship he had so rudely rejected when it was offered.

He went into the school tuckshop out of sheer boredom, and while he was there Figgins came in.

Figgins had made up his mind.

He gave Page a nod.

"Have a ginger-pop?" he asked.

Page stared.

"Eh—what?" he asked, in surprise.

"Have a ginger-pop?" said Figgins hospitably.

Page stared at him.

"So you've stopped that fool Coventry business?" he said.

"I have," said Figgins.

"And you want to make it up to me, do you?"

Figgins coloured. He realised that the new boy would be extremely difficult to get on with. But he stuck to his guns.

"Not exactly that," he said mildly. "But—but I—I thought you might be feeling a bit lonely, you know."

"I'm not lonely."

"Oh!"

"They can send me to Coventry if they like. I don't care twopence! There's nobody in this rotten school that I'd care to speak two rotten words to!"

"Oh!" repeated Figgins.

(Continued on the next page.)



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"I hate the place!" said Page. "I hate everybody in it! I've written to my pater to take me away, but he won't. It's sickening!"

"Why not try to make the best of it?" urged Figgins gently. "If you play the game, you know, the fellows will come round in time. If you don't get on in the School House, you might ask the Head to transfer you to the New House. You could say you had a friend there."

"What friend?"

"I'm willing to be your friend," said Figgins.

"What are you driving at?" demanded Page. "Are you hard up?"

Figgins turned crimson.

"No," he said. "Do you think I want your rotten money?"

"What else do you want, then? Why are you laying this scheme to get me into the New House?" demanded Page suspiciously.

Figgins looked at him fixedly.

"I think you had better stay in Coventry!" he said. "I'm not surprised that your own House can't stand you! What I'm surprised at is that they haven't suffocated you!"

And Figgins walked away, boiling with indignation.

CHAPTER 15.

Figgins' New Friend!

"**H**OW long are you going to be reading that letter, Figgy?" Figgins started and looked up, and coloured.

It was several days since his interview with Page in the tuckshop, and since then he had not spoken to the new boy; neither had anyone else, for that matter. Just now Kerr and Wynn were waiting for Figgins to come down to footer practice after last lesson, and they had already waited ten minutes.

As Figgins had just had a letter, and had read it six or seven times, and seemed inclined to go on reading and re-reading it for ever and ever, Kerr felt that it was time to speak.

"I should think you knew it by heart by this time, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn.

"It's from Cousin Ethel," Figgins explained.

Kerr grinned.

"I could guess that," he replied. "Is she coming to St. Jim's?"

"No."

"Any news?"

"No."

"Then six readings are enough," said Kerr. "Come down to footer."

"Ahem!"

"Oh, come on!" said Fatty Wynn. "We've got to do some practice before tea, you know, and I'm getting hungry already."

"Page has written to Ethel," said Figgins.

"Has he? The cad!"

"She's disappointed."

"Yes; I suppose so. I suppose he's given her a long list of complaints, and tried to make trouble between her and us?" said Kerr savagely.

Figgins nodded.

"She doesn't say so, but I fancy it's something like that," he said ruefully.

"She doesn't ask us to take the cad up again and coddle him, I suppose?" growled Kerr.

"Oh, no! She says she's sure that we did our best, and she's much obliged to us for having done it, and she's sorry it wasn't any good."

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Kerr's face cleared.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said. "That's just like Cousin Ethel. She wouldn't let that cad put her back up against us. She takes it very decently."

"Very decently," said Fatty Wynn.

"Yes; only it makes me feel that—that we might have done a little more," said Figgins hesitatingly. "As I said before, the fellow must have some good in him—"

"Better get a microscope and look for it, then!"

"And we ought to find it out, if we can, and—give him a chance."

"We've done that. You can write back to Cousin Ethel that he's an unspeakable toad, and nobody can stand him. Come down to the footer!"

Figgins thrust the letter into his pocket and sighed, and followed his chums down to the junior football ground. But he was very thoughtful during his practice, and he failed several times in easy shots, which showed how absent-minded he was.

After the practice, while Fatty Wynn and Kerr went into the tuckshop to get the supplies for tea, Figgins strolled away by himself.

He made his way into the School House, and looked into Study No. 5.

He found a junior sitting there moodily alone. Page did not look up as he entered.

"I—I say—" began Figgins.

Page raised his eyes then, and stared at him uncompromisingly.

"Feeling a bit down?" asked Figgins.

"No!" growled Page.

Figgins coughed.

"Look here, you are getting on pretty badly in this House," he said. "Why don't you ask the Head to change you over?"

Page was silent.

"You could come into my study," said Figgins.

"What for? What do you want me for?"

"I don't want you," said Figgins frankly; "but—but I don't like to see you like this. You'll never get out of Coventry if you don't make a change, and you must have found it pretty rotten by this time."

Page's lip quivered.

"I've been miserable ever since I came here!" he said. "Nobody likes me here! I don't know that I've done anything so very much amiss."

Figgins suppressed a smile. If Page did not realise that he had done anything very much amiss, Figgins felt that he must be very obtuse indeed.

"Well, come into the New House and make a fresh start," he said. "Everybody in this House knows that you're in trouble, and the Head will be willing to change you over. Ask him."

"But—but why do you want to do this for me?"

"To help you on a bit."

"Why do you want to help me?"

"Because—because—well, I think perhaps you're not wholly a rotter—ahem—I mean, I can't help thinking there's some good in you, and I want you to have a chance."

Page's eyes gleamed for a moment. He was upon the point of bursting out in his old fashion; but adversity had tamed him by this time. The sentence of Coventry in the School House was enforced so rigidly, that it was weighing terribly upon the new junior's spirits. He had learned his lesson to some extent, and he would have done a great deal to escape from the position in which he had placed himself.

More than once he had regretted

having rejected Figgins' kindly advice in the tuckshop. He had sense enough not to make the same mistake twice.

For once he held his unruly temper and awkward pride in check, and did not throw away the last chance that was offered him.

"I dare say I've been a bit uppish," he said. "Things were very different here from what they were at home. I've always had my own way, and I used to order my tutor about just as I pleased."

"Well, that wasn't any good for you," said Figgins. "It's not right for a boy to be able to order a man about, and the poor beast must have felt pretty rotten about it."

"I changed my tutor pretty often," said Page.

"I have no doubt you did."

"Look here, if you fellows will treat me decently, I'll come into the New House," said Page; and his tone implied that he felt he was doing Figgins a great favour. The old Adam was not dead in Eric Page yet.

Figgins swallowed something down and nodded.

"Right-ho!" he said. "The Head's in his study now, and you can go and ask him. Tell him that I've asked you to come into my study, if you can change Houses."

"All right."

And Page, looking more cheerful, made his way to the Head's study.

Figgins remained in Page's room, drumming upon the table with his fingers. The door was open, and the chums of Study No. 6 passed it as they came up to tea.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "What are you doing here, Figgy, old man?"

Figgins flushed.

"I'm waiting for Page?" he said.

"Not speaking to him, are you?" demanded Jack Blake warmly.

"Well, yes."

"Look here—Hallo, here he is!" Page came into the study. He had not been long with the Head.

"It's all right," he announced.

"You're coming over?" asked Figgins.

"Yes."

"Good!"

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Herries.

"Page is changing into the New House," Figgins explained.

"Hurrah!"

"Bai Jove! You're welcome to the wottah, Figgy!"

"You'll soon get fed-up with him," said Digby.

"What do Kerr and Wynn say?" Blake asked.

"I—I haven't spoken to them yet," said Figgins. "It will be all right. Come on, Page! I'll help you carry your things."

"Bai Jove! I really think you must be off your wockah, Figgy!"

"Right off it," said Blake. "Anyway, you're welcome to Page. You'll be sick of him pretty soon, but you'll have to keep him on your side. If you try to send him back we'll get up a deputation to the Head and protest against it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 stalked away.

Page looked uneasily at Figgins.

"Look here," he said, "is this going to get you into a lot of trouble—sticking to me in this way?"

Figgins was surprised by the question. Page had never displayed any concern before as to whether anybody might get into trouble or not. It

occurred to Figgins that this was a little glimpse of the atom of good which he had persistently declared must exist in Eric Page somewhere.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Figgins, with a confidence he was far from feeling, as he thought of Kerr and Wynn. "We shall get on somehow. Buck up! We want to be in time for tea over there."

And he helped Page to carry off his personal possessions, and they crossed the quadrangle to the New House.

From the study window Blake & Co. watched them go. Blake whistled expressively.

"Figgys is looking for trouble," he said. "Kerr and Wynn will be as mad

And he marched Page into the New House and into his study.

CHAPTER 16.

Page Turns Over a New Leaf!

"HERE you are!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, as he marched into the study and deposited a goodly parcel on the table.

"Got the eggs all right, Kerr?" "Right as rain," said Kerr. Then the two juniors paused.

They had just caught sight of Page in the study.

They fixed upon him glances that were far from agreeable. Page had sat

"Decent thing, be blowed! We don't want that rank outsider here."

"And we won't have him!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"He's fixed in the House now," urged Figgins. "He'll have to be in some study. It wouldn't be fair to plant him on other fellows when I brought him over."

"Then you can have him all to yourself," said Kerr. "I won't share a study with that rotter. I'll ask Pratt to let me dig with him."

"Same here!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'll dig in with Dibbs."

"Look here," said Figgins, his temper beginning to rise, "who's chief of this Co.? Who's head of this study, eh?"



"If you won't clear the table," exclaimed Page, "then here goes!" He jerked up the table and the crockery and the herrings all swooped down over the juniors. "Yawooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "My twousahs!" "Stop the cad!" exclaimed Blake. "Collar him!"

as hatters if he takes that toad into his study."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They'll fire him out," said Herries. "But everybody on this side ought to back up, and see that he doesn't get back into the School House."

"Hear, hear!"

In the quadrangle Figgins and Page encountered the Terrible Three. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther simply stared at the sight of the ill-assorted two.

"Hallo! Found a new friend, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Page has changed into the New House," Figgins explained.

"Bravo!" said Manners.

"And you're taking him up?" demanded Lowther.

"Yes."

"You'll be sent to Coventry, yourself, then."

"Oh, bosh!"

"You're a silly ass, Figgy!" said Tom Merry warmly. "You can't say that we haven't given him every chance here. He's simply outside."

"Oh rats!" said Figgins.

down in the armchair and put his feet on the fender.

"What's that fellow doing here?" asked Kerr.

Figgins coughed uncomfortably. "He's changed into the New House," he explained.

"Oh! Ha, he?" said Kerr. "I suppose they haven't had the frightful cheek to stick him into this study, have they?"

"I—I asked for him to be put here."

Kerr and Wynn gave a simultaneous jump, as if they had touched an electric wire at the same moment.

"You—you asked?" gasped Kerr.

"You asked for him?" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"Yes."

"Doesn't that seem to you a bit like cheek, Figgy?" asked Kerr grimly. "This is our study as well as yours, you know."

Figgins turned red.

"I wish you wouldn't put it like that, Kerr. I thought my own chums would stand by me when I'm trying to do the decent thing," said Figgins.

"You can be head of the study, and have it all to yourself," said Kerr, with deadly earnestness. "You've no right to spring a thing like this on us, and you know it. As for the Co., the Co.'s busted! I'm off!"

And Kerr stalked out of the study.

"Look here, Wynn!" said Figgins pathetically.

"I'm off, too," said Fatty.

"You're not going to back up against an old chum, Fatty."

"You've backed up against me in taking up that rotter," said Fatty Wynn. "When you fire him out we'll come back. Not before."

"Then you won't come back at all!" shouted Figgins. "Go and eat coke!"

"Rats! Rot! You're a silly ass, Figgy, and you know you are!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "You've no right to do what you've done. It's rotten! Yah!"

"If you want a thick ear, Fatty Wynn—"

"Yah!" "Oh, get out of this study!" said Figgins. "Clear off, and be hanged!" "I'll clear off jolly soon, if you prefer

that beastly boulder to me," said Fatty Wynn, almost stuttering with wrath. "I hope you'll be satisfied with him. Perhaps he'll bash a stone at your napper some day, same as he did at Blake's, the cowardly cad. Yes, I'll clear off fast enough, Figgins."

And Fatty Wynn stamped out of the study in such a state of agitation that he actually forgot the supplies he had just laid upon the table.

Figgins remained very red and angry. "I—I say!" Page rose to his feet. "This is pretty rotten for you, Figgins. I didn't know I was going to make all this trouble."

"It's all right," said Figgins heavily. "I'll get out, if you like."

"You can't. You can't ask the Head to change you back to the School House the same day as you've asked him to change you over here," said Figgins. "He would think you were pulling his leg."

"I could get into some other study, though."

Figgins shook his head. "They wouldn't have you," he said. "But if your pals don't come back?" said Page.

"I dare say they'll come round in time. If they don't, they needn't," said Figgins bravely. "I believe I'm doing what's right, though I'm not surprised at their getting their backs up. You see, what you did to Blake has made the fellows wild; they can't get over it, and you can't expect them to."

"I—I know it was rotten," faltered Page. "I—I acted without thinking, then. Only—only, a chap can't say he's sorry."

"I don't see why he can't, if he is sorry," said Figgins curtly.

"Well, there's a chap's pride to be considered."

Figgins' lips curled. "I don't see any pride in being an obstinate ass," he said.

"Hold on! Look here, Figgins, if you're going to begin—"

"Oh, never mind," said Figgins. "You don't understand. I dare say you will in time. Let's have tea. Can you make toast?"

"I've never tried," said Page. "Couldn't you tip one of the servants to make the toast?"

"Well, I could if I were a purse-proud, uppish swanker," said Figgins. "But I'm not, so I make it myself."

"I don't see any sense in doing servants' work if you've got the money to make somebody else do it," said Page sullenly.

"Well, you've got a lot to learn yet, then."

Figgins cut the bread and stirred the fire. Page watched him with a moody brow as he impaled the bread upon a toasting-fork.

"Give it to me," said Page.

"Oh, I'll do it!"

"Rot! Give it to me," said Page, taking the toasting-fork from Figgins. "I—I didn't mean to be swanking, Figgins—I didn't, really. I suppose it's just my way."

Figgins nodded.

"The mater always lets me do as I like," said Page uneasily. "Pater has only just come back from India. Perhaps it would have been better for me if—he'd been at home. I wonder!"

"I don't," said Figgins. "But wasn't there an uncle, or an elderly cousin, or somebody, to give you a licking when you wanted one?"

Page coloured.

"I wouldn't have taken a licking

from anybody," he said. "My mother wouldn't have allowed it, either."

Figgins snorted.

"You've had some since you've been here," he remarked. "Nice chap you are, to order a tutor about, and to make servants do every little thing for you. What right have you to give orders, if you can't obey 'em?"

"Oh," said Page. "I—I never looked at it in that light before."

"Time you did, then," growled Figgins.

"I suppose it is," said Page quietly.

Figgins glanced at him curiously.

"Excuse me," he said. "I'm a bit rusty. Fatty Wynn and Kerr going off like that worries me. Don't mind what I say."

"Oh, you can pile it on," said Page. "I'm beginning to see that I've played the giddy goat; but I never meant to be such a silly ass. It was a big change coming here, after the way I used to live at home. It's taken some time to get used to it. The worst of it is, that my pater won't take me away; he actually wrote to me that all the hard knocks I get here will do me good, and that if the fellows have sent me to Coventry, he hasn't the slightest doubt that I deserved it."

Figgins grinned.

"Your pater seems to know a thing or two!" he remarked.

"Ye-es," said Page, very slowly. "I suppose he does."

And he was silent.

He made the toast very carefully, and tended the fire, and washed up the teacups. He seemed bent upon making himself useful.

They sat down to tea. Figgins missed Kerr and Wynn very much, and he could not quite get the cloud from his face, although he wanted to be genial to Page. They ate almost in silence, each of them busy with his thoughts. They had nearly finished tea when Redfern of the Fourth looked into the study. He bestowed a sniff upon Page, but no other sign of recognition.

"I hear from Kerr and Wynn that they're changing out of this study," he said. "Have you really taken up with that chap, Figgins?"

"Yes, I have," said Figgins.

"Sticking to him?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you haven't forgotten that he's in Coventry?" demanded Redfern wrathfully.

"No, I haven't forgotten."

"The fellows are very ratty about it. If you stick to him, you'll get sent to Coventry, too!" said Redfern gravely.

"Let 'em send me, then."

"I think you are off your rocker, Figg'y."

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Redfern retired, and slammed the door after him. Page slowly finished his tea, and then rose to his feet. He collected up his books.

"What are you going to do?" asked Figgins, looking at him.

"I am going to get out!" said Page quietly.

"Where?"

"Oh, anywhere! Do you think I am such a cad as to let you be sent to Coventry for me, and to part you from your own chums?" asked Page. "I'm afraid I've been a bit of a rotter in some respects, but I'm not quite such a rotter as that. You've been jolly good to me; but I'm not cad enough to let you suffer for it. I'm grateful to you, and—good-bye!"

Figgins started to his feet.

"Look here, Page," he said. "I'm

standing by you. You haven't a friend in the school, and you'd better stick to me."

"It's my own fault, and I shall have to stand it," said Page. "I suppose I can't go back into the School House. But I have my locker in the Form-room, and I can do my prep there. And I shan't come into this study, Figgins. I mean it. Don't think I've got my back up. I haven't. But I couldn't be such a cad. And you'd better not speak to me again; you'll only get into trouble with the other chaps. I wish I'd had sense enough to make a better start here. But it can't be helped, and I shall have to stand it the best I can, without dragging anybody else into it."

"But—I say!" stammered Figgins.

"It's settled. Good-bye!"

And Page left the study.

Figgins remained alone, with a look of wonder on his face—wonder that was mingled with satisfaction. His persistent belief that there was good in the new junior somewhere had been justified at last. The good had certainly been a long time in coming to light; but it had come at last. Cousin Ethel had been right! It only required sufficient patience to bring out the better side of Eric Page's character, and Figgins had succeeded in bringing it out.

Figgins felt very much inclined to pat himself on the back.

Figgins remained alone a long time. The door of the study opened presently, and Kerr came in.

"Well?" said Figgins.

"We haven't come to stay," said Kerr. "We want our books, that's all. We're going to do our work in Reddy's study."

"You can stay!" said Figgins.

"Page is gone."

"Gone for good?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yes."

"Oh, good! You decided to turn him out, then?"

"No."

"Then why has he gone?" asked Kerr, puzzled.

"He turned himself out. He's going to do without a study, and work in the Form-room, and he told me to leave him alone."

"Why?"

"Because he won't drag me into his troubles."

"Oh!" said Kerr.

There was silence for some moments.

"I suppose you're not pulling our leg?" said Kerr, at last.

"No. Didn't I tell you Cousin Ethel was right—that there was some good in the chap?" demanded Figgins. "He's chucked up his only friend, because he won't get me sent to Coventry on his account. And it's jolly decent of him."

"In that case, he—he can't be such an utter rotter, after all," said Kerr slowly.

"I told you Cousin Ethel said—"

"Oh, blow!" said Kerr peevishly.

"Cousin Ethel isn't a giddy oracle, you know."

"She is!" said Figgins, with conviction. "I knew she was right. She always is. And I think you chaps have treated Page badly. He's decent enough if he has a chance, and he can see that he's made a muck of things. He would be all right now if the fellows would give him a look in."

Kerr looked uneasy.

"Well, I don't want to be the one to be hard on him," he said uncomfortably. "We don't want him in this study. But if you think he might be decent, we might speak to the fellows, and get them to let him have a fresh start."

The BLACK HAND at ST. FRANK'S!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

The Fighting Eight!

IN conjunction with Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, Nelson Lee, of St. Frank's School, is trying to probe the mystery of the sinister enterprise being carried on at an old house—Gallows Mere—by Dr. Zangari, an Italian. The latter fears the school-master-detective, and, to a lesser degree, eight boys of St. Frank's, who are also involved in the affair.

Several times his masked, black-garbed gangsters try to "bump off" Lee and the schoolboys. Eventually Nipper & Co., the St. Frank's juniors, fall into his hands, and they are confined to an old convict prison; but they soon escape. They decide to form themselves into the "Fighting Eight," with headquarters in an island fortress in the River Stowe, near St. Frank's. Their object is to safeguard themselves against Zangari's gangsters, while, at the same time, hitting back at them if they get the chance. The chance is to come sooner than they expect, for, meanwhile, Nelson Lee has been captured, and is being conveyed by boat along the river to Gallows Mere.

The two towers of the miniature castle on Willard's Island stood out against the stormy night sky. No lights were visible in that quaint building; no sign or sound of human occupation manifested itself. Yet in each tower a silent sentry was on duty, watching the river and the surrounding countryside.

Lightning flickered occasionally on the horizon, but there was no sound of thunder. From the direction of Bellton village came the sound of two solemn strokes as the parish church clock struck the hour. A moment later two answering strokes sounded from the clock-tower at St. Frank's in the other direction.

Two a.m.—and all was well.

Nipper and his seven valiant companions—the Fighting Eight—had put in a good deal of hard work since they had landed on Willard's Island with

their store of booty—in the shape of bedding and food, obtained from the River House School.

Everything was shipshape in the little fortress.

One of the rooms had been quickly converted into a dormitory, and six of the boys were now sleeping soundly after their hectic adventures. Two others—Nipper and Handforth—were taking the first watch. Another room in that old building was stored with food, and was to be used as a living-room. There were only three outer doors in the little castle. One was the main entrance, and it was protected by enormous double doors of iron-studded oak. These were fast closed and barred, and as an added protection against any possible assault, heavy wooden props had been jammed into position. The other doors were narrow, and these were secured in the same thorough fashion. No entry could be made through any of the windows, for they were constructed in the style of the Middle Ages, and were merely long slits, through which air and light entered, but through which nothing bigger than a cat could have squeezed. The eight St. Frank's boys, therefore, were in a very secure position.

Outwardly, there was no sign that the place was occupied.

As a stronghold for the eight boys who were menaced by the grim killers of Dr. Zangari, the place was ideal. Not only were they safe within the building, but they were surrounded by water. Any surprise attack was impossible. Nipper watched at the summit of one tower and Handforth at the summit of the other. When the time came for them to be relieved, two other boys would mount guard. And so it would go on by night and day. Never for an instant would Willard's Island be at the mercy of a surprise attack.

Furthermore, the boys were convinced that they had carried out their plans in secret. They were safe from the enemy, and they were also safe from their friends—Nelson Lee and the

police—who might deem it advisable to take the boys right out of the district. And Nipper and his chums were determined to remain in the district. They wanted to see this thing through to the bitter end.

"We're safe here, my sons," Nipper had said, just before he and Handforth had gone to their posts. "We've grub enough to last us for weeks; we have comfortable beds, and everything."

"Better than being in school doing lessons, anyway," said Church with a grin.

"It's an adventure, and we've just got to do it because we're not going to admit defeat," went on Nipper grimly. "My gov'nor decided to pack us off to a place of safety. That's darn rot! We've made ourselves a darn lot safer. Mr. Lee knows that we escaped from the enemy, and he won't worry. But the enemy will worry. At this very moment, I'll bet Zangari is tearing his hair. He knows we escaped from the old prison, but he doesn't know what became of us. He's got men scouring the countryside, or I'm a Dutchman. But they won't find us. The more we can worry him and harry him, the better it will be for the gov'nor. Now you chaps had better get some sleep. Handforth and I will keep first watch."

Thus it was that as 2 a.m. struck the island fortress was all quiet. Nipper and Handforth were to be relieved at three o'clock. From their towers they could see up and down the river, and across the meadows on either side. There were trees on Willard's Island, but the towers overlooked them. The two watchers had an uninterrupted view.

The night continued to change. Earlier there had been drenching rain with high wind; then the sky had cleared, and for a time it seemed that the weather was to improve. But now, in the early hours of the morning, grim stormclouds were coming up from the south, and they were bringing thunder and lightning with them.

Boo—oom!

A vivid flash in the direction of Caistowe was followed, after a pause, by a rolling echo of thunder. The storm was getting nearer; the direction taken by the drifting clouds indicated that the storm centre would soon be right over St. Frank's.

Nipper and Handforth watched the approaching storm with interest, and they were very wakeful, very alert. Something seemed to tell Nipper that, although a lull had come, the night's excitement was not yet over. He did not know why, but he was keenly expectant—almost as though he anticipated an attack by the grim, black-garbed myrmidons of Dr. Zangari.

The minutes passed, and the rumble of the storm grew nearer, but nothing else happened to disturb the night. In the far distance a reflected glow on the lowering clouds marked the spot where Bannington lay, with its lighted streets. But elsewhere the countryside was absolutely black.

Black, that is, except for the occasional split seconds when the lightning blazed. Then meadows and woods and trees were lit up with vivid brilliance, and for a brief period the two watchers could see their surroundings clearly. They saw nothing to disturb them.

Zizzzzh—boom!

Forked lightning split the heavens, and seemed to strike near the village. Instantly there was a terrific clap of thunder, followed by rolling echoes. Rain commenced to fall, but Nipper and Handforth in their towers were well protected. The top of each tower was roofed. There was a tiny chamber at the summit of the narrow circular staircase—a chamber only just big enough to accommodate a single human being. There were little slits of windows all round, and through these slits the boys maintained their watch. From outside they were completely invisible—and they would still be invisible even in daytime. And no matter how it rained they were dry and secure.

Nipper, who was in the tower at the lower end of the island, was in a better position to watch the advancing storm than Handforth; he had a clear view of the river where it was broad and straight.

Suddenly, as he watched the river, his attention became acutely concentrated. Was it imagination, or could he see something blacker than the surrounding blackness creeping up the river in the distance?

A shadow, perhaps.

Another blaze of lightning, and Nipper did not shift his gaze. With his face pressed to the window slit, he caught his breath in; for he had seen clearly; his eyes had not deceived him. A small boat was coming steadily up the river in midstream!

For what legitimate reason could a boat be on the river at this hour of the night?

Did the enemy know, after all, of the boys' presence on Willard's Island? Was this the beginning of an attack? Many different theories flashed through Nipper's mind. He kept his gaze fixed upon the black spot in the river, which was slowly getting nearer and nearer. Common-sense told him that the enemy could know nothing of the island; and Nipper, relying on his judgment, did not yet make any attempt to arouse the others. He decided that it would be folly to give the alarm until he knew more. So he maintained his watch

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and waited impatiently for the next lightning flash. The boat was nearer, and it was bearing to the left, which would take it into the wider channel past the island. This hinted that it was on its way upstream, with no intention of making a halt at the island itself.

Nipper strained his ears, but could hear no sound of oars. He concluded that they had been muffled, and were being wielded so that they made no splash.

A mysterious boat with muffled oars!

No honest users of the river would muffle their oars. The conviction came over Nipper that it was manned by members of Dr. Zangari's criminal gang.

Suddenly the heavens were split by another blaze of lightning; Nipper's eyes were directed on the boat; he saw it vividly. It contained three figures, and two were rowing. The figures were utterly black—even their heads. Men in black! Men of Zangari's organisation! There was no longer any room for doubt.

Nipper thought rapidly. Should he go down and arouse the others in readiness for a possible attack, or should he wait and watch? He decided to wait for a few minutes longer. The men in the boat, it seemed, were not interested in Willard's Island. The boat was well in the left channel, just at the island's end, and soon it would be going right past.

Nearer and nearer.

Although there was no other flash of lightning, Nipper's eyes were so accustomed to the darkness that he could just manage to see the black shape of the boat below. From his elevated position in the tower he was now looking down upon it. It was exactly opposite, and continuing its course past the island.

Zizzzzh!

In the flash of lightning which blazed out Nipper saw right down into the boat, and it was so near that he could see everything in clear detail. His heart almost stopped beating, and he stood as though paralysed. For in that sudden blaze of light he had seen a figure lying in the bottom of the boat—a figure bound and helpless. A man—a prisoner with a gag over his mouth!

Nelson Lee!

Brief as the glimpse had been, Nipper knew that he had made no mistake. The captive in the boat, in the hands of the three men in black, was Nelson Lee himself!

The thunder rolled and shook, and the darkness which followed the lightning flash was more intense than ever. The boat continued on its course. Nipper stood like a statue, his heart now beating faster. His thoughts were chaotic at first, but he quickly took a grip on himself and tried to reason things out.

Where was Nelson Lee being taken? Farther up, Nipper knew, the river wandered along in the neighbourhood of Edgmore; it twisted and turned, and one bend of it came within a couple of meadows of Gallows Mere. That was it! Nelson Lee, a captive, was being taken to Zangari's secret headquarters. And when he arrived—

Nipper shivered.

He felt that he was partly responsible for his guv'nor's plight. It was he who had flung that note through the window of Inspector Jameson's office at the Bannington Police Station; because of the note, Lee had gone to the old prison, perhaps with Inspector Lennard and the police. But something must have happened there—a fight, no doubt. Lee had been seized and carried off.

Nipper's reasoning was sound enough. True, there had been no fight at the

old prison, for Lee had been spirited away as though by magic in the darkness. For a time he had been kept in a dense thicket beyond the moor, near the river; then, in the small hours, the task of conveying him to Gallows Mere had commenced.

"They've got the guv'nor!" muttered Nipper. "There's no telling what devil's tricks Zangari will get up to. Something's got to be done—and at once!"

Nipper made up his mind. Swiftly he descended the narrow stairway, and a few moments later he had aroused the sleeping garrison.

"Great Scott! What's wrong?" panted Tommy Watson, rubbing his eyes. "An attack?"

"No," said Nipper. "Run up to the other tower and bring Handforth. Quick!"

"No need for that," came a voice, and Handforth was in their midst. "I say, I've just spotted a boat going up the river, and I believe—"

"Did you see anybody in the boat?" interrupted Nipper quickly.

"Yes; three men in black, and another man lying helpless in the bottom!" exclaimed Handforth tensely. "I may be mad, but when a flash of lightning came I thought I recognised Mr. Lee."

"What!" went up a general chorus. "This clinches it!" said Nipper. "Two of us couldn't be mistaken. I know I recognised the guv'nor. They've got him, you chaps!"

"Good gad!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"They're taking him to Gallows Mere—taking him to Zangari!" said Nipper. "Listen, you fellows! I want three volunteers. The other four must remain here, guarding the fortress. Four of us ought to be enough; we've got guns, too."

Everybody volunteered, and Nipper quickly selected Handforth, Archie Glenthorne, and Tommy Watson.

"What are we going to do—chase the boat and give battle?" asked Handforth eagerly. "By George! What a night!"

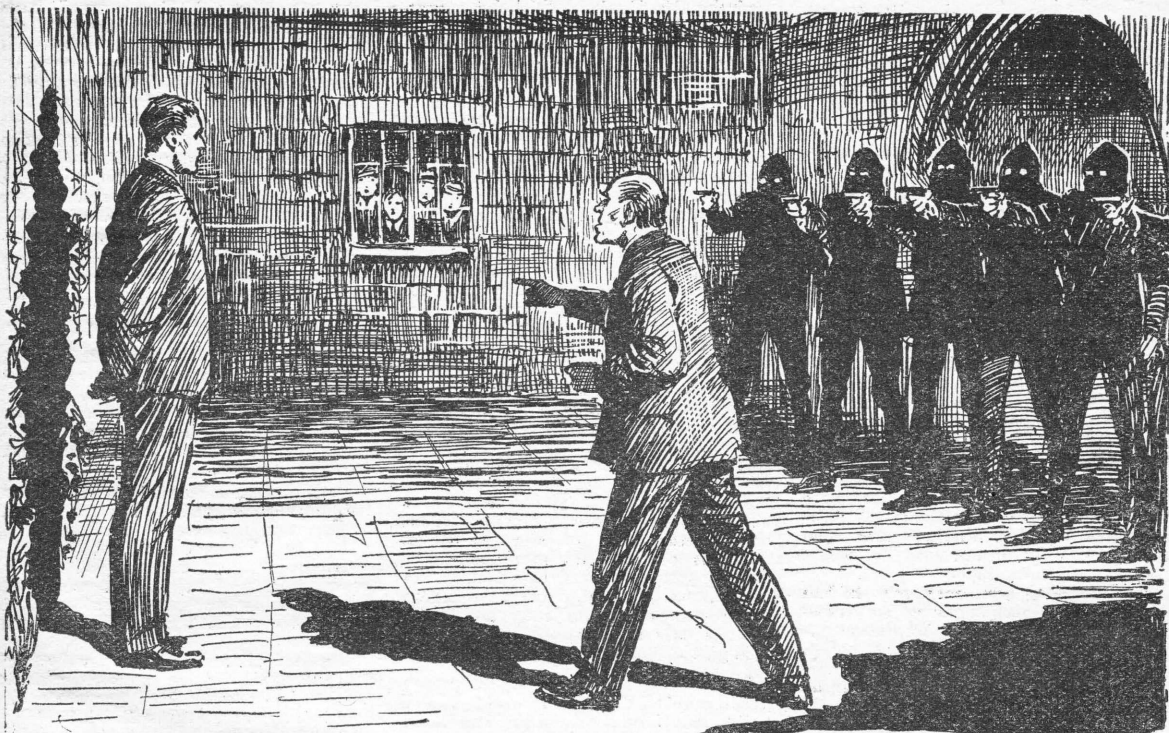
"No; we couldn't possibly hope to put up a fight on the river," said Nipper. "We've got to get ashore, and then race across country in a direct line to Gallows Mere. We shall get there before the boat. The river is about two meadows away from the house, and my idea is to lurk in ambush. Then, when these men are carrying the guv'nor from the river to the house, we'll pounce. They'll be handicapped by their burden, and all the advantage will be with us. We'll make one swift rush, knock the brutes out, grab the guv'nor, and scoot."

"Easy as winking!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "It's as good as done!"

And two minutes later the four valiant juniors were off on their desperate mission.

The Death Sentence!

DR. ZANGARI sat at his desk in his study at Gallows Mere. He was silent with the silence of suppressed fury. There was something grim and terrible in his expression, in the blaze of hatred and rage in his eyes. He sat hunched, staring straight before him, his clenched fists thudding with rhythmic beat on the arms of his chair. A soft, shaded light glowed on the desk; beyond, near the



The St. Frank's boys were horrified as they gazed at the scene in the courtyard. The men in black had lined up, with automatics raised, and were waiting for the order from Dr. Zangari to fire. Nelson Lee was to be shot as a spy!

fireplace, stood Carlo Mazzini, one of Zangari's chief men. There had been silence for over five minutes, and Mazzini knew better than to break it. He watched his chief uneasily, waiting for the next outburst, which he felt was overdue.

It had been a bad night for Dr. Zangari.

All news had reached him—not once, but several times. Everything had been going wrong. He had called many members of his organisation to Gallows Mere, and important operations had been set in motion. Firstly, the eight St. Frank's boys—the boys who knew too much—had been captured and taken to the old prison on Bannington Moor. Then had come the news that they had made their escape. That had been the first blow. Men in black had been sent out in all directions, searching, but reports had come in from time to time. The boys had gone!

Then came the information that three men had been seized by the police at the old prison. Three more men! Zangari's force was being reduced hourly. The one consolation he had was that the police had no evidence to connect Zangari or Gallows Mere with the men who had been arrested. He was satisfied that none of those men would talk.

The one item of good news which had come to hand was that Nelson Lee had fallen into his hands. And even now he was not sure. There were so many police about that perhaps Lee had been rescued. He had sent out definite orders—instructions for his men to take every precaution. They were to bring Lee by a roundabout route.

"Disaster—disaster—disaster!" exclaimed Zangari suddenly. "That is the only tale I hear! First, Lombardo, the most valuable man in our organisation; then Ricotti; now, tonight, these others! They are gone!

Some are dead; others are in the hands of the police! And who is responsible—eh, Mazzini?"

"The police, Excellency, are getting dangerous!" said Carlo Mazzini un- easily. "They have definite suspicions that—"

"Bah! Suspicious!" interrupted Zangari. "Let them have suspicions! Who cares? It is not the police we have to fear. Those infernal schoolboys have given us more trouble than the police! And Lee—Lee is the greatest enemy of all! When I am certain that Lee is dead, then, and not until then, shall I feel really safe!"

"He is in our hands, Excellency; he is being brought here even now."

"Yes! And with my own eyes I shall see him die!" vowed Dr. Zangari. "Then I shall be satisfied that he is indeed dead. Do you think I should have had him brought here otherwise? But he is cunning and clever. He might trick our men, but he will not trick me! To see him fall dead will compensate me for much, Mazzini!" He continued to drum his fists on the arms of his chair. "The boys—they are of secondary importance." He shrugged. "They are out in the night hiding. They will not elude my searchers for long. But why do you stand here, fool? Go!"

"It was your wish, Excellency—"

"Go, I tell you, imbecile!" shouted Zangari. "Go out and watch! Take men with you! And when Lee comes, bring him straight to me!"

Mazzini hesitated.

"You will face this Englishman as you are?" he asked doubtfully.

"Why not?"

"Would it not be wiser, Excellency, to wear black?"

"It matters not!" said Zangari, with an evil laugh. "Lee will know that he has been brought to Gallows Mere;

therefore, he can see me as I am. For this man, Lee, is to die! Fifteen minutes after he reaches this room he will be no more!"

Shadows of the night. But this time different shadows—the silent, stealthy figures of four stout-hearted St. Frank's schoolboys. Nipper, Handforth, Watson, and Archie had reached their destination.

It had been a trying journey across country, for the fields were thick with mud, the grass and weeds were drenched, and rain was falling. The lightning, too, had compelled the boys to seek the cover of hedges. But now they were hidden behind a dense clump of brambles in a meadow which was immediately behind the back garden of Gallows Mere. They could not see that grim old house, for trees intervened. Some little distance away lay the river. The boat would stop there, for it was the nearest spot, and Nelson Lee would be brought across this meadow.

"Think we're in time?" murmured Handforth. "Everything's jolly quiet."

"We must be in time," replied Nipper. "The boat could not have got here by now; it'll be twenty minutes or more before it can arrive. I wish this lightning would stop!"

A flash had just illuminated the meadow. The storm, instead of passing, had apparently gone round in a circle, and was coming back again. The storm clouds were still heavy over the greater part of the heavens, and at intervals the lightning would flash and the thunder would roll.

"The lightning's jolly useful, isn't it?" asked Tommy Watson in a low voice. "Anyhow, it was useful a little while ago, when it enabled you to spot Mr. Lee in the boat."

"Yes; the lightning was our friend!"

then," agreed Nipper. "But if a flash of lightning comes just as we leave these bushes, the brutes will spot us. Then we shan't have an earthly!"

"Perhaps the lightning will ease up soon," said Handforth hopefully.

"Careful, old things!" breathed Archie. "There's a certain activity of sorts over on this side."

They looked round quickly. Several figures had emerged from a gateway at the rear of the Gallows Mere premises. They were now walking across the meadow in the direction of the river. Nipper's heart sank. This was an unforeseen difficulty. Lightning flickered in the distance, but by its flash Nipper could see four men in black and another in ordinary clothing.

"Five of them!" he whispered. "That's five in addition to the men in the boat. Crumbs! This has put a kink in our plan, you chaps. We can't possibly hope to attack eight of the brutes!"

"Look! The boat must be here already—sooner than we thought," murmured Watson. "Aren't there some men coming from the river?"

It was true enough.

The two groups of men met in the meadow. Then, after a pause, they commenced walking in close formation towards the garden of the old house. Nipper clenched his fists with helplessness. He and his chums could do nothing.

Soon the men were almost opposite, and within easy reach. Then the lightning came, and it was a vivid flash. Nipper, risking all, raised his head above the brambles. He saw, in the midst of the enemy force, the upright figure of Nelson Lee. The detective was being marched, in the centre of his bodyguard, towards Gallows Mere.

Nipper felt utterly sick. His helplessness maddened him. Under his very eyes, his beloved gov'nor was being led into that house of mystery and evil, and he could do nothing.

Dr. Zangari rose from his chair as the door opened and admitted Mazzini. Immediately on Mazzini's heels came the bodyguard of men in black, and in their midst—Nelson Lee.

"Entrate, mio amico, Nelson Lee!" said Dr. Zangari suavely. "Buono giorno."

"Good-morning, Dr. Zangari," replied Nelson Lee. "I am delighted to see that you have at last come out into the open."

The gag had been removed from his mouth just before entering the study. His legs were free, but his wrists were bound behind his back. At Zangari's order, he was marched to the centre of the room, and then the men in black stood back, silent, motionless.

"You spoke of being delighted," said Dr. Zangari. "But you will not be delighted, Mr. Nelson Lee, when I explain why I have come into the open. It does not matter that you should know me—or that you should have been brought boldly to this house. For you will never leave. What you have seen to-night will go no further."

"Meaning that you intend to kill me?" said Lee. "Well, I am quite prepared for it, Dr. Zangari. I expect no mercy at your hands. You therefore find me quite cool—quite prepared."

Zangari strode forward, and for a moment it seemed that he would strike Nelson Lee in the face. But he checked himself, and only glowered.

"Dog!" he snarled. "You I have to

thank for the disasters which have overtaken me. You alone! But this is the end."

"The end for me, apparently—and undoubtedly the end for you," returned Nelson Lee smoothly. "You will gain nothing by killing me, Zangari, although you must not construe my words into a plea for my life. I do not plead with common murderers. The hunt has been getting too hot for some time, and now you are practically at the end of—"

"No. I am not yet at the beginning!" shouted Zangari, his eyes wild. "For years I have planned; for years I have organised. Now we are nearly ready for—the day! Soon it will dawn."

"You are optimistic, my friend, if you think that your new Black Hand Society will ever flourish," retorted Lee. "I am interested to know how it is that you, a man of science, should place yourself at the head of a new Mafia."

Dr. Zangari stared.

"You know?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"What other explanation can there be?" countered Nelson Lee. "That you are the head of a great secret society is obvious; on more than one occasion you have used the sign of the Black Hand. The sign of the defeated Mafia—stamped out of Italy and Sicily by the orders of Mussolini."

Zangari's eyes blazed with renewed fire.

"Yes! You are right! Why should I deny it?" he exclaimed. "You are to die at once. My two sons, fine men, died at the hands of Mussolini's assassins!"

"They were criminals, or Mussolini's men would never have—"

"They died fighting," interrupted Zangari fiercely. "Yes, they were members of the Mafia—but they were not criminals. They were good citizens; they had been drawn into the Mafia in the innocence of their youth, and once in, they could not escape. Yet, notwithstanding their innocence, they were shot down."

"You are a prejudiced man, Dr. Zangari," replied Nelson Lee. "If your two sons were members of the Mafia, and they elected to fight against the soldiers who were sent to exterminate the Mafia, then they died enemies of Italy."

"Now it is my turn!" panted Zangari. "Italy is very busy just now—busy with her soldiers in Eritrea and Libya. Mussolini has his hands very full. A golden opportunity, yes, for such a man as myself? In Italy I could not organise the new Mafia—which will soon be of far greater strength than the old Mafia—but here, in peace-loving England, I have made my plans and preparations. I have organised my forces, and at this moment there are hundreds, thousands, ready to strike when I give the order—when the day dawns. Here, in this corner of Sussex, I have war material such as your modern armies do not dream of. It can easily be exported to Italy—when the right time comes."

He stepped nearer, until his face was close to Lee's.

"You have hindered my plans more than any living man," he went on. "But your interference is now at an end."

"You intend to murder me," said Lee. "What do you expect me to do? Get on with your dirty work."

"You are wrong, mio amico; it is clean work; it is good work," said Zangari. "Putting you to death will not be murder. You are to be executed as a war spy. You are to be placed in front of a firing squad. Yes, I regard this as a war, and you are one of my enemies.

Do you realise that for years I have gathered funds from all corners of Italy and Sicily where the Mafia once held sway? Thousands trust me—they await my signal. Do you think I am going to be foiled by your interference? You die as a spy, and your riddled body will be delivered to-morrow at the police station in Bannington. That is my decree." He stood back and raised an arm. "Take him!" he shouted in Italian. "Take him and shoot him!"

Without a word the men in black closed round Nelson Lee, and he was marched out—to the execution.

A Desperate Chance!

"W" E'VE got to do something!" Nipper spoke calmly, but he was in an inward turmoil of anxiety and fear. The very fact that Lee had not been blindfolded indicated that he was destined never to emerge.

The situation seemed hopeless. Four schoolboys—and pitted against them, Zangari and his desperate killers.

"It's no good, old son," said Watson helplessly. "What can we do? There are only four of us, and it would be sheer insanity for us to attempt a rescue. We couldn't do it. It's against all reason."

"Against all reason or not, we've got to try!" said Nipper fiercely. "Don't you understand? My gov'nor's in there! They're going to kill him!"

"And if we go in there, we stand a good chance of sharing his fate!" said Handforth aggressively. "But do you think we're going to be stopped by that? We're not afraid of a crowd of Italian crooks, are we? They're outlaws, criminals—members of a murderous secret society! Come on! It's no good standing here talking. We've got to get into action!"

"Good old Handy!" said Nipper gratefully. "It's asking a lot of you chaps, I know, but I'm pretty desperate. When I think of the gov'nor, and—"

"Don't keep on jabbering!" growled Tommy Watson. "Let's see what we can do."

"Absolutely," agreed Archie Glen-thorne.

They did not hesitate. The truth was, they had grown so accustomed to the deadly perils of late that they were getting inured. And there was always the chance that they might succeed. The very fact that Nelson Lee had been brought to Gallows Mere was proof that Zangari and his men were concentrating on their prisoner. It was likely, then, that the garden and grounds would be unguarded. Certainly Zangari would never dream that the boys would come so near—to actually invade the enemy's territory.

So the enterprise was not so mad, after all. It was desperate, yes; but desperate ventures have sometimes come off.

Nipper was careful, in spite of the urgency. He did not enter the orchard or garden of Gallows Mere, for he remembered how Handforth & Co., on an earlier occasion, had been trapped there. Nipper led the way round the outer wall of the garden until they reached a spot where some outbuildings were to be seen—probably the old coach-houses and stables attached to the house. Nimble the boys shinned up the wall, and when they dropped down on the other side, they found themselves in a stone-paved courtyard. Very little chance of traps here. In the deep shadow of the wall they sidled along, fearful every moment lest a lightning

flash should show them up. But they reached the nearest shed in safety, and the door was not locked. They entered, and the smell of petrol and oil told Nipper that the place had probably been used as a garage. Handforth stumbled over something, and there was a clatter of cans.

"Corks! I've skinned my shins!" he groaned. "Fancy leaving a lot of petrol cans—"

"Don't make any more noise than you can help, Handy, for goodness' sake!" interrupted Nipper. "Wait! We'd better see where we are."

He took out an electric torch, and, placing his fingers over the bulb, he pressed the switch. Only a tiny ray of light escaped between his fingers, but it was sufficient to show him the floor. There were at least fifty two-gallon cans of petrol stacked up against one of the walls. They were all full. Against another wall were other cans—empty. There were many ten-gallon drums of lubricating oil, too. The boys took little notice of these. They crept along to the end of the garage, and here they found a door. It led into a long range of disused stables. Everything was still.

"Better go this way," whispered Nipper. "My sense of direction tells me that we shall get nearer to the house. Somehow, we've got to get in, and—"

"Shsssh!" came a warning hiss from Watson.

They were near a window, and they dodged down. The window was half-obscured by ancient cobwebs, and it overlooked the courtyard. There was an inner courtyard here, too—one quite near to the house itself. Lights had appeared—which was the reason for Watson's warning hiss. The boys, raising their heads, and peeping through the cobwebby window, were in a position to see everything.

Nelson Lee had just been brought out of the house by masked men in black, and behind them came Dr. Zangari. His face, in the white flood of light from the lamps his men were carrying, was hideous with hatred. The boys could not hear the words he said, but he was giving directions.

Nelson Lee was marched to the wall of the house, between two of the windows, where the wall was thick with evergreen creepers. Lee was placed with his back to this wall, and then the men in black retreated. They went right across the inner courtyard, until they reached the open gateway. Here some of them were plainly visible to the watching schoolboys. The men stood with their backs to the gateway, and others, no doubt, were standing in the same way, with their backs to the courtyard wall—but out of sight of the boys.

"Good gad!" said Archie huskily. "You see what it is, old things? A dashed firing-squad!"

"Oh!"

"Great Scott!"

They were horrified. The thing was obvious enough. A firing-squad! Each man held an automatic pistol—and there was no doubt that each pistol was fitted with a silencer.

Nelson Lee was to be murdered—but murdered in a manner which gave it the appearance of an official execution.

What could be done? Nipper thought feverishly. He could think of nothing. His impulse was to rush forward madly; but common sense held him back. What if all four boys rushed forward? What could they do? In all probability they would be shot down in the first ten seconds.

"Isn't there something we can do?" asked Handforth, his voice tense with

anxiety. "Didn't we bring any of those gas guns, Nipper?"

"No," groaned Nipper. "We might have done something if—"

He stopped. An idea, a flash of inspiration had come to him.

Fascinatedly he watched that scene through the gateway—the scene inside the inner courtyard. The men in black were ready. Dr. Zangari had gone forward and was talking to Nelson Lee—probably taunting him in his helplessness. There might yet be a moment or two.

"Quick, you chaps!" panted Nipper. "Follow me!"

"What the dickens—"

Nipper did not wait to explain anything. He ran like mad, and now he openly flashed the electric torch in front of him so that there should be no delay. There was little chance of the light being seen, for the men in the other courtyard were necessarily dazzled by the light of the lanterns, and they were not looking in this direction, anyway. Handforth, Archie, and Tommy raced after Nipper. They thought, indeed, that he had gone mad, for he was running away from the scene of execution.

But he only ran a short distance—into that storehouse where the petrol cans were stacked. He had thrown the torch down and was wrenching at the cap of one of the cans, unscrewing it by using the lower rim of another can.

"Quick—all of you!" he exclaimed. "Take the caps off, tip them over—let the petrol escape!"

"My only sainted aunt! You—you mean—" began Handforth.

"Never mind—do it!" exclaimed Nipper. "It's the only chance."

Within thirty seconds they had a

dozen cans opened, and the spirit was gurgling out and splashing all over the floor—round that great pile of other full cans. A stream of petrol, too, was running into a brick gutter and going along in a stream through the doorway into the disused stables. Nipper nearly shouted with delight when he saw this.

"That's enough!" he exclaimed. "We daren't risk another second. Come on—quick! Run for your lives—run to the far end of the stables!"

They understood. They ran madly. Nipper followed. The others, taking a glance through the window, were horrified by what they saw.

It was the moment of the execution! Nelson Lee was standing alone now; the men in black had raised their arms, and their wicked pistols were pointing at Lee's heart. Dr. Zangari was standing like an officer in command, his hand raised, ready to give the order to fire.

Then came a sudden burst of fire in the stable; Nipper had set a match to the end of the trickling stream of petrol. Zoooooooom! Like a streak of lightning the flame leaped all up the stream of spirit in the gutter, and within a split second it reached the great pool in the store-room and the cans which were still emptying their contents.

Boooooomp! With a terrifying, devastating roar the great body of petrol caught alight, and flames roared a hundred feet into the air, through the opening in the roof which had been caused by that first terrific concussion.

But had this great pillar of livid fire come in time to stay the execution?

(Can Nipper & Co. save Nelson Lee from death? Look out for next week's all-thrilling chapters!)

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The Boy Who Defied His Form!

(Continued from page 22.)

"Just what I was thinking," said Fatty Wynn.

"Done!" said Figgins. "You won't be sorry for it. Come on!"

The light was burning in the Fourth Form Room. A junior sat solitary at a desk, bending over his work. There was no fire in the Form-room, and the evening was chilly. The room looked dull and desolate.

Page sighed a little over his work. The thought of the cheerful study, the cheerful companions he might have had, but for his own folly and obstinacy, obtruded itself into his mind, though he tried to keep his thoughts upon his work.

The door of the Form-room opened quietly.

Page did not hear it, and he did not look up.

Quite a little crowd of juniors came in. There were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and Kangaroo of the Shell, and Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, and Figgins, Kerr and Wynn, and Reilly and Kerruish of the Fourth.

Page started out of his moody reverie as they came up to the desk where he was sitting, and glanced at them in surprise.

"It's all right, Page," said Figgins cheerily.

"What do you mean, Figgins?"

"The sentence of the House is reversed," said Tom Merry. "We hear from Piggy that—that—"

"That you're not such a rotter as you've made yourself out to be," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we're chucking up the sentence of Coventry to give you a trial," said Lowther.

"Faith, and we'll give you the run of the study, and see how you turn out," said Reilly.

"I wegard that as a good ideah, deah boys. I considah—"

"You see—" said Kerr.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Kerr, deah boy!"

"Yes, I know that, Gussy. You see, Page—"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"You see, if you mean to be decent, we don't want to be rough on you," said Kerr. "I believe in giving everybody a chance. You're a dog with a bad name at present; but if you like to toe the line—"

"And be decent—"

"Or try, anyway—"

"It will be all right for you!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Eric Page rose to his feet. He did not speak for a moment, and his voice was a little husky when he did speak at last.

"This is jolly decent of you fellows!" he said. "I don't mind admitting that I've felt pretty rotten in the past week. And—and I know that it was all my own fault. I've played the giddy goat. I didn't know the ropes, that's what it was. And—and I don't think you'll ever find me playing the ass again in such a way!"

"Bravo, deah boy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, a chap can't do more than own up!" said Blake. "Blessed if I ever expected to hear you talk such sense, Page—excuse me!"

Page smiled faintly.

"I shouldn't have expected it myself," he said, "but I've learned a few things since I've been here. That's all!"

"Bai Jove! It's all wight. An apology from one gentleman to another is quite suffish, in any circes," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard Page as havin' made the amende honouvable, and I am willin' to extend my friendship to him."

"Hear, hear!"

"Sure, and ye're a broth of a bhoys intirely," said Reilly. "Come on, you belong to our study, and you're coming back! March!"

And in the midst of the crowd of cheery juniors Page was marched out of the gloomy Form-room and back to the study in the Fourth Form passage. His face was very bright.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn walked home to the New House, all of them looking pleased, and especially Figgins.

"Didn't I say that Cousin Ethel was right?" he demanded.

"You did!" said Kerr, giving him a slap on the back that made him stagger. "You did, Piggy, old man; and you were right, too!"

And that evening—the happiest in Eric Page's life—was only the prelude to many happy days that were in store for the fellow who had had such an extremely bad time when he openly defied his Form fellows.

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