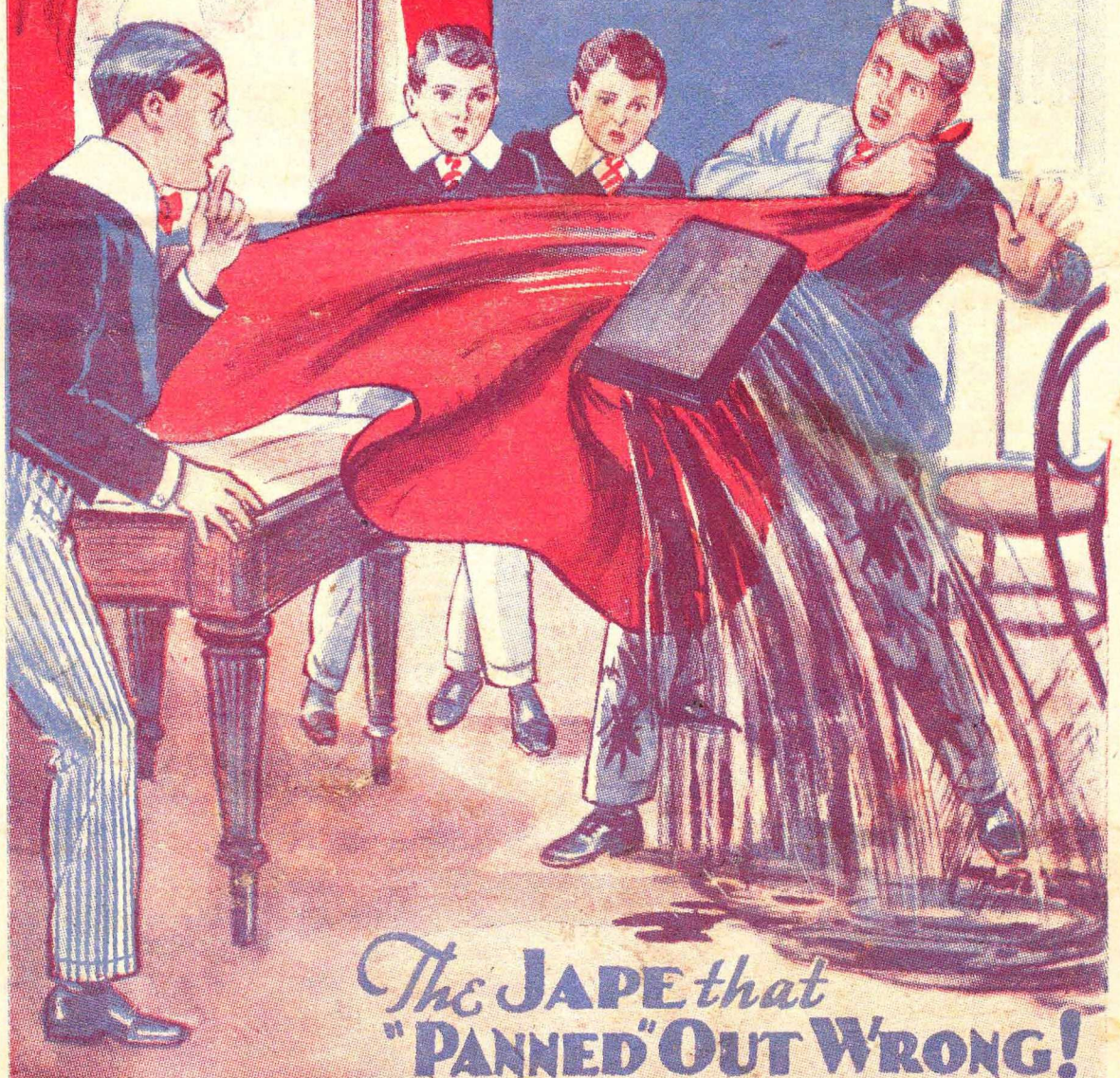


"STANDING BY THEIR SKIPPER!" CRIPPING STORY OF THE ST. JIM'S CHUMS INSIDE.

The

GEM

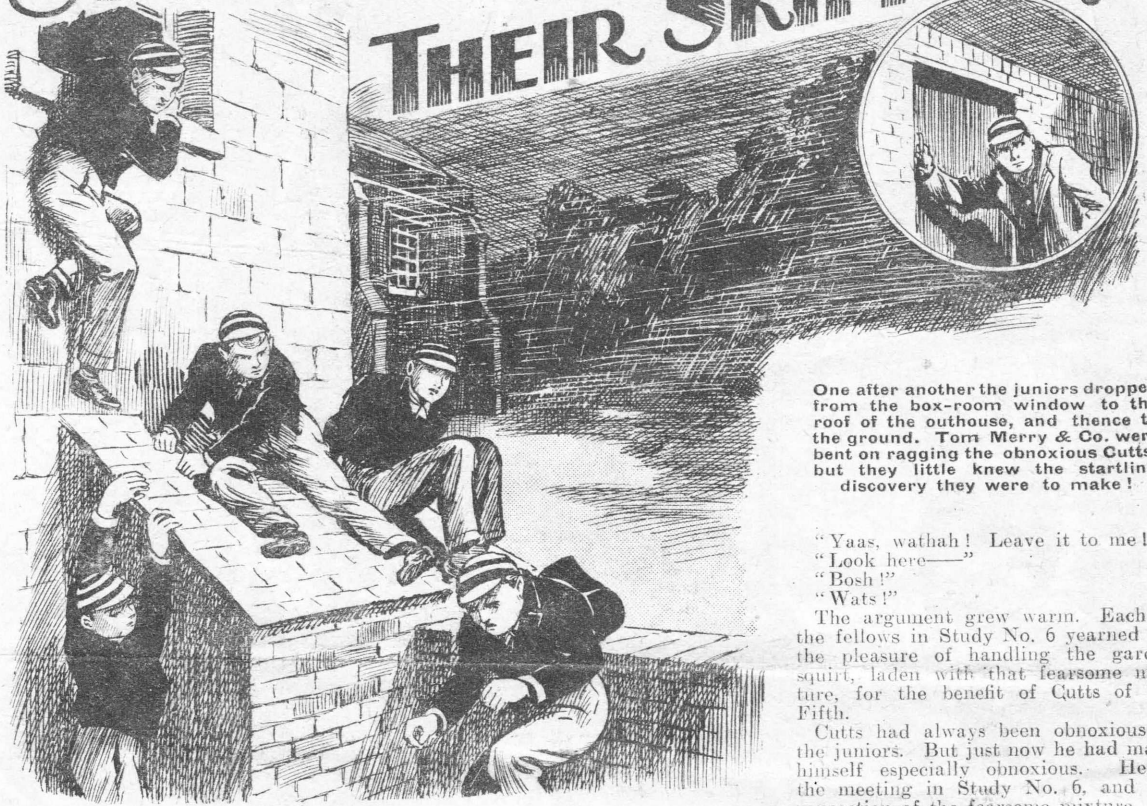
2^d!



The JAPE that
"PANNED" OUT WRONG!

2
WHO IS THE SENIOR SEEN BY TOM MERRY FURTIVELY LEAVING ST. JIM'S AFTER LIGHTS OUT? IS IT ERIC KILDARE?

STANDING BY THEIR SKIPPER!



One after another the juniors dropped from the box-room window to the roof of the outhouse, and thence to the ground. Tom Merry & Co. were bent on ragging the obnoxious Cutts, but they little knew the startling discovery they were to make!

"Yaas, wathah! Leave it to me!"
 "Look here——"
 "Bosh!"
 "Wats!"

The argument grew warm. Each of the fellows in Study No. 6 yearned for the pleasure of handling the garden squirt, laden with that fearsome mixture, for the benefit of Cutts of the Fifth.

Cutts had always been obnoxious to the juniors. But just now he had made himself especially obnoxious. Hence the meeting in Study No. 6, and the concoction of the fearsome mixture.

Tap!

The argument ceased suddenly as the tap came on the door.

Blake hastily caught up a tablecloth and threw it over the pan containing the mixture. Monty Lowther shoved the squirt quickly under his jacket.

"Come in!" growled Blake.

"Not a word about the mixture, deah boys," whispered Arthur Augustus. "It may be a beastly pwefect——"

"Shurrrup!"

"I wepeat, Blake—— Ow! What silly ass is that twampin' on my foot?" wailed Arthur Augustus in tones of anguish.

The study door had opened in response to Blake's invitation, and a big, handsome Sixth Former came in. It was Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare was very popular in the School House, and it was an honour for him to visit a junior study. But at that precise moment the captain of the school was the last person in the world whom Tom Merry & Co. desired to see.

For, just as was the punishment to be meted out to Gerald Cutts, from a junior point of view, they could not expect Kildare to look at it in the same light, if he discovered their intentions.

Kildare's keen eye noted at once the sheepish and self-conscious expression upon the seven faces in the study.

"Hallo, Kildare!" said Blake feebly.
 "Gl-glad to see you, deah boy,"

CHAPTER 1. A Catastrophe!

"VERY misty!" said Tom Merry.
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"By Jove, it is thick," said Blake of the Fourth, looking out of the window of Study No. 6 into the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. Even the old elms could not be seen in the March mist that lowered over the old quadrangle, and the light from the lower windows of the School House was a blur.

"All the better," said Tom Merry, turning from the window. "Cutts won't know what hit him! If he recognises us in this mist, he must have the eyes of a cat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors in Study No. 6 chuckled. There were seven juniors there and they were very busy. Their occupation was somewhat unusual, and it would have surprised anyone who had looked into Study No. 6 at that moment.

On the study table was a large tin pan. Digby was stirring in it with a long wooden ladle. Herries was pouring in red ink from a bottle, and Manners was adding black ink from another bottle. Monty Lowther added some liquid glue to give it a consistency. Jack Blake's contribution was a bottle of indelible ink of a purple hue. Tom Merry collected a shovel of
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soot from the chimney, and Digby mixed it in. It was a fearsome mixture.

Outside in the old quad, the mist had been growing thicker and thicker. Fellows coming across the quad had to grope their way along the paths—even the lights of the School House could not be seen from the gates.

"Don't splash the table, Dig, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus warningly. "We must not have any twaces left. Cutts is bound to be watty about this, and there may be an iniquity, you know."

"Cutts is certain to be annoyed," agreed Monty Lowther. "Where's the squirt?"

"Here you are!"

Monty Lowther took the big garden syringe Arthur Augustus handed to him.

"I think that will do now, Dig," he remarked. "It's beautifully done! I suppose you'd better leave the job to me."

"Weally, Lowthah, you had bettah leave it to me," said D'Arcy. "You might make a mistake in the fog, you know, and squirt it ovah the wong person."

"I'll take it on!" said Blake decidedly. "I first thought of it."

"Oh, no!" said Tom warmly.

"You'd better leave it to me!"
 "You Shell fellows would make a bungle of it," said Blake, with a shake of the head.

A RIPPING STORY OF JAPING, FUN AND ADVENTURE, INTRODUCING ALL YOUR FAVOURITES OF ST. JIM'S.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

murmured Arthur Augustus, making terrific signs to his chums to be careful.

Blake glared at him with the side of his face that was turned away from Kildare, while striving to keep a welcoming smile on the other side. The result was extraordinary.

"What the dickens is the matter with you, Blake?" asked Kildare.

"M-m-matter?" stammered Blake.

"What are you twisting your face like that for?"

"I—I—I—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What are you making faces for, D'Arcy?"

"I, deah boy?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Yes. What's going on in this study?"

"We were just holding a—a—a meeting," said Tom Merry. "We—we're awfully glad to see you, Kildare. Will—will you come along to my study and—

and have tea?"

"No, thanks!" said Kildare. "I'm just going out. I looked in to remind you that your lines have not been brought in to me, Blake."

"My—my lines?"

"Yes, your lines. And what are you hiding under your jacket, Lowther?"

"M-m-my jacket?" stammered Lowther.

"Yes, what is it?"

Monty Lowther, with a grimace, produced the garden squirt. Kildare stared at it in astonishment.

"What have you got that here for?" he demanded.

"We—we— Ahem! We—we've got it here, you know," explained Lowther vaguely. "We—we borrowed it from Taggles to—to—"

Kildare smiled grimly. He could see that he had surprised the young rascals in the midst of their preparations for some "jape," and he intended to sift the matter to the bottom.

"And what's under that tablecloth?" he asked.

"Bai Jove! It's all up now!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "You silly ass, Blake—"

"Shurrup!"

"Quite so!" said Kildare. "It's all up! I suppose you young sweeps are looking for a licking—is that it?"

And Kildare strode towards the table, caught hold of the cloth thrown over the tin pan, and jerked it away.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry.

But it was too late. The cloth was caught in the pan, and Kildare's jerk took it off the table, and the tin pan along with it. There was a loud "swoosh!" and Kildare gave a whoop as the contents of the pan shot over him. The terrible mixture that had been prepared for the sole benefit of Cutts flooded Kildare, swamping his waistcoat and streaming down his trousers.

"Gerrrrroogh!" gasped Kildare.

"What the— How the— What— Oh, oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You've done it now!" gasped Lowther.

"Oh my hat!"

Kildare stood for a moment rooted

to the floor, while red ink and black ink, blacklead and liquid glue streamed down his clothes and formed a pool at his feet. His face was a study. His clothes were ruined, and, to judge by his next action, his temper had suffered also. He had a cane in his hand, and he proceeded to use it with rapidity and vigour.

"You young rascals!" Swish, swish, swish! "You—you young sweeps!" Swish, swish, swish!

"Here, hold on—"

"Ow! Ow!"

"Stop it! Ow! Ow!" Swish, swish, swish, swish, swish!

"Yaroooooh! Oh crumbs!"

"Gweat Scott!"

The unfortunate juniors dodged wildly round the study table, bumping into one another in their frantic efforts to escape the swishing cane. Tom Merry made a rush for the door, and the other fellows followed fast. The study doorway was not built for seven juniors to pass through at once, and there was a jam.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

Behind them was the enraged prefect, with the cane rising and falling with amazing swiftness.

"Bai Jove! Wun, deah boys!"

"My hat!"

"Oh! Ow! Yow!" Swish, swish, swish!

The juniors burst through the doorway and dashed along the passage at

Tom Merry & Co. are nothing if not loyal to Kildare, the popular captain of St. Jim's—even when they suspect him of taking the downward path!

top speed, Kildare brandishing the cane after them.

"Take a hundred lines each!" he roared.

Then he strode away, leaving an inky trail behind him.

CHAPTER 2. Very Cautious!

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Oh dear!"

"My—my—my word!"

Seven unhappy juniors gathered in Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage, groaning in chorus. Every one of them had five or six distinct pains in various parts of his anatomy. The cane had not fallen lightly.

"Oh ewumbs!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I always liked old Kildare; now I wegard him as a wotten beast! Oh!"

"What rotten luck that he should drop in just then!" grunted Blake.

"He's got the mixture instead of Cutts. Oh!"

"Serve him wight, the awful beast!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Hallo! What's the row?" Talbot of the Shell came into the study with a look of surprise upon his handsome face.

"Ow!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Gwoogh!"

"But what's happened?" asked Talbot.

Tom Merry explained in a dolorous voice, to an accompaniment of groans and gasps from his suffering comrades.

"Hard lines!" said Talbot sympathetically. "But what the dickens were you making that mixture for, you duffers?"

"Cutts!" said Blake.

"It was on your account, deah boy," mumbled Arthur Augustus. "We were goin' to vevenge your injuwics, you know."

Talbot's face clouded.

"I wish you hadn't," he said. "I don't mind Cutts. Better leave him alone."

"Wats!"

"We're jolly well going for him, all the same!" said Tom Merry. "We can easily make another mixture. Kildare's going out, thank goodness, and we shall catch Cutts all right in the mist—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They'll know who's done it now!" groaned Herries. "It'll mean another licking!"

"Who cares?"

"Well, I do, for me," said Herries.

"Still, I'm game if you are."

"Then let's pile in, or we shall be too late for Cutts," said Tom Merry.

"He's going out at seven; Levison heard him tell St. Leger so."

"Yaas, buck up!"

"Hold on!" said Talbot quietly. "If you're doing this on my account, I'd rather you chucked it—really!"

"Bow-wow!" said Blake.

"You leave it in our hands, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with a wave of the hand. "We're goin' to look aftah you."

"But really—"

"Ring off!" said Tom Merry briskly. "Clear out, Talbot! You leave it to us!"

"Now you're talking," said Monty Lowther.

And the juniors, only made more determined by that tremendous licking, set to work at once. A big biscuit-tin was taken from the cupboard, and ink of various hues poured into it.

The juniors soon recovered their spirits as they wired into the congenial task. Only Talbot was looking a little grave.

It was entirely upon Talbot's account that the pleasant surprise was being prepared for Cutts. Talbot was one of the best fellows breathing, and as straight as any fellow in the School House. But it was no secret that Talbot had had a peculiar and "shady" past.

A short time ago Cutts' pal, Tresham of the Fifth, had been sacked from the school. He had been involved in gambling transactions, and was in debt—not an uncommon experience with any member of Cutts & Co.—and he had helped himself to the funds of the Fifth Form Football Club. Taking advantage of Talbot's peculiar past, he had sought to fasten the theft upon Talbot—and he had failed.

Tresham was gone, kicked out of St. Jim's. It was a heavy blow for the "blades" of the Fifth. It rankled deeply with Cutts, and his animosity was chiefly directed against Talbot. Talbot certainly had done nothing but prove his innocence, but the result had been the expulsion of Cutts' pal, and Gerald Cutts could not forgive it. And

on every possible occasion since, Cutts made bitter allusions to that shadowy past which Talbot and his friends were so anxious to forget.

Talbot bore it quietly; he took it as part of his punishment for early wrongdoing, though in that the unfortunate junior had been more sinned against than sinning. But Talbot's chums were not so patient. It was agreed on all hands that Cutts had to be "shut up."

And Tom Merry & Co. had agreed that until Cutts "shut up" they would make Cutts' life not worth living. Hence the little scheme that had ended so disastrously in Study No. 6. That was only to be the first step, but the first step had unfortunately come a "mucker." But Tom Merry & Co. were determined.

The mixture was soon ready. Tom Merry looked out of the study window. The mist in the quadrangle was thicker than ever. Monty Lowther scudded back to Study No. 6 and returned with the squirt.

"Ten to seven!" said Manners. "No time to lose. Now, who's going to be the doer of the deadly deed? No good a crowd going."

"I'll take it on," said Talbot. "As you're doing it on my account, it's only fair that I should take the risk."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Toss up for it," he suggested.

"Betah leave it to me, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus persuasively. "I'm afraid you fellows will make a muck of it."

"Rats! Toss up!" said Blake, producing a penny. "Odd man out."

The lot fell to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he smiled with satisfaction. The other fellows did not seem so satisfied.

"It's all wight, deah boys. Pway give me the squirt, Lowthah. Bai Jove, how am I goin' to cawwy the stuff, though?"

"Better pour it into your pocket," suggested Lowther sarcastically.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Take the tin under your arm, fat-head, and put the squirt under your jacket," said Blake. "Shove the lid on the tin. Mind you don't spill it, ass."

Arthur Augustus took the biscuit-tin under his arm rather gingerly. He was not afraid of Cutts, but he was nervous about his clothes. However, with the tin under his arm and the squirt under his jacket, he was soon ready to start. The juniors impressed upon him to be careful. Arthur Augustus smiled the smile of superior wisdom.

"Pway leave it to me, deah boys! You can wely on me. It's all wight."

And Arthur Augustus marched out of the study. He proceeded slowly along the passage, fearful of spilling the contents of the tin and soiling his immaculate "clobber."

At the top of the stairs D'Arcy met Kangaroo of the Shell coming up, with Clifton Dane and Glyn. They stared at the biscuit-tin.

"What on earth have you got there?" asked Kangaroo in astonishment.

"Shush!" said Arthur Augustus mysteriously.

"Eh?"

"It's a dead secwet. Shush!"

Arthur Augustus proceeded down the stairs, leaving the Shell fellows staring after him in amazement. Levison of the Fourth came running upstairs and nearly bumped into him.

"Look out!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Levison.

"Shush!"

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A dozen fellows in the Lower Hall heard Arthur Augustus' "shush!" and they stared at him as he came down. The sight of the swell of St. Jim's carrying a biscuit-tin out into the misty quadrangle was curious, to say the least.

"What are you up to, Gussy?"

"What's the little game?"

Arthur Augustus put his finger to his lips, and in doing so allowed the squirt to slip from under his jacket, and it crashed on the floor.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus hastily gathered up the squirt, amid looks of astonishment from all sides, and there was a splash from the biscuit-tin as he stooped. The lid was not very tight.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus fairly bolted into the quad, leaving a pool of ink on the floor. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, came along the passage, stared at the pool of ink, and then stared after the figure of Arthur Augustus vanishing through the open doorway into the mist.

"D'Arcy!" he called out sharply.

But D'Arcy had vanished.

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry, who had watched Arthur Augustus' striking progress from the head of the stairs. "The awful ass! I suppose there's nobody in the School House who hasn't spotted him, excepting the cook."

"And I wonder," said Monty Lowther musingly—"I wonder who'll get the mixture?"

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy Does It!

BAI JOVE! It's fwightfully thick!"

It was.

Arthur Augustus felt as if he had put his head into a blanket as he felt his way through the mist in the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

He could not see the elm-trees, and he could hardly discern the ground at his feet. He stumbled on through the thick mist, blinking round him. The lights of the School House disappeared in the mist behind. Arthur Augustus had to stoop down several times to make sure that he was still upon the drive to the gates. He was still picking his way towards the gates when seven strokes boomed out in muffled tones from the clock tower.

"Seven, bai Jove! The beast will be startin'!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

And he stumbled on hurriedly.

It was known that Cutts was going out at seven—Levison had heard him tell St. Leger so. The juniors guessed that the black sheep of the Fifth probably had a particular appointment in Rylcombe among some of his sporting friends there, and he was not likely to miss that appointment.

Cutts had doubtless given some excellent reason for going when he obtained the pass out of gates; but Tom Merry & Co. guessed shrewdly that he was going to visit the betting set at the Green Man—one of Cutts' little habits that they were well acquainted with—which, of course, made it all the more justifiable to decorate Cutts with that mixture en route.

Arthur Augustus reached the gates at last. It was not yet the hour for locking up, and one half of the big gate stood open. Arthur Augustus took position behind a tree, close to the gates, waiting.

He was quite certain that Cutts had not passed him on the way to the gates, so he was certainly ahead of his intended victim; but Cutts could not be many minutes now, unless he was to be very late for his appointment.

D'Arcy waited eagerly, peering through the mist. He had set down the biscuit-tin on the ground and taken the lid off, and held the big squirt in his hand. At the sound of footsteps he intended to fill it, and then let fly at close quarters.

"Bai Jove! Here he comes!"

Footsteps came with a muffled sound through the fog. There was a faint sound of grinding under heavy boots.

Arthur Augustus hastily thrust the nozzle of the squirt into the biscuit-tin and drew the mixture up into the instrument. He rose again with the loaded squirt ready in his hands. There was fully a pint of mixture in it, and a few drops splashed down Arthur Augustus' elegant trousers, unnoticed in the mist. A figure in an overcoat and cap loomed up, making for the gate.

Splooosh!

With a deadly aim, Arthur Augustus discharged the squirt.

Splash!

"Urggggh!"

A wild, gasping gurgle came from the dim figure as it staggered back under the unexpected attack.

"Groooooogggg!"

Before the victim had finished gurgling, Arthur Augustus was fleeing through the mist. He had certainly not been seen. With his face drenched in that deadly mixture, the unhappy victim would have had no eyes for him.

"Bai Jove! What a giddy success!" chuckled Arthur Augustus as he ran.

Bump!

"Great Scott! Ow!"

The fleeing junior had bumped into the fountain. He swerved off from it, and, catching the glimmer of light in the distance, he headed for the School House. He bumped into a tree, and gave a yell, and dropped the squirt, which rolled somewhere in the fog. He groped for it for a few minutes, and then, giving it up, he headed for the lights again. This time he reached the School House without accident and panted up the steps.

The door had been closed, but Arthur Augustus pushed it open and slipped in, and closed it again behind him. He blinked in the lighted Hall. Down both legs of his trousers were dark streaks of the mixture, and his hands were stained, and there was a dab of it on his face. But Arthur Augustus was too excited and triumphant to notice these little details.

Tom Merry & Co. were waiting for him in the Hall. Arthur Augustus gave them a reassuring grin.

"It's all wight, deah boys!"

"But—"

"I caught him a tweat—wight on the chivvy!"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "Then there'll be a row soon! He's bound to come in! He can't go out like that! Ha, ha, ha! I should say not!"

"Better clear!" grinned Talbot.

"Gussy has a few tell-tale signs about him. It wouldn't need Sexton Blake or Ferrers Locke to find out who's done it if Gussy's seen with that dab on his nose."

"Bai Jove! Is there a dab on my nose, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus anxiously.

He rubbed it with the back of his hand and changed it into a streak across his noble features.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Well, you are a pretty sight, you young ass!" exclaimed a voice behind Arthur Augustus. "Are you making up

as a Red Indian, or are you off your rocker?"

Arthur Augustus swung round with almost a yell, for the voice was that of Cutts of the Fifth!

D'Arcy stared at the Fifth Former blankly. Cutts had his coat on, and his cap in his hand, and had just come downstairs. He was just going out. Evidently he had not gone out yet. D'Arcy stared at him in horror. Cutts had not started. Upon whose face, then, had he squirted the dreadful mixture?

"B-bai Jove!" stammered D'Arcy. "You—you here, Cutts?"

Cutts stared at him. "Yes," he said. "Why not? What's the matter with you? Why shouldn't I be here? Are you dotty?"

"You—you haven't gone out?" "Gone out? No; I'm just going," said Cutts, still more puzzled.

"You were goin' out at seven, and it's past seven now."

"How did you know I was going out at seven? And what's it to do with you, anyway?" demanded the dandy of the Fifth.

"Oh crumbs!"

The door was flung violently open. A figure in an overcoat came in. At first sight the face was not recognisable. It was only a purple blot. The overcoat, which was of a light-grey tweed, was splashed and spotted with the mixture. But the face of the wearer was one mass of purplish black.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It—it's Kildare!"

"Kildare! Oh cwumbs!"

"Groogh!" came from the purple Sixth Former. "Oh, where's that young villain? Where are those sweeps? I—I—I'll—"

"Good heavens, Kildare!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, coming out of his study.

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

Cutts burst into a chuckle. He understood now, and he rejoiced. Kildare had frequently stepped in between Cutts and the juniors and stopped his bullying. And now he had received the ragging intended for Cutts.

The faces of the juniors were a study. They knew that Arthur Augustus must have made a mistake in the mist when they saw Cutts. But they had not dreamed that it was so dreadful a mistake as this.

Arthur Augustus regarded Kildare with horror, his mouth agape.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from Cutts.

"Cutts, this is no laughing matter!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Kildare, what has happened to you?"

"I—I—I've been drenched with something—ink or something!" spluttered Kildare. "Some young villain was lying in wait near the gates!"

"I don't think you need look far for the young villain!" grinned Cutts. "Perhaps D'Arcy will explain that smudge on his face."

Mr. Railton fixed a freezing glare upon D'Arcy.

"D'Arcy!"

"Ya-as, sir!" groaned the swell of St. Jim's.

"You are the author of this!"

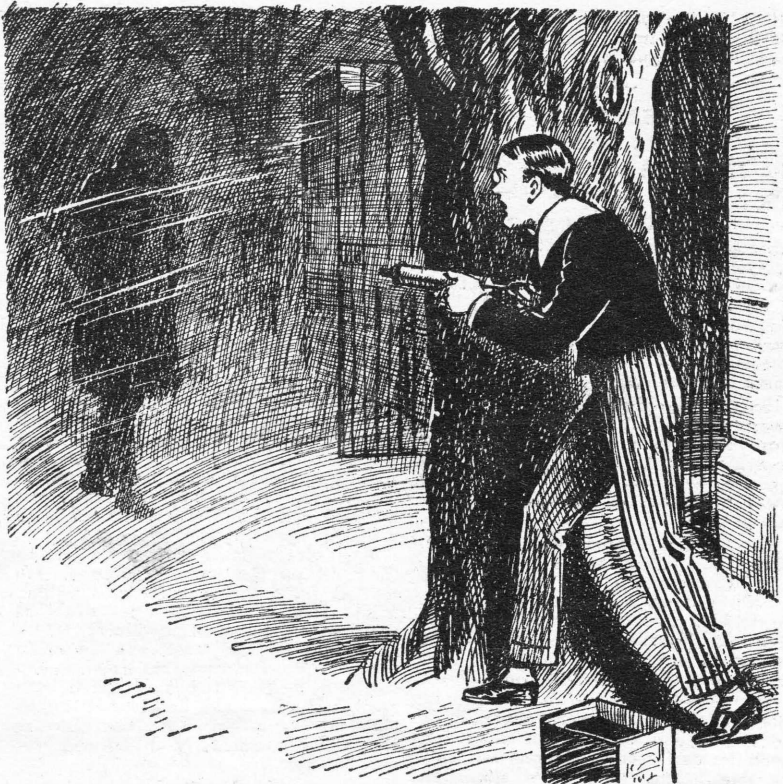
"Weally, sir—"

"You spilt some ink on the floor when I saw you leave the House a quarter of an hour ago. You have ink on your face and hands and clothes now."

"Oh cwumbs!"

"You have done this?"

"It—it was an accident, sir," stammered Arthur Augustus. "I wouldn't



"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as footsteps sounded through the mist. "Here comes Cutts!" A figure in an overcoat and cap loomed up, making for the gate. D'Arcy tensed, ready to discharge the squirt at the approaching figure.

have tweeked old Kildare like that for—for worlds, sir!"

"An accident?" roared Kildare. "You let fly at me with a squirt!"

"Yaas; but—"

"It could not have been an accident, then," said the Housemaster.

"Yaas, sir, it was an accident—a feahful accident! I thought Kildare had gone out. I didn't wecognise him in the mist, sir. Oh dear! I'm fwightfully sowwy, Kildare! I wouldn't have done it for worlds! It—it was meant for somebody else."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Railton. "Then you deliberately intended to squirt that dreadful concoction over someone?"

"Yaas, sir."

"Come into my study, D'Arcy! Kildare, you may rest assured that D'Arcy's punishment for this outrage will be exemplary."

"Oh dear!"

Kildare gave D'Arcy a purple frown and strode away.

The unfortunate swell of St. Jim's started for Mr. Railton's study. The Housemaster selected the stoutest cane.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy. I shall punish you most severely for this—"

"If you please, sir—" said Tom Merry meekly, looking in, with a crowd of anxious faces looking over his shoulders.

"What do you want, Merry?" snapped Mr. Railton.

"We're all in it, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Cleah off, you asses!" said Arthur Augustus testily. "You can't do any good by owning up, you silly duffahs!"

"Silence, D'Arcy! So you were all in it, as you express it?" said Mr. Railton grimly. "You may all come

into the study. I will endeavour to impress upon you that you must not play tricks of this kind. Your hand, D'Arcy!"

"Swish, swish, swish, swish!"

"Oh cwumbs! Oh wikey!"

Then Tom Merry & Co. took their turn. They had four each, and Mr. Railton laid them on as if he had been doing special athletic exercises to get in form for it. When he had finished, he pointed to the door with the cane, and the juniors departed. They crawled out of the study, feeling as if life were not worth living.

Cutts had gone out chuckling. Kildare was busy in his bath-room with hot water and soap, and he remained busy for some time. The juniors almost crawled up the stairs, and in the study passage they paused to look at one another.

"What ought to be done with him?" asked Blake sulphurously.

"With Cutts, deah boy? He ought to be boiled in oil!"

"No!" roared Blake. "Not Cutts. You—you silly ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"To waste that mixture, swamping it over Kildare— Oh, you thumping chump!"

"Weally—"

"You blithering cuckoo!"

"You crass ass!"

"You burbling jabberwock!"

"Oh, bump him!" said Monty Lowther. "Bump him hard!"

"Weally, Lowthah— Hands off, you wottahs! Gweat Scott! Yawwooh!"

Bump, bump, bump!

And the disconsolate juniors went their ways, leaving Arthur Augustus

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sitting in the passage, trying hard to get his second wind, and in a state of speechless indignation.

CHAPTER 4. No Luck!

KILDARE'S appearance the next morning was greeted with smiles.

The captain of St. Jim's had expended a great effort, and any amount of soap and water on his face, but he had not been able to get rid of all the mixture.

Some ingredients, especially the marking-ink, had great sticking powers, and Kildare had to leave the traces to wear off in time.

Hence his countenance presented a peculiar mottled appearance, which caused smiles wherever he went. Even Tom Merry & Co., sorry as they were for the accident, smiled when they saw the captain of the school in the daylight.

But Kildare himself did not smile. His usually sunny temper had suffered a good deal, and that day he was extremely down on Tom Merry & Co. He doubled Blake's unwritten lines; he gave the Terrible Three a hundred lines each for smiling when he met them; he caned Digby for sliding down the banisters.

Tom Merry & Co. were generally in Kildare's good books, and they felt the difference keenly. It was not only the punishment—they could stand all that—but they did not like being on bad terms with old Kildare, who was the idol of the juniors.

They guessed that perhaps Kildare suspected that the mixture had been bestowed upon him in return for the swishing in Study No. 6, which, as a matter of fact, the juniors had forgiven with all their hearts.

Arthur Augustus undertook to explain to Kildare, so that he should not labour under that wrong and unjust impression. But when he presented himself in Kildare's study to explain, the captain of St. Jim's greeted him

with a mottled frown, and pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said briefly.

"I wanted to tell you somethin', Kildare, deah boy!"

"Outside!" snapped Kildare.

"It was weally an accident last night—"

"Will you clear, or not?"

"I was waitin' at the gate for that beast Cutts, you know. It was Cutts I was goin' to dwench—"

"Take a hundred lines, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, deah boy; but I wanted you to undahstand that it was weally an accident. I wouldn't have dwenched you for worlds!"

"Take two hundred lines!"

"Vewy well. But I weally want you to undahstand— Ow! Pway don't be a beast, Kildare! Oh, my hat!"

Arthur Augustus departed quite suddenly from Kildare's study, helped from behind by Kildare's foot. He wore a pained expression when he returned to Study No. 6. He had explained, but he had not improved relations with Kildare, apparently.

Tom Merry made the next effort to pour oil on the troubled waters. He started fagging for Kildare, unasked. When Kildare came into his study at tea-time he found Tom Merry there, very busy making toast, and the table nicely laid. Perhaps that might have softened Kildare's heart, which was really not very hard, had he not caught sight of his reflection in the glass at the same moment, and noticed his mottled face.

So, instead of softening his heart, he hardened it, like Pharaoh of old. He stooped over the junior kneeling before the fire, grabbed him by the collar, jerked him across the study, and threw him into the passage. Tom Merry collapsed there in a breathless state, and the door slammed on him.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom.

He did not venture into the study again. Evidently Kildare was not in a mood to be fagged for.

The Terrible Three wore quite clouded brows as they gathered in their study for tea.

"It's rotten!" said Manners. "We're on bad terms with old Kildare, and we haven't made Cutts sit up. Our luck is out.

And the chums agreed that it was. So far from making the dandy of the Fifth sit up, they had been made to sit up themselves very severely. And Cutts was making himself as unpleasant as ever.

After tea the Terrible Three joined Talbot, and they went down to the Common-room together. Cutts and St. Leger were chatting in the lower passage, and they looked at the juniors as they came by, and Cutts ostentatiously put his hand over his watch-chain, as if on his guard against a pickpocket. Talbot turned crimson, but he passed on without a word. The Terrible Three halted.

"Cutts, you unspeakable cad—" began Tom Merry.

"You apology for a worm!" said Monty Lowther.

"Excuse me," said Cutts, with elaborate politeness. "What is the matter? Have I had the misfortune to offend you in any way?"

St. Leger grinned.

"You rotten cad!" broke out Tom Merry. "Why can't you let Talbot alone? It wasn't his fault that your chum was expelled for embezzling the footer funds."

Cutts' eyes gleamed. The expulsion of Tresham had been a severe blow to the prestige of the "blades," as Cutts & Co. called themselves. But Cutts retained his icy coolness. It was not easy to make him lose his temper.

"My dear youths," he drawled, in his most insulting tone, "it may be your choice to chum up with a reformed pickpocket or cracksmen, but you can't blame me for looking after my property. You see, I'm afraid your burglar pal might break out again any time."

The Terrible Three did not reply in words. Words were useless with fellows like Cutts. They made a sudden rush at him and collared him, and, before Cutts knew what was happening, he was bowled over and rolled on the floor.

"You—you young villains!" roared Cutts. "You—you— Help, St. Leger, you ass! Oh!"

St. Leger rushed to his aid; but they were very close to the door of the Common-room, and at the sound of the row a dozen fellows rushed out, and piled in without waiting to ask questions.

Cutts and St. Leger were grasped by a dozen pairs of hands, bumped on the floor, and rolled along the passage. They would have fared worse still had not Kildare come on the scene with a cane in his hand.

The two Fifth Formers limped away, leaving the captain of St. Jim's to deal with the juniors, which he did very severely. Tom Merry & Co. scuttled into the Common-room, with the prefect's cane swishing behind him. Then Kildare strode away. Tom Merry & Co. regarded one another dolorously.

"Our luck is out!" groaned Manners. "Seems to be," said Tom Merry. "Never mind; never say die. Kildare is rather down on us, I must say."

"Yaas, wathah! I am beginnin' to think that Kildare is wathah a beast!"

"It's my fault," said Talbot, with a distressed look. "I wish you fellows would let it drop. As for what Cutts says to me, I can stand it—and it serves me right, in a way. He might let it drop; but if he won't, let him rip! It doesn't matter."

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"I wefuse to let it wip, deah boy!"
 "Same here," said Tom Merry.
 "He's got to shut up!"
 "But—" said Talbot.
 "Rats!" said the juniors altogether;
 and Talbot gave it up.

CHAPTER 5.

A Surprise for Blake!

CUTTS was in his study that evening, chatting with Gilmore of the Fifth over a cigarette, when there came a tap at the door.

The dandy of the Fifth frowned and thrust his cigarette hastily into the fire. Gilmore threw his "fag" after it.

"Come in!" snapped Cutts.

Kildare came in. He gave a slight sniff as he entered. The cigarettes were out of sight, but there was a very perceptible scent of tobacco-smoke in the room.

"Notice the smell?" drawled Cutts. "I've just been burning some old letters."

Kildare's lip curled. "I've come here to speak to you, Cutts," he said.

"Sit down, dear boy."
 "Thanks; I'll stand! I shan't keep you a few minutes."

"Please yourself!" yawned Cutts.

Kildare's eyes gleamed a little at the scarcely suppressed insolence of the Fifth Former's manner. There was no love lost between the St. Jim's captain and the dandy of the Fifth.

"In the first place," said Kildare, "it isn't what I came about, but I'll mention it—you've been smoking here. The juniors are caned when they are caught smoking; and a senior ought to have decency enough to set them an example."

"Are you going to cane me?" yawned Cutts.

Gilmore chuckled. "It may be my duty to report you to the Housemaster," said Kildare.

"I should wait till I had proof if I were you," suggested Cutts. "I've already told you that I've been burning some old letters—"

"Yes, you have told me so," said Kildare, in a tone which showed his precise opinion of Cutts' veracity. "However, I was only giving you a warning, so we can let that drop. I've a strong suspicion, Cutts, that you are asking for the sack, and, unless you are very careful, you may follow the way Tresham went."

"Thank you!"
 "This looks like it, for instance," said Kildare, taking up a paper that lay on the table.

It was a sporting paper, turned inside out, and there were pencil-marks against several names in the list of horses. Gilmore looked a little alarmed, but Cutts did not turn a hair.

"That?" said Cutts. "That isn't mine!"

"You keep papers that do not belong to you on your study table?"

"It came wrapped round a parcel from Hanney's," said Cutts. "It's very immoral of them to wrap parcels in sporting papers, but I'm not responsible for them."

Gilmore chuckled again, in great admiration for the chief of the "blades." Cutts did not expect Kildare to believe the explanation. He meant him to understand that that was the explanation he would make if the matter were reported to the Housemaster. And certainly it was plausible enough.

"Very well," said Kildare. "I can't



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disprove what you say, of course, and I hope it is the truth. As you have no use for this wrapping-paper, I will take it away with me."

Cutts bit his lip. The two blades had been studying that paper, and discussing the chances of various "gee-gees," and they did not want to lose their valuable source of information.

But it was impossible to raise an objection. Cutts nodded.

"Take it, by all means," he said. "That is, if you are sure that it will not corrupt the pure atmosphere of your study, Kildare."

Gilmore's merriment was irresistible now; but Kildare did not appear to notice it. He gave his attention solely to Cutts.

"Now I'll come to the matter I came to see you about," he said.

"Yes, it's time you did," assented Cutts.

"It's about Talbot of the Shell!"
 "Talbot!" repeated Cutts, in surprise.

"What the deuce— Yes, I believe there is a kid in the Shell named Talbot—at least, he calls himself Talbot. He was called something else, wasn't he, when he was a pickpocket—or a burglar, was it?"

"Never mind that," said Kildare. "That's what I've come about. It's come to my knowledge that you have been ragging Talbot on the subject of his past—"

"My dear chap, you can hardly imagine that I have time to waste in ragging juniors."

"And it has got to stop!" said Kildare, unheeding Cutts' interruption.

"Got to!" said Cutts, frowning.

"Yes. Whatever Talbot may have been—and everybody knows that he had a very unfortunate upbringing—that is all over. He has been pardoned, and he has been admitted to this school with a scholarship, and there is nothing whatever against him now. It's the Head's wish that nothing should be said about his past, and nearly all the fellows have respected it. You have refused to do so. Well, I tell you plainly that you won't be allowed to go on. Mind"—Kildare raised his hand warningly—"if you act in that caddish and despicable way again—"

"You're using some pretty strong expressions," said Cutts, changing colour a little.

"I'm saying what I mean. It's caddish and despicable to persecute a kid

who's had everything against him, and who's trying hard to make up for it now; and if you don't stop it, you'll have to deal with me!"

"And what will you do?" asked Cutts contemptuously.

Kildare came a step nearer, with so grim a frown that Cutts half-rose from his seat.

Cutts smiled a sneering smile. "I should not accept it meekly," he remarked, "and a fight between the head of the Sixth and a Fifth Former would make an unpleasant incident, wouldn't it? Something like a scandal!"

"I shall risk that. In the second place, if that doesn't make you act decently towards that kid I shall report you to the Head, and you can deal with him on the subject."

Cutts was silent. He had never expected the captain of the school to take up the cudgels for Talbot in this way, and he was nonplussed. He knew what kind of reception the Head would give him when he was sent for after Kildare had made his report. The cool and insolent dandy of the Fifth was silenced for once.

"That's all," said Kildare. "I want you to remember that. The kid's done you no harm; he's trying to live down his past—and you've got to leave him alone. That's all. Better think it over."

And, without another word, the captain of St. Jim's turned and quitted the study.

"My word!" murmured Gilmore softly.

Cutts gritted his teeth. "Hang him, the meddling hound! Hang him!"

"Better take his tip, all the same. You don't want to have it out with the Head," said Gilmore. "Old Holmes would be frightfully down on you. He thinks a lot of that fellow Talbot, in spite of what he's done. Dash it all, Cutts, you can let the kid alone! After all, it was Tresham's own fault that he got the order of the boot—"

"Oh, rats!" said Cutts morosely.

And the subject was dropped; and the precious pair resumed the discussion of the chances of their favourite gee-gees, which had been interrupted by Kildare's visit.

Kildare returned to his study with a frowning brow. He tossed the sporting paper on the table with an impatient gesture. He had a deep dislike for Cutts, and all his manners and customs, and the visit to Cutts' study seemed to leave an unpleasant taste in his mouth.

He stirred the fire together to make a blaze, intending to throw the paper on it.

A tap came at the door of his study, and he rapped out:

"Come in!"

Blake came in, with a sheaf of impot paper in his hand. Kildare looked at him irritably.

"My lines, Kildare," said Blake, with great meekness.

"Put them on the table."

Blake placed the lines on the table, and started at the sight of the sporting paper.

There it was, open, in full view of the electric light, with pencil marks against the names of horses in the lists. Blake stared at it open-mouthed. He would not have been more astonished if he had seen the geegees themselves in Kildare's study.

"You can go!" rapped out Kildare.

"Ye-es!" stammered Blake.

Kildare looked at him, and coloured with vexation as he saw the junior's astonished glance fixed upon the sporting paper. He snatched it up and threw it into the fire with a hasty hand.

Blake did not look at him as he turned to the door, but he knew that his face was red. He hurried out of the study.

Kildare bit his lip with annoyance. It was impossible for the head prefect of the School House to explain himself to a junior—to tell him that he had taken the paper from Cutts' study. It was no business of Blake's, of course, but he knew that Blake had been very much astonished.

Jack Blake was more than astonished; he was what he would have described as flabbergasted. He returned to Study No. 6 in a state of wonder. Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were at work with their preparation there. Blake's peculiar expression struck them at once.

"Anythin' w'ong, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass inquiringly on his chum.

"Eh?" said Blake. "Make room for a chap!"

"Seen a ghost?" asked Digby.

"Oh, rats!"

And Blake sat down to his preparation without a word of explanation to his surprised chums. If Kildare chose to have sporting papers in his study it was not Jack Blake's business to tell anybody about it; and Blake reflected sagely that a still tongue shows a wise head. But while he was at work with his preparation he could not help thinking of it.

CHAPTER 6.

The Plan of Campaign!

LEIVISON looked into Tom Merry's study the next day, when the Terrible Three were sitting down to tea. Tom Merry gave a cheery nod.

"Just in time," he remarked. "Squat down."

Levison nodded and drew a chair to the table. The black sheep of the Fourth was on unusually good terms with the Terrible Three of late. The former follower and imitator of the "blades" of the Fifth seemed to be turning over a new leaf, and Tom Merry & Co. kindly gave him their encouragement.

Monty Lowther had remarked that it was never too late to mend, even for Levison, and certainly he required a good deal of mending. But the way Levison had stood by Talbot when Talbot was in a tight corner made the chums of the Shell feel unusually cordial towards him.

"You haven't had any luck," said Levison abruptly, as he accepted the teacup filled by Manners.

"Our luck seems to be out," confessed Tom Merry. "We haven't downed Cutts, and old Kildare is down on us. But our time will come."

"That's what I've come to talk to you about," said Levison. "I can put you up to a dodge."

"Ahem!"

The Terrible Three did not look enthusiastic. Levison's "dodges" were not quite to their taste. There seemed, in fact, to be an inextricable "kink" in Levison's character; even when he wanted to do good he would choose a crooked way. And crooked ways, with ever so good an object, did not recommend themselves to Tom Merry & Co.

"You can take it for what it's worth,"

said Levison, with a slight sneer. He was quite keen enough to read the thoughts of the Shell fellows. "Cutts has been treating Talbot in a rotten way, and all's fair in war."

"Not all," said Tom Merry. "Still, we'll be glad to hear of a dodge for downing Cutts. We haven't had any luck so far."

"My idea is to show him up to the Head," said Levison. "I can't appear in it myself, because he could tell some things about me, if he liked. People who live in glasshouses can't throw stones, you know. But you fellows—Eric's all round—with your irreproachable reputations—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Tresham was sacked the other day," went on Levison. "We all know that Cutts was in the same boat, though he was too keen to be caught. We know he is a gambler, and deals with bookmakers—breaks bounds of a night, and that kind of thing. If he were once caught out, with proof against him, it would be all up with him here. I know Kildare suspects him, but he won't spy on him, and without watching him he can't be bowled out. Well, I happen to know that he has another of his little expeditions on for to-night. Anyway, I'm pretty certain of it. He could be caught out and shown up, and he would be sacked from school. It would be a good riddance for St. Jim's."

"No doubt about that," said Tom Merry. "But—"

"And it would be quite easy," said Levison eagerly. "The rotter has been down on me ever since I chucked palling with him and his set. He licked me to-day!" Levison gritted his teeth. "I told him I'd make him sorry for it."

"H'm!"

Tom Merry and his chums devoted their attention to their toast and sardines. As a matter of fact, they had no desire to be used as Levison's cat's-paw, which was evidently what the Fourth Former was planning.

"All you've got to do," resumed Levison, "is to catch him out at night. Take care that he doesn't get in again. You can get out of the dorm easily enough."

"Suppose we were caught out ourselves?"

"Well, you'd be licked, but that wouldn't hurt you. Nobody would suspect that you were out for any rotten reason, and they might suspect it in my case," said Levison coolly. "You could make out that you were going to jape the New House chaps, or something."

"Thanks!"

Levison's lip curled.

"Sorry. I forgot that you were brought up at the feet of George Washington," he said. "Anyway, you could be careful. Dash it all, you've broken bounds before and not been spotted. Well, then you could lay for Cutts in the quad and watch him get out; drop on him outside the school walls, and take care that he didn't get in again. Tie him to the gate, or something, and leave him."

"My hat!"

"Then he would be missed in the morning," said Levison eagerly. "He would have to explain how he came to be out of doors at night. He couldn't, of course. Once the Head was put on the track, he would soon nose out the whole story. The whole game would come out. He only needs a clue to open his eyes, you see. Cutts would be thoroughly shown up, and he'd get the sack."

"He might," agreed Tom Merry.

"Well, it would be a jolly good thing for the school, wouldn't it?"

"First rate."

"Then you'll do it?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Why not?" demanded Levison angrily.

"Can't be done," said Tom. "It would serve him right, especially after the rotten way he's treated Talbot. But it would be sneaking. Whatever Cutts does, it's not up to us to give him away to the Head. We're not prefects."

Levison made an impatient gesture.

"You're letting a jolly good chance slip!" he exclaimed. "You could clear the rotter out of the school for good."

"Why not tackle the job yourself?" asked Lowther.

"I couldn't handle him alone, and I've got nobody to back me up," said Levison sullenly. "Besides, he could tell things about me. I've been in with him in a good many things. I don't want the boot myself."

"Well, we shouldn't be sorry if Cutts got the order of the boot," remarked Tom Merry. "But we can't give him away ourselves. It would be rather too rotten. But you are sure he is off to-night?"

"I believe so, anyway."

"What time?"

"He usually clears off about eleven when he goes out. I know his habits, you see," said Levison, with a sneering smile. "I've been along with him more than once. Since I've been hard up, though, he hasn't been anxious for my company. His precious friends only want fellows with well-lined pockets and fellows who can't play cards quite so well as I can. But, of course, I mustn't talk about that here!" added Levison, with another sneer.

"Better not," agreed Lowther. "You are corrupting our innocence, my dear boy."

"We might collar the cad," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "No chance of making a mistake in the mist again, as nobody else will be going out at eleven o'clock to-night. We could rag the rotter bald-headed, and he wouldn't be able to say a word about it afterwards, as he couldn't very well confess that he was outside the House at that time of night—what?"

Lowther and Manners chuckled.

"Good egg!" said Lowther.

"I'm on!" said Manners.

"What's the good of a ragging?" said Levison irritably. "Better show him up and get him the order of the boot."

"Can't be did, my son. That's barred. But if we could catch him in the quad to-night, we could give him the ragging of his life."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll think it over," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "It's a good wheeze. We might get Taggles' tar-pot out of the woodshed, and give him a coating. He could spend the rest of the night getting it off, instead of playing cards at the Green Man. It would really be a good thing for him."

The chums of the Shell chuckled at the idea.

"You'll have to be careful," said Levison. "Since Tresham came a mucker, Cutts has been very careful. It won't be so jolly easy to catch him, especially inside the school walls."

"Oh, leave that to us!" said Tom.

After tea, when Levison had departed, the Terrible Three discussed the scheme, and the chums of Study No. 6 were called into the council. Blake & Co. were "on" at once. The idea of tarring Cutts, and in a way that made it impossible for him to make any complaint afterwards, appealed to them at once. And it was agreed that, at half-past ten that night, the seven juniors

should meet in the box-room with due secrecy, and sally forth to "lay" for Cutts in the quadrangle.

They made their preparations before locking-up. A jam-jar was filled with tar from Taggles' tar-pot in the woodshed, and concealed in the hollow elm in the quad, ready for use.

At half-past nine the juniors went to bed as usual, but not to sleep. Not a word had been said about the scheme outside their own select circle; but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was so very mysterious that several of the fellows in the Fourth asked him what was on—questions to which Arthur Augustus replied only with still more mysterious shakes of the head.

When the Fourth turned in, Arthur Augustus only partly undressed himself on going to bed. It was not worth while to take all his things off, as he was to get up in an hour. Of course, a dozen fellows in the dormitory observed his peculiar conduct.

"Phwat's the little game on to-night, Gussy?" Reilly wanted to know.

"Pway don't ask indiscreet questions, Weally, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus reprovingly.

"Oh, you feathad!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Is it a raid in the New House?" asked Kerruish.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Have you got your wubbah shoes here, Blake?"

"Shurrup!" said Blake in a fierce whisper.

"I was afwaid you might have forgotten them, deah boy. I've put mine undah the bed weady."

"You—you frabjous ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! In the cires, we shall wequiah wubbah shoes, and—"

"Cave!" murmured Hammond, as Kildare came in to see lights out.

Kildare glanced sharply at the juniors. The sudden cessation of talk as he entered the dormitory was a suspicious circumstance. The pair of rubber shoes that stood quite prominently just under the edge of D'Arcy's bed was another suspicious circumstance—or, rather, a couple of suspicious circumstances. And the fact that D'Arcy's beautiful pyjamas lay on his bed did not fail to attract Kildare's attention. D'Arcy was in his underclothes, and had not troubled to put on his "pyjamas."

The captain of St. Jim's strode towards his bed.

"D'Arcy!" he rapped out.

"Yaas, Kildare?" said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"What are these shoes doing here?"

"Shoes, deah boy?"

"Yes!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, sitting up in bed and peering at the

shoes as if he had never seen them before. "Bai Jove! They—they are lyn' undah the bed, Kildare. No harm in that, is there?"

"Why are you not undressed, D'Arcy?"

"Undressed? Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus hastily gathered the bedclothes round him, but it was a little too late.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked daggers at their noble chum. The cat was out of the bag now, so far as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was concerned.

"You wretched young slacker!" said Kildare. "Do you mean to say you are going to bed in your clothes? Get up at once!"

"I wefuse to be called a slackah!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "It's nothing of the sort! I—I—I—"

"Well?"

"Ahem!"

Kildare smiled grimly.

"You young ass! You are thinking of getting up after lights out, I suppose! Put on your pyjamas at once! Do you hear?"

"Ya-as!" said D'Arcy feebly.

"I suppose you have some foolery planned for to-night?" said the prefect sternly. "I shall take away these shoes with me. And if there is any nonsense in this dormitory to-night, you will hear from me! And I require you to promise, D'Arcy, that you will not get out of bed after lights out! And you will take a hundred lines, anyway!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Now, then, give me your word, or I'll take you by the scruff of the neck and march you down to the House-master!" said Kildare irritably.

Arthur Augustus gave his chums a despairing look. Blake, Herries, and Digby had closed their eyes, however, and seemed to be asleep.

"I—I pwomise, Kildare!" said D'Arcy, after a long pause.

"There was nothing else to be done.

"Very well."

Kildare put out the light and quitted the dormitory.

CHAPTER 7.

In the Dead of Night!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY sat up in bed after Kildare's footsteps had died away along the passage.

"What wotten luck, deah boy!" groaned D'Arcy. "It's all off now! You fellows can't go without me!"

"Shut up, you silly idiot!" said Blake sulphurously.

"I wefuse to be called a silly idiot, Blake! That feahful beast has taken my shoes away! I nevah wegarded Kildare as such a suspicious beast before! He seems to be wemarkably

sharp to-night. I did nothin' whatevah to make him suspicious. I'm afwaid you fellows must have given it away somehow!"

"Will you shut up?" shrieked Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

Whiz!

A pillow came hurtling through the air, and it caught Arthur Augustus on the side of the head.

"Ow! What feahful beast thwew that pillow?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If that was you, Blake, I'll come and give you a feahful thwashin'! Bai Jove, though, I've pwomised that suspicious beast not to get out of bed! Howevah, as I cannot come, you fellows must give up the ideah!"

"What ideah?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Pway don't ask questions, Lumley! It's a secwet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at, Lumley. Blake, will you give me an undahtakin' not to cawwy out the plan to-night?"

"I'll give you a thick ear, you howling chump!" said the exasperated leader of Study No. 6. "For goodness' sake, shut up!"

"You will make a feahful muck of it if I do not come with you, deah boy. I cannot wely upon you to wag Cutts without my assistance."

"So you're going for Cutts?" said Mellish.

"Mind your own business, Mellish, and don't be inquisitive. Blake, you had bettah slip along to the box-woom and tell Tom Mewwy you can't come. Tell him it's all off, owin' to unforeseen circumstances."

"So Tom Merry's in it, too?" chuckled Mellish.

"Wats! You are an inquisitive beast, Mellish, and I uttaly wefuse to tell you whethah Tom Mewwy is in it or not. Do you heah me, Blake?"

Snore!

That was Blake's only reply.

"Hewwies—Dig—"

Snore, snore!

"You uttah asses, I know perfectly well that you are not asleep! I wequiah you to pwomise that you will put it off till the next time Cutts goes out on the wan-dan!"

"Cutts going on the ran-dan, is he?" chuckled Lumley-Lumley. "Go it, Gussy! Tell us all about it!"

"I wefuse to say a word about it, Lumley! It's a secwet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at, Blake! Hewwies! Dig!"

Snore, snore, snore!

Nothing but snores could be elicited from Blake, Herries, and Digby. Their only hope was that Arthur

(Continued on the next page.)

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Augustus would settle down to sleep. They did not want to start their nocturnal expedition under the eyes of a wakeful dormitory.

The juniors did not seem at all sleepy now. There was a ripple of laughter from bed to bed. Arthur Augustus' way of keeping a secret tickled the Fourth immensely.

The swell of St. Jim's gave it up at last. But he determined to keep awake till half-past ten, and remonstrate again with Blake & Co. if they attempted to carry out the scheme without his assistance. The whole plan would go wrong if deprived of his valuable aid, Arthur Augustus had not the slightest doubt.

Fortunately, by the time ten o'clock rang out Arthur Augustus was fast asleep, without intending it. By that time, too, the rest of the Fourth had dropped off, with the exception of Blake, Herries, and Digby—and one other. The other was Percy Mellish. Curiosity was keeping the Peeping Tom of the Fourth awake. He intended to know what was going on.

Until half-past ten there was silence in the Fourth Form dormitory. Then Blake slipped out of bed and called softly to Herries and Dig. They had dozed off; but they awoke at once and turned out, and the three juniors dressed themselves quickly, and put on their rubber shoes almost without a sound.

"Not a word!" Blake whispered. "If we wake up that chump he will begin talking again and never leave off! Mum's the word!"

And in cautious silence the three juniors quitted the dormitory. But as the door closed softly behind them, Percy Mellish sat up in bed. He waited a few minutes, and then slipped out and crept towards Levison's bed. Levison awoke as Mellish shook him lightly.

"Hallo! What—"

"Hush!" whispered Mellish.

Levison blinked at him in the darkness.

"What is it? What are you out of?"

"Those three rotters have gone out!" whispered Mellish. "Blake, Herries, and Digby! I couldn't see them, but I know it was them!"

"Well, what about it?" growled Levison.

"Don't you see?" Mellish whispered eagerly. "They've gone to break bounds; they'll be outside the House by this time. We know the way they've gone. What a chance to catch them on the hop!"

Levison set his teeth. In the dark Mellish could not see the expression on his face.

"What do you mean, Mellish?"

"You could go after them, and fasten the box-room window on the inside!" said Mellish, with a subdued chuckle. "Then, when they came back, they couldn't get in! See?"

"You rotter!"

"Eh?"

"You worm!" said Levison in a fierce whisper. "Let me catch you doing anything of the sort, you beastly sneak!"

"Why, you—you beast!" stammered Mellish, quite taken aback. As a rule, Levison was quite willing and eager to enter with great keenness into any ill-natured trick, and Mellish had expected him to jump at the suggestion. "What's the matter with you? I tell you they'd be shut out all night, and they'd get into an awful row in the morning. They wouldn't know who'd done it;

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there's no risk. Look here, Levison, I—oh—owwwwww!"

Mellish broke off as a finger and thumb fastened upon his nose in the darkness, with a grip like that of a vice.

He gurgled with anguish.

"Groo—oooh! Leggo! You beast! Ow!"

"You sneaking cad!" said Levison. "I'll stay awake now, and see that you don't play any such dirty trick! Get off, you rotter!"

Mellish jerked his nose away.

"You—you—you—I'll—I'll—"

"You'll go back to bed, or I'll call D'Arcy, and tell him what you suggested!" said Levison savagely.

"You—you—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Mellish crept back to bed, caressing his nose. And, in spite of that excellent opportunity for playing a scurvy trick upon the chums of the Fourth, Mellish remained in bed.

CHAPTER 8.

A Startling Discovery!

"HERE we are!" Tom Merry whispered the words in the darkness of the box-room.

The Terrible Three were first on the spot. Blake, Herries, and Digby came quietly into the box-room, groping their way in the darkness. Blake shut the door softly.

"Right-ho!" he whispered.

"All of you there?"

"Excepting Gussy! We've left him behind."

"Good!" said the Terrible Three all together. They did not agree with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as to the great value of his assistance in their enterprise.

Tom Merry had opened the window which gave upon the roof of an out house. The juniors climbed through the window one after another, and Tom Merry, who went last, carefully closed it behind him. The juniors dropped lightly to the ground.

It was dark outside. A dim mist hung over the school, through which the stars twinkled faintly.

They made their way quietly into the quadrangle. Most of the lights were out in the School House. Some of the Masters' Studies and some of the Sixth were still lighted, and the windows of the Head's house glimmered in the mist. But the doors were all locked at that hour, and the quadrangle was dark and deserted. There was little danger of discovery, unless a surprise visit should be paid to the dormitories—and that was not likely to happen.

"Now the question is, where are we going to watch for Cutts?" whispered Tom Merry. "He will have to get over the wall somewhere—and most likely he will use the slanting oak. I expect he knows that as well as we do."

"But he mayn't," said Blake doubtfully; "and we can't see far in this blessed mist. No good waiting for him in one place while he's getting out at another."

"Not much, certainly."

"Might collar him as he gets out of the House," suggested Manners. "He's almost sure to get out by his study window. It's easy to reach the ground from there. As a matter of fact, he was seen doing it once."

"I—I suppose he's certain to come?" said Digby, with a shiver. It was cold

in the quadrangle. "Levison may have been mistaken—"

"Bow-wow!" said Blake. "Not much good thinking of that now, ass. We're here on spec. Let's see if his light's out, anyway; he mayn't be gone to bed. The Fifth don't have to buzz off the same as we do."

The juniors approached the School House, under Cutts' study window. The window was quite dark.

"Oh, he's in the dorm long ago!" said Tom Merry. "Cutts isn't the one to burn the midnight oil."

"I say, it's jolly cold here!" said Blake. "How long is it off eleven now?"

"There goes a quarter to."

"Groogh! A quarter of an hour to wait! It's beastly cold!"

In the chilly quadrangle, in the cold mist, it was not exactly pleasant. It occurred to the juniors that japing Cutts at that hour of the night was not quite an enjoyable occupation. It had seemed much pleasanter when they discussed it in the warm and well-lighted study. However, it was too late to think of that now. They were in for it.

"He might get out of the House a dozen ways!" growled Lowther. "We'd better wait by the wall. We can separate and watch in half a dozen places. Chap who spots him can give the curlew call."

"Good egg!"

That was decided upon, and the chilly juniors made their way to the school wall, where it bordered the high road. There was a light burning in Taggles' lodge, and they gave that a wide berth.

Near the big gates was the little side gate, which was only used by masters and prefects, who had keys to it. A little farther on was the slanting oak, which had helped fellows to climb the school wall from time immemorial.

In the shadow of the oak Tom Merry took up his stand, and the other fellows strung themselves out at equal distances, to keep watch. They were out of sight of one another in the mist, but the curlew call—the signal of Tom Merry's Boy Scout Patrol—would be sufficient to call them together when the dandy of the Fifth appeared. The jarful of tar was placed in readiness close to the wall.

Then the juniors waited.

It seemed an age to them before eleven o'clock rang out from the old tower. If Gerald Cutts was coming, he could not be very long now.

Tom Merry was keenly on his guard. He was watching the spot that was likeliest to be used by Cutts in getting out of bounds.

He gave a start as he heard the sound of cautious footfalls in the mist. It was only a few minutes after eleven.

Tom Merry bent his head to listen, his heart beating faster. There was no doubt about it; he could distinguish the light and cautious tread, which was following the path down to the side gate, within a dozen yards of where he stood.

He waited, refraining from giving the curlew signal until he was quite sure that it was Cutts. Certainly no one else—unless some other "blade" had determined upon "seeing life" at forbidden hours—was likely to be leaving the school at that hour on a dark and misty night. But he did not want to risk making a mistake.

The stealthy footfalls ceased.

They had stopped at the little gate, and Tom Merry almost held his breath. Had Cutts heard some sound that placed him on his guard? He was not coming in the direction of the slanting

oak; he had stopped at the gate. Was it Cutts?"

A faint sound came through the stillness—the sound of a key being inserted into a keyhole.

Tom Merry started again. Whoever it was that was going out was unlocking the side-gate, to which only masters and prefects had keys. Puzzled and perplexed, Tom Merry crept forward, keeping close to the wall, till he could see the figure at the gate.

He caught his breath. The breaker of bounds did not hear him—did not glance in his direction. Evidently he believed himself alone in the deserted quadrangle.

But Tom Merry saw distinctly the light tweed overcoat, upon which, even in the mist, he could distinguish the inky traces of the mixture which Arthur Augustus had so unfortunately squirted over Kildare by mistake.

He had come there to "spot" Cutts of the Fifth; and it was the captain of St. Jim's whom he had seen leaving the precincts of the school at that hour.

The discovery almost dazed him. Kildare! Was it possible?

It was amazing—staggering—yet there could be no doubt about it. Tom Merry would have given worlds not to have made that discovery. With his brain in a whirl, the captain of the Shell groped his way along the wall to rejoin his comrades.

CHAPTER 9

A Secret to Keep!

S EEN him?" Monty Lowther whispered the question as Tom Merry bumped into him in the mist. "No!"

about?" he asked. "Do you want to warn the rotter that we're here?"

"I want to chuck it and get in," said Tom Merry.

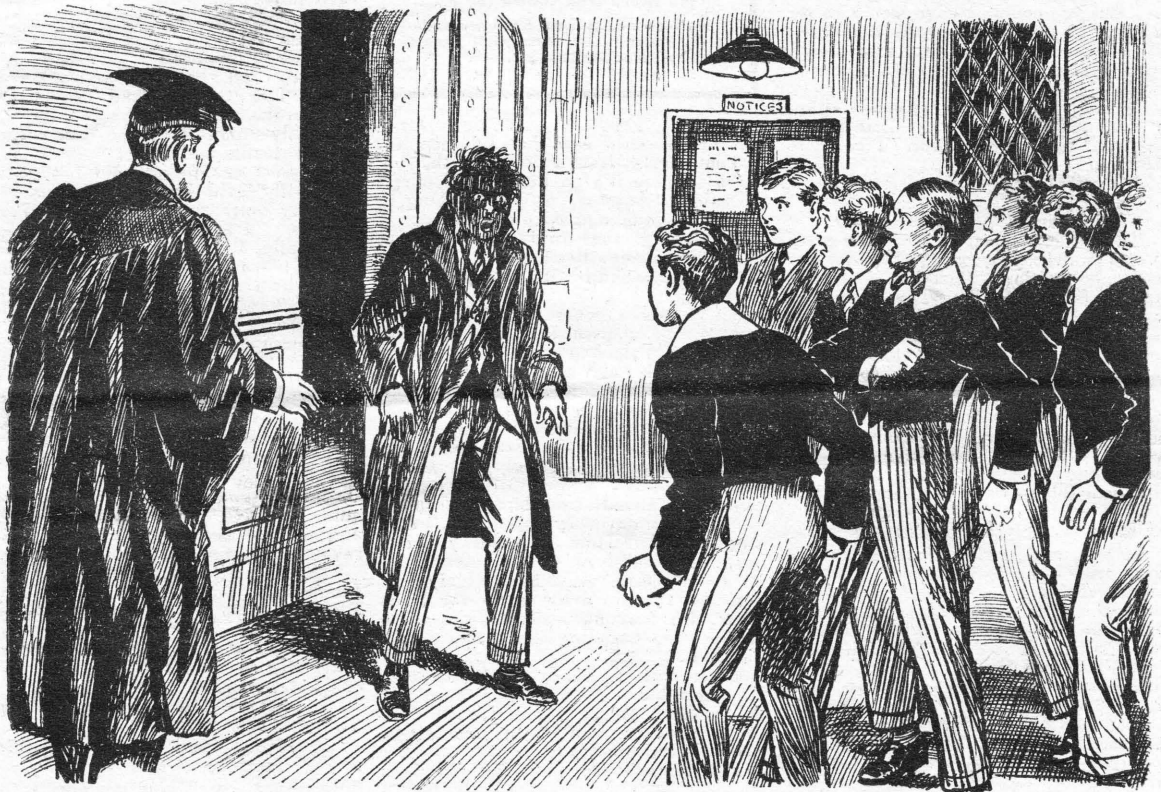
"What the dickens for?" asked Blake. "We haven't come out here for nothing. I suppose? He can't be long now."

But Tom Merry did not feel inclined to wait for the dandy of the Fifth. He was sick of the enterprise after the discovery he had made; and he wished from the bottom of his heart that he had not come out. He was not in a mood now for a jape on Cutts.

"Has anything happened?" asked Blake, peering at the captain of the Shell.

"Yes," said Tom. "I'll tell you later. Let's get in. I'm fed up with this! Call the others, and tell them to chuck it!"

"I don't see chucking it!" said Blake obstinately. "We've been out of bed



"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry, as he recognised the figure splashed and spotted with a purple mixture. "It—it's Kildare!" "Groogh!" came from the Sixth Former. "Where's that young villain? I—I'll —" "Great Scott!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What has happened?"

Tom Merry stood rooted to the ground.

Had the wearer of the overcoat looked towards him, he must have seen him, for the startled Shell fellow was in a clear view now.

But he passed out of the gate without a glance round him. His face Tom Merry could not see; it was in the shadow, and besides, the collar of the coat was turned up to the ears, and his cap was pulled low down over the brow.

But Tom Merry did not need to see the face. He knew the coat; and he knew that only prefects had keys to that gate.

He stood spellbound.

"Kildare!"

The gate closed softly, the spring lock closing of itself. Faintly, from the other side of the high wall, Tom Merry heard footsteps die away.

"I thought I heard somebody!" muttered Lowther.

"It wasn't Cutts."

"Then it was somebody?"

"Yes!" muttered Tom huskily. "It was somebody—let's get in!"

"Somebody else has gone out?" asked Lowther, puzzled.

"Yes; let's get in."

"But, aren't we going to wait for Cutts?"

"No, I—I think not. I wish we hadn't come out."

Monty Lowther peered closely into his chum's face in the mist.

He could see that something had happened.

"What's the matter, Tom?"

Blake came looming through the mist. He had heard the whispering voices.

"What are you fellows burbling

an hour, and I don't see sticking here all that time for nothing. If you're fed up, you can go in, and we'll look after Cutts!"

"We can't go on with it," said Tom in a low voice. "We can't run the slightest risk of a row to-night. Something might come out. Look here! I've just seen somebody go out, and it wasn't Cutts. He went out by the side-gate, and let himself out with a key."

"One of the masters?" said Blake. "Blessed if I see what he can be going out at this time for; but, if he's gone, the coast is clear. It's all right!"

"It wasn't a master. It was Kildare."

Blake jumped.

"Kildare! You're dreaming!"

"I wish I were!" said Tom Merry bitterly. "The chap we've always liked and looked up to—to think he should

come to this! I—I hope he may have had some other reason for going out. It's barely possible, though it's hard to guess what it could be. Anyway, we're not going to say anything about it; and—and let's get in."

"But it couldn't have been—it couldn't—"

"Of course it couldn't," said Herries, who had joined them now. The whispering voices had brought the whole party to the spot. "You've been seeing double, Tom. It's the blessed mist!"

"That's it," said Manners. "It's the mist, Tom. Gussy took Kildare for Cutts the other night in the mist, you know. Now you've taken Cutts for Kildare."

"Must be that," said Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Cutts isn't a prefect," he said. "You know as well as I do that only the prefects have keys to that gate."

"Ye-es, but—"

"But you couldn't have seen him very clearly in this mist," urged Blake.

"He had his collar up, and his cap pulled down, but I knew his coat quite well."

"Poof! Coats are very much alike." "It was the same coat that D'Arcy squirted the mixture over. I could see the marks on it."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Sure, Tom?"

"Quite sure!"

There was a short silence. The proofs were convincing enough, and there could be no doubt that it was the captain of St. Jim's whom Tom Merry had seen let himself out. As for his having any innocent and blameless reason for going out after eleven o'clock on such a night, it was hard to imagine that.

Although the prefects were trusted to use their own judgment to a certain extent as to their hours, the Head would certainly have required an explanation if he had known that any fellow left the school precincts less than an hour before midnight. What reason could Kildare possibly have had?

It was not possible to imagine one. But even if he had a reason, and had obtained his Housemaster's permission to make that extraordinary excursion, how then to account for the stealthy way he had come down the path to the gate? Tom Merry clearly recalled those soft and almost noiseless footsteps. It was only too certain that the senior who had gone out was going out secretly.

"He came sneaking down the path like a thief," said Tom in a low voice. "I scarcely heard him. He had a key to the gate. I spotted the coat at once. I was so close to him that he would have seen me if he'd looked towards me. And he came from the School House, not the New House. I—I don't know what to think about it. To think that old Kildare should be dropping into the kind of thing that Cutts goes in for! It seems impossible."

"It is impossible," said Blake. "There's never been a sign of it—at least— My hat!" He broke off suddenly.

"What have you got in your noddle now?" asked Manners.

Blake coloured uncomfortably.

"I wasn't going to say a word about it," he said hesitatingly. "But now it looks as if it throws some light on the matter. Last night, when I took my lines in to Kildare, there was a rotten racing paper on his table, open, and marked with pencil—the names of the geegees, you know. Kildare turned red, yanked it up, and jammed it into

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the fire when he saw that I'd seen it." Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"I suppose it's no business of ours," he said. "Anyway, we're not going to set up in judgment on old Kildare. If he's playing the giddy goat—and it looks like it—it's not for us to say anything against him. We've got to keep this dark."

There was a general murmur of approval. For precisely the same conduct the Co. looked upon Gerald Cutts as an outsider and a rotter. But it was different with old Kildare. It was not easy to break old habits. They had always liked and admired Kildare, and their loyalty was strong even now. If he had been guilty of foolish weakness, it only caused compassion to mingle with their affection for him.

"Keep it dark, by all means," said Manners. "How jolly lucky Gussy isn't with us!"

"Let's get in," said Blake. "I don't feel much inclined for going for Cutts now. He may have slipped out while we've been standing here, too. Let's chuck it."

There was no dissentient voice now. The half-dozen juniors made their way to the back of the School House, with gloomy enough thoughts in their minds, and climbed quietly in.

The expedition had not been a success. There was not one member of the party who did not wish sincerely that it had never been undertaken. But it was too late to wish that now. They had made an inadvertent discovery, and it weighed upon their minds. They went to their dormitories in glum silence and turned in.

In the Shell dormitory all the fellows were asleep, but Blake & Co. found one wakeful in the Fourth Form quarters—it was Levison.

"What luck?" came Levison's whispering voice through the darkness, as the three juniors crept towards their beds.

"Rotten!" said Blake briefly.

"Didn't you spot 'im?"

"No."

"You didn't wait long enough, then," said Levison. "I'm jolly certain that he was going out to-night. As a matter of fact, I heard him asking St. Leger to go with him, and St. Leger said he wouldn't. You were duffers to miss him."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake gruffly.

And the juniors turned in, but it was

some time before they slept. The discovery they had made worried them. It was easy enough to agree to keep it dark; but it was not pleasant to have such a secret to keep, and the shock to their belief and faith in Kildare had been a rude one. Truly their nocturnal expedition was very far from having been a success.

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy Wants to Know!

CLANG, clang clang! Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes as the rising-bell clanged out. He groped under his pillow for his famous monocle, where it always reposed at night, and jammed it into his eye, and surveyed Blake, Herries, and Digby, who were feeling decidedly disinclined to get up that morning. They were feeling the effects of their loss of sleep overnight.

Arthur Augustus' first thoughts were for the expedition that had been planned, and he had remembered—rather late—that he had intended to stay awake and keep the juniors from recklessly undertaking the task without his invaluable assistance.

"I twust you fellows did not go out aftah all," said Arthur Augustus.

"They jolly well did!" said Percy Mellish. "I heard them."

"Weally, Blake, it was vewy weekless of you! I suppose the whole thing ended in a muck-up?" said D'Arcy.

"Yes," said Blake.

"Did you collah Cutts, aftah all?"

"Shurup!"

"Wats! There is no harm in the fellows knowin' about it, now it's all ovah," said Arthur Augustus. "Cutts won't be able to say anythin' about it if you caught him out of bounds, you know. Did you collah Cutts, or didn't you?"

"Faith, and was that the little game?" asked Reilly. "Why couldn't you tell a chap in time? I'd have taken a hand with pleasure."

"Same here, I guess," said Lumley-Lumley. "What luck did you have, Blake?"

"None!" said Blake briefly.

"You failed to spot Cutts, of course?" said Arthur Augustus, in the tone of one who had fully expected as much.

"Didn't see hide nor hair of him," admitted Blake.

"Pwobably you gave yourselves away," assented Arthur Augustus. "I must say I am not surprised. I suppose he spotted you and gave you a wide berth. It is extremely unforch that I was not on the spot. Did nothing happen at all?"

"Time you were out of bed," said Blake, not caring to reply to that question. "Are you going to burble there all the morning?"

"I wefuse to have my wemarks chawactewised as burblin'!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You are extremely wude this mornin', Blake. I asked you a question—"

"Time you were out of bed," said Herries, dragging off D'Arcy's bed-clothes, and rolling him out on the floor.

The swell of St. Jim's gave up asking questions for a time, and devoted himself to his morning toilet.

Blake and his chums were down before Arthur Augustus, who was generally last out of the dormitory, having many touches to give to his toilet that the other fellows did not trouble about. But the elegant junior joined them in the quadrangle soon afterwards. He

wanted to know exactly what had happened the previous night, principally for the purpose of explaining how much better things would have gone if he had been there to give capable directions.

But his chums were not anxious to give an account of the previous night's happenings. Arthur Augustus was not exactly the fellow they would have chosen to keep a secret. They congratulated themselves on the fact that he had not been with the party. The honour of D'Arcy was unimpeachable, but his manner of keeping a secret was not quite reliable.

The present secret was an important one. If Kildare's folly ever became public, the chums were determined that it should not be by their means. It was an irksome secret, but it was one that it was very necessary to keep.

At the same time, it was extremely awkward to keep their bosom chum out of their confidence. Blake saw difficulties ahead.

"Now, I want to know all about it, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "You acted in a vewy weckless way, and, of course, you made a muck of it. You admit that?"

"Oh, yes!" said Blake. "Guilty, my lord!"

"Pway don't be widiculous, Blake. I suppose you don't even know whethah that wottah Cutts went out at all?"

"Quite so."

"I suppose he dodged you—he would," agreed D'Arcy. "Didn't you heah anythin' at all suspicious?"

"I didn't," said Blake, speaking for himself.

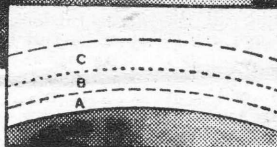
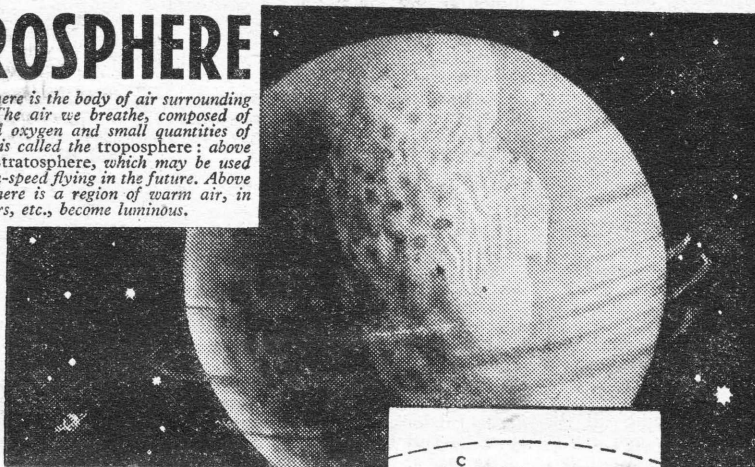
"You didn't see anybody or any-thing?"

"Oh, yes! I saw Dig——"

(Continued on next page.)

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The Aerosphere is the body of air surrounding the earth. The air we breathe, composed of nitrogen and oxygen and small quantities of other gases, is called the troposphere: above that is the stratosphere, which may be used for very high-speed flying in the future. Above the stratosphere is a region of warm air, in which meteors, etc., become luminous.



(a) Troposphere
(b) Stratosphere
(c) Warm air region

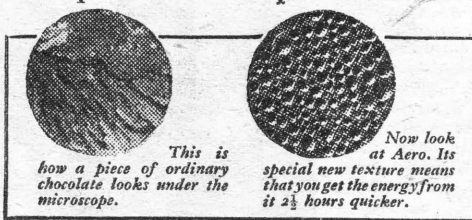
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"Weally, Blake—"

"And Herries—"

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake. Howevah, here is Tom Mowwy, and pewwaps he may be able to give me a sensible account of your wiculous muckah."

"Oh, let it drop!" urged Blake. "It's all over now, you know."

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus joined the Terrible Three, who had just come out of the School House. "Good-mornin', deah boys! So you made a muckah of it, aafh all?"

"What could you expect when you weren't with us?" said Monty Lowther blandly.

"Yaas, wathah! Howevah, tell me pweicely what happened, and I will point out what you ought to have done, you know, and you will have more sense anothah time. Where did you wait for Cutts?"

"In the quad."

"Yaas, I know that. But what part of the quad?"

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. They saw that Blake had told the swell of St. Jim's nothing, and they took their cue from that.

"Near the wall," said Tom Merry, after reflection.

"And you didn't see the wottah?"

"Cutts? Oh, no!"

"Levison is quite certain that he went out, you know."

"Then we must have missed him," said Lowther cheerily. "Deprived of your very valuable assistance, Gussy, you know—"

"Yaas, but it is vevy odd, all the same. What time did you come in?"

"Lemme see. About half-past eleven."

"Cutts must have gone before that, if he went at all," said Arthur Augustus decidedly. "I weally think you have played the giddy ox, deah boys. Pwobably he passed quite close to you in the mist."

"That's how we 'mist' him," said Lowther humorously.

"Didn't you listen for his footsteps, though? You can hear footsteps at a gweat distance by plain' your eah on the gwound. I suppose you nevah thought of that?"

"Can't say I did."

"And you heard nothin' at all?"

That was a poser. Arthur Augustus' thirst for information was decidedly awkward. The chums of the Shell were silent. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass from one to another.

"I asked you a question, deah boys," he said mildly.

"Yes, you generally are asking questions," said Tom Merry restively.

"Let's have a punt about with a footer and get an appetite for breakfast."

"But I want to know—"

"Come on!" said Tom, as Bernard Glyn came out of the House with a footer under his arm. "Here we are again! On the ball!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

And the Terrible Three were after the football, and Arthur Augustus was unable to ask any more questions just then. He was left with a thoughtful frown upon his noble face. Arthur Augustus was very far from being of a suspicious nature, but he could not help feeling that the fellows were keeping something back from him. There was something behind that general disinclination to talk about the affair of the previous night.

"Bai Jove!" D'Arcy muttered to himself. "The boundahs are keepin' somethin' dark. They've got themselves into

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some twouble, and they haven't the cheek to tell me, I suppose. Howevah, I shall insist upon it."

Arthur Augustus followed the footballers. But the Terrible Three steered the footer across the quadrangle, and Figgins & Co. entered into the struggle for the possession of it.

Arthur Augustus had no chance of buttonholing any of the secret-keepers before breakfast. After breakfast they contrived to dodge him until the bell rang for first lesson, and D'Arcy had to go into the Form-room with his thirst for information still unslaked.

After lessons he joined Blake and Herries and Digby as they came out of the Form-room. There was a very determined expression upon his aristocratic countenance—the expression of a fellow who was not to be trifled with.

"Blake, deah boy, I have been thinkin'—"

"That it's a good idea to get in a little footer practice before dinner?" asked Blake. "Right, Gussy, as you always are. Come on!"

"I was not thinkin' about footah—"

"Then you ought to have been. This way," said Blake.

"You are keepin' somethin' back fwom me," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I insist upon havin' a full account of what happened last night."

"Oh, that's ancient history now!" urged Blake. "Let's go down to the footer, old chap. Use your feet instead of your tongue for a bit. You ought to exercise both ends, you know."

Arthur Augustus fixed a very reproachful look upon his chums. Blake, Herries, and Digby looked and felt uncomfortable. It was exceedingly unpleasant to be in the position of keeping a secret from their pal and studymate.

"This is not what I should have expected fwom my fwriends," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I am not askin' questions fwom idle cuwiosity. I have a wight to know how the mattah went off, as I was one of the party, and was only kept behind because Kildare was a suspicious beast. It isn't cwicket, deah boys."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Digby uneasily.

"It isn't cwicket!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "If I had gone and you had stayed in, I should have told you all about it, fwom beginnin' to end. You are aware of that."

Blake had to admit that.

"And yet you are keepin' somethin' back fwom me," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What has put that idea into your head?" said Blake feebly.

"If you assuah me that you are not keepin' anythin' back, Blake, of course I shall be satisfied," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I should not doubt your word—you know that."

But Blake could not very well give that assurance, for undoubtedly he was keeping something back.

"Well, Blake?" said D'Arcy, after a pause.

"Ahem!"

"Out with it, deah boy! If you are in some difficulty,

you know, I will advise you like a fathah. You can wely on a fellow of tact and judgment like me," said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

Blake grinned. He was not yearning after fatherly advice from his noble chum. Neither did he place a full reliance upon Arthur Augustus' gifts of tact and judgment.

"I am waitin', Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Look here, Gussy," said Blake desperately, "I can't very well tell you a whopper and shut you up. Won't you ring off of your own accord?"

"I am waitin'!" repeated D'Arcy frigidly.

"The fact is, I—we—I don't want to tell you!" said Blake, with a burst of frankness. "It's nothing, really—nothing to do with us. Now, be a good chap and don't say anything more about it."

"Why don't you want to tell me? If you have a good reason, of course—"

"Well, you would babble, you know," said Blake, rather unfortunately.

Arthur Augustus stiffened up like a poker.

"I wegard that as insultin', Blake! You fellows know vevy well how I keep a secret!"

"We do!" murmured Herries. "We does!"

"I am as mum as an oystah, you know. Nobody has got a word out of me about our expidish last night. You fellows must have been vevy careless somehow to make old Kildare so vevy suspicious. But I would twust you with a secret all the same."

Blake gazed helplessly at his comrades.

"Howevah," continued D'Arcy, with



"I tell you, Blake & Co. have gone out to break bounds, here, I—oh—ow—!! Mellish broke off as a finger and the sneaking cad!"

lofty dignity, "I will not pweess you. If you cannot take me into your confidence and wely on me, you need tell me nothin'!"

"That's right, old chap!"

"But, in the cires, of course, it is imposs for our fwiefndship to continue!"

"Eh?"

"I decline to wemain the pal of fellows who wefuse to wegard me as a pwopah person to place confidence in!"

"Now, look here, Gussy——"

"I have nothin' more to say!" said Arthur Augustus.

And he turned on his heel and walked away, with his aristocratic nose very high in the air.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake. "Gussy! I say, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus' noble nose was elevated a little more, but he did not look round. He departed, the picture of frozen dignity, and Blake, Herries, and Digby exchanged glances of dismay.

CHAPTER 11.

Dropped!

TOM MERRY was chatting with Manners and Lowther, looking on at the footer practice, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bore down upon them.

There was no escape for the Terrible Three unless they took to their heels, so they faced the swell of St. Jim's resignedly, prepared to go through it. The expression of lofty dignity upon the countenance of Arthur Augustus showed them that the matter was very serious.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, with great affability. "What a giddy picture you look to-day, Gussy!"

"Nevah mind that now," said Arthur

Augustus. As a rule, it was quite easy to draw him upon sartorial topics, but just now the attempt was a rank failure.

"I want to speak to you fellows about——"

"Is Blake comin' down to the footer?" asked Manners.

"I have no knowledge whatever of what Blake intends to do!" said D'Arcy icily. "I have droppod Blake!"

"Dropped him!" ejaculated Lowther. "Was he hurt?"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"I hope you dropped him on something soft—say, a mattress?" said Lowther, with an expression of concern.

"I mean that I have droppod his acquaintance, Lowthah!"

"But he's got a lot of acquaintances here," said Lowther, misunderstanding again. "Which of them have you dropped? And where did you drop him?"

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah! You undahstand me perfectly well. I decline to wecognise Blake as a fwiefnd any longah, and the same with Hewwies and Digby. I twust you fellows will not compel me to tweat you in the same mannah."

"I trust not!" said Lowther solemnly. "Blake and Hewwies and Digby have wefused to tell me what happened last night. They are keepin' somethin' back. Of course, you admit that I have a wight to know, as I was weally one of the party."

"Ye-es," said Tom Merry.

"Then I twust that you will acquaint me with the whole of the cires, deah boy."

Silence.

"I am waitin' to be acquainted with the cires, Tom Mewwy."

"You—you see——"

"Ahem!" said Manners. "Little boys shouldn't ask questions!" suggested Monty Lowther brightly. "Then they wouldn't get any—any stories told them."

"You mean that you wefuse to take me into your confidence on the mattah?" said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately way.

"Not exactly that," said Tom Merry, scratching his curly head in perplexity.

"But—but, you see, in the circumstances—ahem——"

"Exactly!" said Lowther. "Tom Merry expresses it with all the clearness of a great statesman. In the—ahem—circumstances—ahem—ahem we——"

But Arthur Augustus declined to smile. Evidently the swell of St. Jim's was taking very much to heart that want of confidence on the part of his friends.

"You have nothin' to say?" he said.

"To—to say?" asked Tom Merry, looking round helplessly. "Ye-es; it—it's a fine afternoon, considering how misty it was last night!"

"And I think the rain is going to keep off, after all," said Lowther. "We look like having good weather for the match on Saturday."

"Vewy well!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "Enough said! You will kindly wefwain fwom speakin' to me again! Fwom this moment I decline to know you!"

"Gussy, old chap——"

"Gussy, you ass——"

Arthur Augustus walked away. "Oh crumbs!" murmured Monty Lowther. "What an ass Blake was to let him know that there was something being kept dark! Gussy's quite right; he has a right to know, and it's rather rotten not to tell him only——"

"Only he would let it out," said Tom Merry uneasily. "He can't keep a secret for toffee! And we can't run the slightest risk of giving old Kildare away. Whatever sort of a fool he makes of himself, it's up to us to stand by him. He's always been decent to us—excepting when his temper's rubbed the wrong way, of course."

"I feel rather mean towards Gussy," confessed Lowther. "Still, if we're going to keep it dark, we must keep it dark, and that's all about it."

And Tom Merry and Manners agreed that it was. They, too, did not quite feel satisfied in regard to Arthur Augustus, and they knew how wounded he must feel. But what was to be done?

They turned to the footer, to drive the unpleasant matter from their mind.

Talbot had just come down with his football. He gave them a cheery smile. He had been chatting with Kildare before he came down to Little Side, and his talk with the captain of St. Jim's seemed to have had a very brightening effect upon his spirits.

"Kildare's a splendid fellow!" was his first remark, as he joined the Terrible Three. He did not know that the Shell fellows had just been discussing that very person. Even Talbot had not been taken into the secret of the happenings of the previous night. He was perfectly reliable, of course, but Tom Merry & Co. did not feel that they had a right to betray Kildare, even to a fellow who was certain to keep the secret. The less said about the matter the better, was their wise decision.

"Kildare?" said Tom. "I saw you talking to him. What has he done?"

"It's about Cutts," Talbot coloured a little. "You know the way he has been chipping me ever since Tresham was sacked."

"And we haven't made him sit up for it yet," said Monty Lowther.

"All in good time," remarked Manners.

"That's what I want to tell you," said Talbot hastily. "Kildare came to know of it somehow, and he's seen Cutts. And there won't be any more of it. Kildare's put it straight to him, and Cutts knows that if there's any more of it, he's got to have it out with the Head."

"Good old Kildare!" said Tom Merry.

"The sitting-up process is good for fellows like Cutts," said Monty Lowther. "He shan't be deprived of our kind attentions, all the same. Rely on us."

"I want you to chuck it," said Talbot.

"My dear chap——"

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully. "Least said soonest mended," he agreed. "If Cutts behaves himself, we'll let him live."

"But it's jolly decent of Kildare to chip in like that, isn't it?" said Talbot. "He's a splendid chap!"

"Topping!" said Tom Merry. At any other time he could have joined without reserve in any praise of Kildare; but now—— "Let's get on to the footer!" he said.

"Talk of angels!" murmured Monty

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.



id Mellish. "You could shut them out all night! Look fastened on his nose with a grip like that of a vice." "You aimed Levison."

Lowther. "Here's his Highness of the Fifth!"

Cutts passed them on his way to Big Side. He did not glance towards Talbot. The sarcastic smile, the sneering remark which the juniors had learnt to expect, were wanting now. Evidently Cutts had learned his lesson.

Tom Merry & Co. went into the field cheerily. That little instance of Kildare's kindness of heart had touched them, and it made them all the more resolute to keep his secret—even at the price of freezing looks from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 12.

The Cold Shoulder!

AND Arthur Augustus was very freezing.

Feeling that his personal dignity was at stake—a very important point indeed with the swell of St. Jim's—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was adamant.

Tom Merry & Co. felt a little conscience-smitten at leaving him out of the secret, though with the best possible motives, and they were willing to go to any length to placate the offended swell of the Fourth. But Arthur Augustus was not to be placated.

Like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry. And his icy reserve was impenetrable.

At dinner he appeared to be unaware of the existence of Blake, Herries, and Digby. The Terrible Three were at another table; but Blake & Co. had the full force of D'Arcy's dignity brought to bear upon them, so to speak.

Blake politely passed him things, and was thanked with great courtesy, but with a far-away expression. Dig ventured to give Arthur Augustus a jocular jab in the ribs. Arthur Augustus drew a little farther away. Herries asked him whether he was playing in the match on Saturday, and he was afflicted with sudden deafness.

The other Fourth Formers were not long in noticing the state of affairs, and it caused many smiles. Some good-natured fellows chipped in after dinner with the kind intention of pouring oil upon the troubled waters. But they could not get at what was the matter.

Blake & Co. had nothing to say, and from Arthur Augustus there was no information to be gleaned.

"But you've had a row, surely?" said Reilly of the Fourth.

"I'm not in the habit of havin' wows, Welly."

"Well, you're not speaking to the chaps in your study, anyway, Gussy darling!"

"Quite so."

"Sure; and you must have a reason?"

"Yaas! I'm not satisfied with them, and I no longah regard them as friends, that is all!" said Arthur Augustus. And he walked away, only to run into another peacemaker, this time Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

"I guess you've got trouble in your study—what?" said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley good-naturedly. "Can't a chap do anything to help?"

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy! No!"

"But what have you gone off on your ear for?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"I wefuse to have my attitude described as goin' off on my eah!" replied Arthur Augustus; and he departed, and a minute later was collared by Harry Hammond.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

"Somethin' up—wot?" asked Hammond. The Cockney schoolboy was very chummy with Arthur Augustus, for whom he had a tremendous admiration, which was really not undeserved.

"Yaas, deah boy."

"Nothin' serious, I 'ope?" said Hammond anxiously. "If there's anythin' a friend can do, you 'ave only got to ask 'Arry 'Ammond."

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"That's all wight, deah boy. There's nothin' to be done."

In the Form-room that afternoon D'Arcy's attitude was unchanged.

Digby playfully caught him in the ear with a paper pellet, but was unable to make him smile. After lessons the three chums laid in wait for D'Arcy in the passage, with beseeching looks. Arthur Augustus walked past them as if he did not see them. In the doorway the Terrible Three met him, and they put on their sweetest and friendliest smiles. Arthur Augustus was blind to them. He walked on without a smile.



The opening batsman goes out to get the coal!

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Calverley, 58, Thompson Road, Dagenham, Essex.

"We're cut!" said Monty Lowther, with humorous despair. "Gussy is going to freeze us to death. We shall be frozen to death shortly. That will be 'an ice' state of affairs."

But Monty Lowther's wretched pun passed unnoticed. The Shell fellows were really feeling worried. Blake, Herries, and Dig joined them.

"Now, what are we going to do?" asked Blake. "This is rotten, you know. If it was anybody else I'd leave him to stew in his own juice, but I don't like being on these terms with Gussy. You see, he's in the right, in a way. We've got to make it up to him somehow."

"Without telling him the giddy secret," said Manners.

"Oh, of course!"

"What about getting a special feed ready in the study?" suggested Tom Merry. "When Gussy comes in to tea, and finds a whacking feed all ready in his honour, that's bound to touch his heart."

"Not a bad idea! How's the money market?"

The money market proved to be sound on examination. The six juniors proceeded to the tuckshop and laid in supplies. They applied themselves

especially with the things they knew Arthur Augustus liked. They conveyed them to the study in a hopeful frame of mind.

Study No. 6 presented a festive appearance. A cheerful fire blazed in the grate, the electric light gleamed on a well-spread table, and there was a fragrance of hot toast and frying rashers in the study.

Arthur Augustus had gone down to footer practice, and he was sure to come back hungry, and then the unexpected spread all ready in Study No. 6 could not fail, as Tom Merry suggested, to touch his heart.

All was ready, and dusk was deepening in the quad; but the swell of St. Jim's did not arrive in the study.

Blake looked anxiously out of the window.

"Where is the duffer?" he said. "It's too dark to be kicking a footer about now. Why the dickens doesn't he come?"

"I'll look in the dorm," said Dig. "Maybe changing there."

Digby cut along to the Fourth Form dormitory, but Arthur Augustus was not there. He looked into the Common-room downstairs, but the Common-room was empty. He returned unsuccessfully to Study No. 6.

"Not come in?" he asked, looking round the study.

"No!" growled Blake. "Haven't you seen him?"

"No. Maybe gone over to tea in the New House."

"Oh, rotten!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I'll jolly well go and see!" said Blake crossly.

Blake departed. He came back in ten minutes, with the report that Arthur Augustus was not in the New House.

"Then the silly ass must be gone out," said Monty Lowther. "No good letting a good feed spoil. Better pile in!"

That was evidently the only thing to be done. The juniors sat down to tea, leaving a generous supply for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy when he should turn up. But they had finished tea, and he had not turned up, and they debated what had become of him. It was clear by this time that he was staying away from the study intentionally.

The Terrible Three departed from the study, disappointed at the result of their excellent scheme. They had had a good tea, certainly, and that was one comfort.

Blake, Herries, and Digby remained in an exasperated frame of mind. The study funds had been almost exhausted for that feed of reconciliation, and it had been a ghastly failure. In the grate D'Arcy's toast and rashers were drying up, to keep warm, and they would certainly not be very nice if the swell of St. Jim's did not soon come.

"Hallo! Here he is!" exclaimed Blake suddenly, as the elegant figure of the swell of the Fourth appeared in the doorway.

"Tea's ready, Gussy—more than ready," said Digby.

"We've kept yours warm for you," said Herries.

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He was collecting his books, and the three juniors watched him in wonder.

"Are you deaf?" bawled Blake.

"Don't you want any tea?"

Arthur Augustus looked at him coldly.

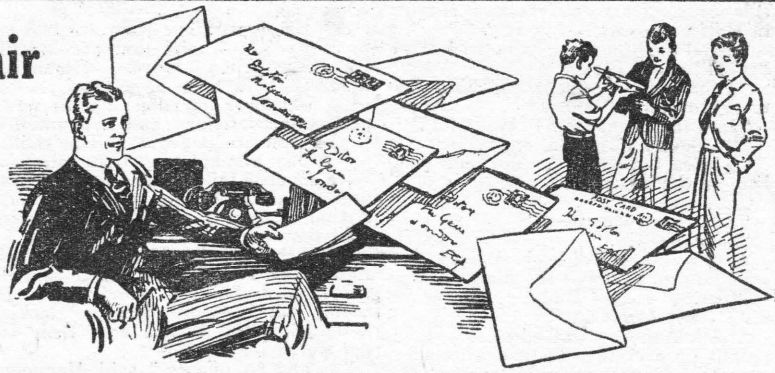
"I have had tea in Hall," he replied icily.

"Well, my—my hat!"

(Continued on page 18.)

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal.
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, Chums! I had a letter this week from Dick Vleeskruyer, a reader in Holland, in which he sends me his list of the ten best GEM stories of last year. I thought readers would like to see his selections. Here they are:

1—The "Toff" series. 2—"The Run-away." 3—The "Captaincy" series. 4—"Gore's Guilty Secret." 5—"The Laugh's on the First Eleven." 6—"Fatty Wynn's Hunger-Strike." 7—"The Mystery of Eastwood House." 8—"The Shanghaied Schoolboys." 9—"Tom Merry's Big Fight." 10—"The Traitor" and its sequel.

It is interesting to note that seven of this reader's selections correspond with those voted for by the GEM Club at the Modern School, Surbiton, whose list I published recently. The order of popularity is not quite the same, however, and the three different stories which Reader Vleeskruyer has included in his list are Nos. 2, 6, and 9—all very good yarns.

Thanks for writing, Dick. I have answered your query in "Replies to Readers."

"THE ST. JIM'S CHARITY FUND!"

Now, let's take a look at next Wednesday's programme. The St. Jim's story, bearing the above title, shows Martin Clifford at his best, brightest, and funniest, and he introduces some very clever touches into the yarn.

It deals with the efforts of the St. Jim's juniors to raise funds in aid of the Wayland Cottage Hospital, which is in a bad way. Naturally, the keen rivalry between the various Co.'s enters into the matter, and each Co. has its own scheme for collecting cash. Their schemes, however, though bringing in plenty of money for the fund, also cause not a little fun and excitement—particularly the auction sale and the freak football match.

If you like a good laugh—and who doesn't?—see that you read this highly amusing story.

"THE MYSTERY RAIDER!"

If you have read the Greyfriars story in this number, no doubt you are wondering who the Remove raider of the pantry is. His identity is certainly a baffling mystery, and I don't think many readers can have spotted him yet.

In next week's gripping chapters Harry Wharton & Co. discover the delinquent, and it is a big shock to them when they learn who he is. The story ends on a thrilling and sensational note, and readers will enjoy it

immensely. So take my advice, chums, and order your GEM early.

And, by the way, while you are at your newsagent's, take a look at this week's "Magnet." It contains a grand cover-to-cover yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., and the chums of Highcliffe, and it's called "Ponsonby Pulls the Strings!" Take my tip and read this ripping yarn—it's much too good to miss.

REPLIES TO READERS.

H. Adams, Eastbourne.—Glad to hear that you think the GEM is as good as ever! Yes, a new series of stories started in 1931.

P. Blagg, Hall Green, Birmingham.—So you have written two school stories? Well, you can pick up a lot of tips from reading Martin Clifford's yarns. Persevere, and one day you may be a successful author.

Miss J. Holt, Camberley, Surrey.—I expect Cousin Ethel will figure in another story soon. She is 16; Kildare is 17 years 8 months; Figgins, 15 years 3 months; Blake, 15 years 4 months; D'Arcy, 15 years 3 months.

M. Mason, Isleworth, Middlesex.—Yes, the reformation of Ernest Levison will be the theme of a series of stories in due course. Have another try at winning half-a-crown.

B. Unwin, Keighley, Yorks.—Pleased to know you like the "Toff" series. I am sorry, but I cannot tell you the exact date of the coming of Johnny Bull.

E. Whiting, Fulham, S.W.6.—I'm afraid I cannot help you to obtain back numbers of the GEM published in 1932 and 1933.

T. Hopkinson, Hyde, Cheshire.—Thanks for your interesting letter. Pleased to hear you enjoyed "Tom Merry & Co. Declare War!"—which was published in the "Schoolboys' Own Library." A Rookwood yarn appears in No. 296 of this library. It's called: "The Fourth Form at Rookwood!" and is on sale next Thursday, April 1st.

W. F. Wyatt, Camberwell, S.E.5.—Very pleased to hear that you have started to read the GEM again. If you cannot get those back numbers of the "Toff" series, write to the Back Number Dept., The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Mrs. Simpson, Stowmarket.—Thanks very much for your congratulatory letter, and I am pleased to hear that you are such a staunch reader of the com-

panion papers. Yes, it would be grand to have two issues of the GEM a week. But what about the poor author? It would mean too much work for Martin Clifford.

G. Taylor, London, N.W.1.—Glad you enjoyed the "Toff" series. I will put your suggestions to Martin Clifford.

I. Miller, Paisley, Scotland.—Martin Clifford and Frank Richards are not one and the same man. One author couldn't write in a week as much as these two do. Glad you have been fixed up with a pen pal. I am sorry, but your jokes were not quite suitable. Have another try.

J. Halliday, Burton-on-Trent.—Send your school story to me, and I will give you my opinion of it. Sorry, but your joke was used in the GEM some time ago.

J. Pilling, Wigan.—You have a fine collection of GEMS. It shows that you are an enthusiastic reader to look after them as you do. Martin Clifford is in good health, and looks well enough to go on for ever. Your joke didn't quite hit the mark. Send along another some time.

D. Vleeskruyer, Amsterdam, Holland.—If you cannot get the "Schoolboys' Own Library" from your newsagent, write to our Subscription Dept., at the above address, and they will forward you the rates for supplying this library regularly.

That's the lot for this week, chums. Chin, chin!

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest with each other. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on this page, and posted to the address given above.

Wallace Smith, 23, Dalry Street, Glasgow, E.2; age 12-16; stamps, films, coins; overseas.

J. Hill, 77, Hamlock Street, Leicester 1; age 14-16; swimming, football, cycling; U.S.A., China, India.

R. Armstead, Erikin, Western Australia; pen pals; age 15-18; Africa, America.

Miss Lorice Thomas, Haroldsmoor, West Cross, Swansea; girl correspondents; swimming, sketching, reading, hiking, film stars, collecting photographs; Canada, abroad.

Leslie Weston, 5, Bath Hill Terrace, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk; age 16-17; fishing, cycling, stamps; Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and any other country.

(Continued on page 27.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

PEN PALS COUPON
27-3-37

"In the circus, I do not care to feed in this study. I am goin' to have my tea in Hall regulahly in futuah."

"What are you going to do with those books?" asked Blake.

"I am goin' to take them down into the Form-woom."

"Into the Form-room! What for?"

"To do my prepawation."

"You're not going to do your prep here in the study?"

"Certainly not."

"Look here, Gussy——"

"Good-evenin'!"

And, with a pile of books under either arm, he walked out of the study.

"Gussy!" roared Blake. "Fathead! Silly ass! Come in!"

Arthur Augustus walked away. Blake caught up a cushion to send after him, but Dig restrained his exasperated chum.

"Oh, the ass!" growled Blake. "How long is this going on, I wonder? The—the frabjous ass! Suppose we go after him and bump him?"

"We can't bump him into making friends again," said Dig. "Give him his head; he'll come round."

That was apparently the only thing to be done. The juniors settled down to their own preparation, giving Arthur Augustus his head. But as for coming round, D'Arcy showed no sign whatever of that.

The juniors did not see him again till the Fourth went up to bed.

"Hallo, Gussy!" exclaimed Dig.

No reply.

"Have you gone deaf, fathead?" bellowed Blake.

Then Arthur Augustus looked at his old chums.

"I shall be obliged to you if you will not address me," he said. "I do not desiah to converse with you!"

"Fathead!"

"Wats!"

And in that cheery mood the chums of the Fourth went to bed. Arthur Augustus had let the sun go down upon his wrath.

CHAPTER 13.

Let In!

THE next day Tom Merry & Co. were considerably exercised in their minds concerning Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The state of affairs had attracted the attention of no end of fellows in the School House, and even Figgins & Co. of the New House had noticed it, and wanted to know what it was all about.

Arthur Augustus was quite a prominent personage in the Lower School, at least; he was the glass of fashion, and the mould of form. Naturally his singular conduct in giving the cold shoulder to his old chums caused much comment.

The four fellows in Study No. 6 had always been inseparable. There were plenty of warm arguments in the study, and even rows sometimes, and their manner of speaking to one another did not always indicate close friendship and esteem. But their attachment was founded upon a rock, so to speak, and was supposed to be quite unassailable. And now it was broken—badly.

Probably Arthur Augustus felt the estrangement quite as much as the other fellows did, but he gave no sign of it. He had other resources, too. Hammond, after ascertaining that it was out of the question to repair the breach between D'Arcy and his best chums, insisted upon the swell of St. Jim's digging in

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,519.

his study, his studymates being quite agreeable.

So that day Arthur Augustus had tea in Study No. 5, and that evening did his preparation there. Hammond, indeed, would have been very glad to keep him there for good; but he was a good-natured fellow, and he wanted to pour oil on troubled waters if he could.

But his attempts in that direction were hopeless failures, and he gave them up, so far as D'Arcy was concerned. Arthur Augustus' dignity was a stone wall that was not to be penetrated.

Later that evening Hammond dropped into Study No. 6, after Blake and his chums had finished their prep. He found the three juniors looking bothered. The breach with their old pal worried them.

"I 'ope no offence," said Hammond in his peculiar idiom, which his training at St. Jim's had not eradicated. "I don't like to see Gussy on these 'ere terms. Why can't you fellows make it up—wot?"

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Blake irritably. "Of course, 'tain't my business," said Hammond hastily. "I don't want to interfere."

"That's all right," said Blake. "If you could make Gussy see reason, we'd be obliged to you. But there's no arguing with Gussy."

"Wot 'ave you done to 'im?" asked Hammond.

"Nothing," said Blake shortly.

Hammond shook his head.

"It's up to you," he said decidedly. "D'Arcy ain't to blame, I know that. My advice to you is to own up as you're in the wrong, and he'll look over it. That's 'ow I look at it!"

And Hammond departed with that excellent advice. Blake & Co. looked at one another.

"Cheeky ass!" growled Herries.

Blake rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Well, he's right in a way," he remarked. "Gussy has some grounds for complaint. Of course, we know he can't keep a secret, and it's no good telling him one. I wish we'd never gone out that night. Blow Cutts! Blow Kildare! Blow everybody!"

"I—I suppose it wouldn't do to tell him?" said Dig hesitatingly. "We could impress upon him to be very careful, you know."

Blake grunted.

"You know how he keeps a secret, Dig!"

"Well, yes; but this is a special sort of one. Even Gussy might understand that it was necessary to be careful. Besides, it's all very well to keep Kildare's blessed secrets, but I don't see falling out with our own pal because Kildare chose to play the giddy ox."

"I've been thinking of that," said Herries. "Kildare's a good chap—or he was a good chap—and we don't want to give him away. But, after all, a chap's own pal comes first. It is a bit thick leaving Gussy out of it. Any of us would be offended for the same kind of thing!"

"I suppose we should," admitted Blake.

"Of course we should," said Digby. "After all, Kildare shouldn't have done it. He'd no right to do it. If he's taking up Cutts' blackguardly ways, he must expect to run the same risk. I don't see quarrelling with Gussy because a chap in the Sixth Form has done something to be ashamed of, and it's to be kept dark!"

Blake ruminated. After all, Arthur Augustus had a right to be admitted to the secret; and he might realise its awful importance, and keep it more carefully than he kept secrets as a rule.

The chums already felt that they had treated him rather shabbily.

"Make him promise to keep it dark before we tell him anything," said Herries. "Impress on him that it might mean the sack for old Kildare, and—and trust to luck!"

"Here he is!" said Dig, as the elegant form of Arthur Augustus passed the study doorway, coming away from Hammond's study.

"Gussy!" called out Blake, making up his mind.

Arthur Augustus walked on.

"After him!" said Blake desperately. "We'll tell him, and chance it. If he lets it out we'll scalp him, that's all!"

The juniors rushed down the passage after D'Arcy. He heard them coming, but he did not look back or stop. He had to stop, however, for three pairs of hands were laid upon him, effectually arresting his progress.

"Welcase me, you wottahs!"

"Come into the study!"

"I wefuse to come into the study!"

"We're going to tell you," said Blake.

"Oh, in that case, I am willin' to heah what you have to say, and to accept your excuses for your conduct, if you have any to offah!" said D'Arcy loftily.

And he condescended to walk back to Study No. 6 with his repentant chums.

Blake closed the door when they were in the study. Arthur Augustus stood stiffly by the table in a graceful attitude, waiting for the explanation. He was not disposed to forgive Study No. 6 all at once.

"Now, first of all," said Blake impressively, "you must promise solemnly to keep it dark, Gussy!"

"I wefuse!"

"Eh?"

"If you cannot trust to my discretion, you need not tell me anythin'!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I decline to be tweated with a want of confidence," said Arthur Augustus. "As a mattah of fact, I am a much more reliable chap at keepin' a secret than any of you chaps. You fellows gave it away to Kildare the othah night, when he stopped me fwom goin' out——"

"We did!" ejaculated Herries.

"Yaas, wathah; you must have done it somehow, or Kildare wouldn't have been so beastly suspicious. He's not a suspicious chap, as a wule. And I have not uttached a word of wepwoach."

"Oh crumbs!" said Blake feebly.

"I am prepared to heah what you have to say, Blake."

"Look here, Gussy; it's awfully important," said Blake. "If it gets out, it may mean that old Kildare will get sacked from the school!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"You see how important it is?" said Dig.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I wathah think you fellows have made some widiculous mistake," he said. "I weally think you are barkin' up the w'ong twee. Howevah, go on."

"We spotted somebody going out that night," said Blake, "or, rather, Tom Merry did. It wasn't Cutts. It was Kildare."

"Wats!"

"What!" exclaimed the three juniors together, in great exasperation. They had not expected the awfully important secret to be greeted in that disrespectful way.

"Wats!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

"Look here, you thumping ass!"

"I wefuse to be called a thumpin' ass! You have made a mistake. Old Kildare isn't that sort of chap."

"But Tom Merry saw him," said Blake helplessly.

"He made a mistake in the mist, I suppose. Why, I made a mistake myself in the mist, you know, when I squirted Kildare instead of Cutts."

"Listen, ass! The fellow who went out had a key, and only prefects have a key. And Tom Merry recognised the stains of the mixture on the coat."

"Bai Jove!"

"Now you see how important it is to keep it dark," urged Blake. "It's barely possible that Kildare has some good reason—ahem!—for going out; but it would look—"

"Wubbish! The chap who was goin' out at that time of night was goin' 'pub-hauntin'!" said Arthur Augustus, decidedly.

"Well, that's all the more reason for keeping it dark. We don't want to get old Kildare into trouble, whatever he's done."

Arthur Augustus nodded assent.

"That's all wight," he agreed. "I admit that it looks vewy suspicious. If Kildare is goin' in for that sort of thing, it's a vewy sewious mattah. He's wathah a good-natured ass, and some feahful wottah may have led him astway. I quite agree with keepin' it dark, and, of course, I shall say nothin'."

"Good!" said Blake, with a breath of relief. "Only do be careful—jolly careful. I expect Tom Merry will rag us for telling you at all."

"Tom Mewwy can go and eat coke! You ought to have told me at once!" said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I accept your apology. I wegard you as havin' acted like vewy thoughtless youngstahs."

"Oh!"

"And I am pwepared to weinstate you in my fwiendship. But you don't know how much harm you may have done by keepin' me in the dark all this time!" said D'Arcy severely.

"I don't quite see that. I shouldn't have told you at all if you hadn't been sticking in the sulks!" growled Blake.

"I was not in the sulks," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I was actin' from a pwopah wegard for my personal dig. Howevah, pewwaps it is not too late."

He crossed to the door and opened it, with a thoughtful shade upon his brow.

"Too late for what?" said Blake, greatly puzzled. "There's nothing to be done except to keep it dark."

Arthur Augustus smiled in a superior manner.

"There is somethin' else to be done, of course. If a fellow we respect highly is goin' to the dogs, as Kildare appears to be doin', it is not wight to stand by and let him go. It is our duty to speak a word in season."

"A—a—a what?"

"A word in season," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I wefuse to stand by with my hands in my pockets while a chap I respect is goin' to the giddy bow-wows! I am goin' to speak to Kildare!"

"Speak to Kildare!" murmured Blake dazedly.

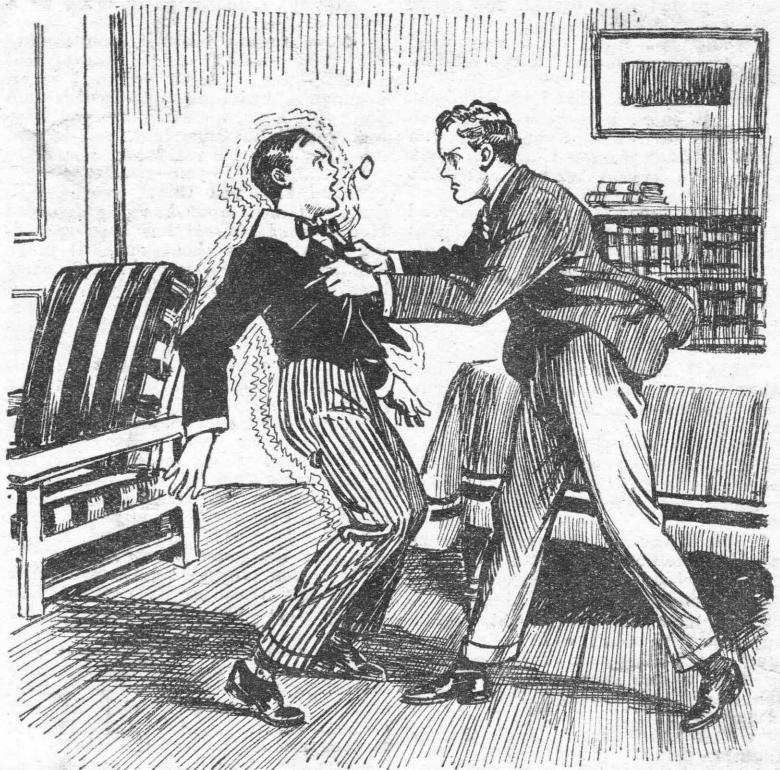
"Yaas, wathah. Of course, I shall be very diplomatie. I shall not tell him we know anythin'. I shall keep vewy dark all you have to say, of course. That is undahstood. But I feel it my duty to warn him."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Gussy, you ass, stop—"

"Wats! You leave it to me, deah boys."

Arthur Augustus quitted the study. The chums of Study No. 6 looked at one another in blank consternation.



"Who told you this?" roared Kildare, shaking D'Arcy vigorously. "If any young rascal has been spreading stories about me, by Jove, I'll make him smart! Who put this into your head, you young imbecile?" "Ow! Welease me!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "How can I s-s-speak when you are sh-sh-shaking me?"

Whatever result they might have anticipated from letting Arthur Augustus into the secret, they had not expected anything like this.

"Many hat," groaned Blake, "we've done it now! I—I say, he must be stopped. After him, and yank him back!"

Blake ran to the door and tore it open. But he was too late! Arthur Augustus was gone, and it was too late to foil his benevolent intention of visiting the captain of St. Jim's and speaking a word in season.

CHAPTER 14.

A Word in Season!

KILDARE was in his study, chatting to Darrell on the subject of the next match of the first eleven, when a tap came at his door, and he sang out cheerily: "Come in!"

It was D'Arcy who entered. Kildare gave him a pleasant nod. The strained relations between Kildare and the juniors were quite over now; the captain of St. Jim's had forgotten and forgiven the incident of the mixture.

"May I speak to you for a few minutes, Kildare?" asked Arthur Augustus, with great earnestness.

"Certainly. Go ahead!" Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Darrell.

"Ahem! I—I want to speak to you in pwivate, Kildare, if you have no objection," he said. "I am sure Dawvell will excuse us."

Darrell laughed. "With pleasure!" he said "I'll look in later, Kildare."

Darrell quitted the study. Arthur

Augustus glanced at the door to make sure that it was closed. Kildare surveyed him with growing astonishment. From the mysteriousness in D'Arcy's manner, he concluded that the junior was in some difficulty, and had come to ask his advice, or that he had committed some delinquency of unusual magnitude, and had come to confess. He waited.

"Ahem!" commenced Arthur Augustus.

Now that he was about to begin, the subject presented some little difficulty.

"Go ahead," said Kildare encouragingly. "What have you been doing, you young rascal?"

"Doin'? Nothin'!"

"Oh! Then you want advice about something? Well, pile in; time's precious, you know."

"It isn't that, deah boy."

"Then what the dickens is it?" asked Kildare, beginning to get impatient.

"Suppose," said D'Arcy, seeking to put it diplomatically, "suppose, you know—"

"Suppose what?"

"Suppose a chap—I won't mention any names, in the circle, as we are keepin' the whole mattah dark; but suppose a chap—"

D'Arcy paused again.

Kildare began to wonder whether there was anything amiss with Arthur Augustus' brain. Certainly, he was speaking very strangely.

"Well," said the St. Jim's captain, as patiently as he could, "suppose a chap—what—"

"Suppose a chap was goin' to the dogs," said Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?"

"Suppose, you know, that a—a chap

you respected vewy highly, you know, was—was goin' to the dogs—"

"Would you mind explaining what you are talking about?" asked Kildare politely.

"Yaas, that's just what I am doin', you know. Suppose a chap was goin' on the woad to wuin, f'winstance, you would considah it a good ideah to speak a word in season to him, wouldn't you?"

"I dare say I should," agreed Kildare. "I don't know any chap at present on the road to ruin, but I know a silly kid on the road to getting a licking."

"Ahem! Pway be patient, deah boy. I'm speakin' for your own good."

"For my good?"

"Yaas. Now, suppose a chap had taken to goin' out of a night and pub-hauntin', and that kind of thing, you know."

"Have you come here to tell me tales about somebody you suspect of that?" asked Kildare. "If you have, I'm bound to listen to you, as a prefect, but—"

"I twust you do not wegard me as capable of tellin' tales, Kildare?"

"Then what in the name of thunder are you doing?"

"I'm puttin' a case," said Arthur Augustus. "I don't want to mention any names. Suppose a chap was takin' up those wotten ways, you know, I—I would beg him to welfect in time."

"To—to—what?"

"Welfect in time," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Pub-hauntin', and that sort of thing leads to twouble, and—suppose there was such a chap in this study, f'winstance—I should be vewy sowwy to see him goin' to the dogs. I should beg him to considah himself in time, and turn ovah a new leaf, you know."

Kildare gazed fixedly at the swell of the Fourth. His hand strayed towards a cane on his table.

"Before I lick you for your cheek, D'Arcy, please explain yourself. Have you got a silly, stupid idea into your head that I have been doing the kind of thing you were alluding to?"

"I have not mentioned any names, deah boy."

"Who has put this fool idea into your head?" demanded Kildare wrathfully. "You silly young ass! You could not have thought of this for yourself. Somebody has been pulling your leg for you, of course. Who was it?"

"I wepeat that I am not mentionin' names," said Arthur Augustus, in distress. "I am only speakin' in a general way."

"You have come here to give me a lecture on bad conduct in a general way?" demanded the astounded Sixth Former.

"Yaas, exactly!" said Arthur Augustus, delighted at being so well understood. "You have hit it, Kildare. Suppose a chap—"

"D'Arcy—"

"Suppose a chap knew that a chap whom he respected highly was goin' on in a wotten, weckless way, a chap would be bound to speak to a chap, without sayin' exactly that he was the chap that was—ahem!" Arthur Augustus realised that he was getting a little confused. "Suppose, as I was saying, a chap—"

He was interrupted this time. Kildare strode towards him, grasped him by the shoulders, and shook him forcibly. Arthur Augustus gasped, and his monocle dropped out of his eye.

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"Weally, Kildare, pway don't be a wuff beast—"

"Now explain yourself, you thumpin' young idiot!" said Kildare, still shaking him. "Some practical joker, I suppose, has been putting this into your silly head, knowing that you were fool enough to come here and lecture me. By Jove, I'll make him smart!"

"Bai Jove! I—you—you—they—," "Who told you this?" roared Kildare. "I insist upon knowing at once! If any young rascal has been spreading such stories about me, I'll make him smart! Who put this into your head, you young imbecile?"

"Ow! Welease me! How can I s-s-speak when you are sh-sh-shakin' me like that?" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

Kildare ceased to shake him; but he retained his grip, which was like iron.

"You young ass! You ought to be licked for your cheek! But the chap I'll lick is the funny merchant who has been putting this rot into your head! I'll teach him to start lying stories about me!" fumed Kildare.

"Lysin' stowies!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Yes, you imbecile! Do you think there's any truth in it?" roared Kildare. "Are you idiot enough for that?"

"You have no wight to chawactewise Blake's stowies as lies!" said Arthur Augustus. "Blake is incapable of doin' anythin' of the sort, and he was gweately distwessed about it. That is why we agweed to keep it dark."

"Blake!" exclaimed Kildare, in astonishment. "It is impossible! I know Blake isn't the fellow to invent such a yarn. You must have been dreamin'."

Arthur Augustus jerked himself away from the Sixth Former's grasp, and groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye with great dignity.

"I came here to do you a good turn, Kildare," he said severely. "I hoped to be able to turn you back f'rom the woad to wuin with a word in season. I did not think that you would go as far as to pwevawicate."

"I prevaricate?" said Kildare.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you— Are you mad? You dare to tell me that I am prevaricating?" shouted the captain of St. Jim's.

"I am not afwaid to tell the twuth to anybody. I came here to do you a good turn, without mentionin' names. As you have weceived me in such a spiwit, there is nothin' for me to do but to wetiah f'rom the study, and leave you to go to the dogs in your own way."

"I—I—I— By Jove, I'll lick you till you can't wriggle!" gasped Kildare. "I—or, rather, I'll lick Blake for putting you up to this! The young rascal, to invent such a yarn—"

"It was not invented, and you have no wight to suggest such a thing! Tom Mewwy saw you with his own eyes!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignant at the charge against his chum, and forgetting his resolve not to mention names.

"So Tom Merry's in it, too?" ejaculated Kildare.

"I wefuse to give you any information. I will wetiah—"

"No, you won't," said Kildare grimly. "We're going to have this thrashed out, you utter young ass! Stay there!"

He whirled the swell of the Fourth farther into the study, opened the door, and put out his head and called:

"Fag!"

Curly Gibson of the Third came in answer to the call.

"Go and fetch Blake and Tom Merry here at once!" said Kildare.

The fag cut off.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "I'm afwaid it will all come out now, and those boundahs will think that I have let out the secwet. Bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 15.

Light at Last!

BLAKE was not surprised when the fag put his head into Study No. 6, with the information that the chief of the study was wanted by Kildare.

"Is D'Arcy there?" he asked.

"Yes," said Curly. "And Kildare seems to be in a wax about something. He wants you and Tom Merry in a hurry. You're in for it!"

And, with that consoling statement, the fag hurried on to call Tom Merry.

Blake looked dismally at his chums.

"Tom Merry, too," he said. "It's all out now. Gussy's done it."

"Well, Kildare can't blame us," said Herries thoughtfully. "He'll know we've been keeping it dark."

"He'll know we were out of bounds that night," grunted Blake.

"So was he!"

"Better give Tom Merry the tip," said Dig. Blake nodded. They proceeded together to Tom Merry's study.

The Terrible Three were all there, and they had just received the fag's message.

"Come on!" said Blake glumly.

"We're in for it!"

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"We had to let Gussy into the secret."

"Fathead!"

"Oh, call me anything you like!" said Blake resignedly. "You can kick me if you like. I feel like kicking myself. The thumping ass went straight to Kildare—"

"Not to tell him?" howled Monty Lowther.

"No; to speak a word of warning diplomatically!" groaned Blake. "Of course, he's let the cat out of the bag. Come on!"

"We'd better all come," said Manners. "We're all in it. We'll stand by one another. After all, I don't see why Kildare should be ratty, when we've been keeping his secret."

"He jolly well is ratty, all the same."

"Well, we'll put it to him plainly," said Herries. "He shouldn't have done what he did. We couldn't help bowling him out. Of course, we oughtn't to have been out of the dorm."

"He ought to keep that dark, as we're keeping his beastly secret dark," said Dig.

"H'm! He ought!"

But it was not in a hopeful mood that the six juniors made their way to Kildare's study.

The captain of St. Jim's stared at them when they presented themselves.

"I sent for Blake and Merry," he said.

"We're all in it," said Lowther. "We were all on the scene. I suppose that howling duffe has told you all about it."

"Weally, Lowthah, I have not said a word. I was speakin' to Kildare in a general way, without mentionin' names at all."

"Oh, scat!"

"But when he said it was a lyin'!"

stowy, I had to declare that Blake was incapable of tellin' lies," said D'Arcy warmly. "I suppose you wouldn't expect me to stand quietly and heah a chum wun down, would you?"

"That's enough!" said Kildare sternly. "Now, you young idiots, I want to know all about this. Someone has dared to say that I have broken bounds at night, and gone out of the school for a rascally motive. Who was it? Which of you young rascals invented it?"

"Invented it?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes! Sharp now!" "I—I suppose we may as well have it all out!" said Tom reluctantly. "The fact is, we know it for a fact, Kildare. We had agreed to keep it dark; and, but for Gussy, there wouldn't have been a word said."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" "We're still going to keep it dark," said Blake. "We'll find some way of shutting up that crass ass. You needn't be uneasy, Kildare. Whatever you do, you've always been decent to us, and we're not going to give you away."

"Give me away! You—you— Do you dare to say that you believe the story?"

"I saw you!" said Tom Merry, beginning to lose patience himself.

"Saw me? When?"

"Three nights ago."

"At what time?"

"About eleven."

"Where?"

"In the quad"

"And where were you?" demanded Kildare sternly. "You could not have seen anybody in the quad from the Shell dormitory."

"We were out of the House," said Tom. "We confess that. We weren't thinking about you, though. We were going to jape somebody—never mind whom—a chap we expected to catch out of the House at that time. And—and, instead of him, you came along."

Kildare had a stupefied look.

"I—I came along! In the quad—three nights ago—after eleven o'clock?"

"Yes."

"I have been in bed every night this week before eleven, you young idiot!"

Tom Merry was silent. There was no reply to be made to a statement like that.

"Who else saw me?" demanded Kildare, looking round at the downcast juniors.

"No one else," said Tom. "I saw you."

"I heard somebody," said Lowther.

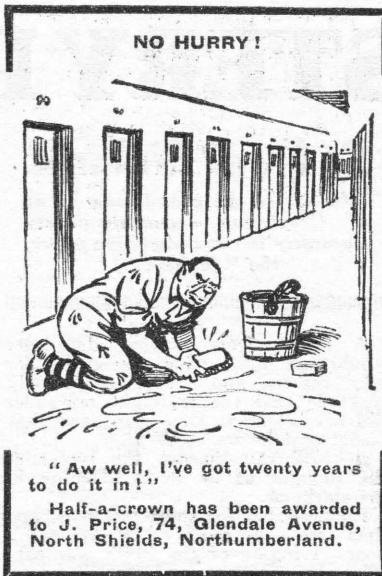
"I couldn't see in the mist from where I was. But Tom Merry saw you right enough. You needn't think we've got this up against you, Kildare. It was a shock when Tom told us, and we all agreed to keep it dark; and we're going to keep it dark now, too, even if you lick us!"

"Yaas, wathah! Only you ought to wect in time, Kildare, where this conduct is likely to lead you—"

"Hold your idiotic tongue!" shouted Kildare.

"Bai Jove!"

"So it rests with you, Tom Merry," said Kildare savagely. "If I didn't know that you were a straight kid, I'd lick you here and now for saying such a thing! But I can't imagine you as an intentional liar. You must have made a mistake. Do you say that you actually saw me close enough in that mist to recognise me? Mind what you say!"



"I didn't see your face, of course. You had your cap pulled down and your coat-collar turned up. But you opened the side gate with a key, and only prefects have keys to that gate; and I knew your coat."

"My coat! You dared to think such a thing of me on the evidence of a coat?" asked Kildare. "Why, there are dozens of coats in the House like mine."

"Your coat was marked. I saw the marks on it—that mixture that D'Arcy squirted over you. Anybody would know that coat."

"You—you young idiot!" said Kildare. "Did you think I should wear that coat again after it was smothered with ink? It's been hanging up in the lobby in the hall ever since D'Arcy spoiled it. I have worn my other coat ever since."

"Mind, I don't doubt your word—you saw somebody go out. I suppose it did not occur to you in your wisdom that somebody might have taken my coat?"

"Oh my hat!"

"Well?" snapped Kildare.

"I—I certainly never thought of that," admitted Tom Merry, in dismay. "You usually have your coat here—in your room—and—and I didn't know it was in the lobby. If—"

"I hung it there because I'm not wearing it, you ass! It's there now."

"But—but the key to the gate?" stammered Tom Merry. "How could—how could any other chap get that?"

"Go and fetch the coat out of the lobby," said Kildare.

Tom Merry obeyed. He brought the stained and spoiled overcoat into the study, and laid it on the table. There were several splashes of mud on it.

"That mud wasn't there when I used it last," said Kildare. "Now feel in the inside pocket—on the left."

Tom Merry did so and drew out a small key.

"That's the key to the side gate," said Kildare. "I kept it in that pocket. As I've never had occasion to go out after locking-up this week, I didn't think of getting it. It's been in that pocket, hanging up in the lobby, ever since that lunatic squirted ink over me."

"Oh!"

"Is there anything else you have

founded this ridiculous story upon?" demanded Kildare.

Tom Merry was silent. Blake opened his lips and closed them again. But Kildare noted it at once.

"Well, Blake, out with it!"

"There was that—that sporting paper, you know—in—in your study. I—" stammered Blake.

Kildare laughed involuntarily.

"You thought that was mine, you—you—I don't know what to call you!"

"Well, it was here, and you burnt it—and—"

"What else should I do with a racing paper I had taken from a fellow who ought not to have had it in his study?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Now," said Kildare quietly, "I have been patient with you. I ought to have given you a hiding all round, but instead of that I have explained the matter. Are you satisfied?"

"Of course," said Tom Merry. "We might have guessed. It's just what he would do, take another fellow's coat, in case he was seen, the rotter! If we'd known that you'd left it in the lobby—with the key in the pocket—"

"That was wathah careless of you, Kildare—"

"Shut up, ass!" murmured Blake.

"Quite so; it was careless of me," said Kildare. "But I did not know that a fellow in the School House was in the habit of breaking bounds at night. You juniors seemed to have been better informed. And now I want to know who it was? It must have been a senior, or you could not have taken him for me, even in my coat. His name?"

There was silence in the study.

"You say you had gone out of your dormitories specially to intercept a certain person in the quad. You knew, then, that he was going out. Undoubtedly it was the same person who took my coat and used my key. Who was it you expected to see in the quad—whom did you see?"

"We—we can't tell about him," said Tom Merry. "I—he is a rotten cad, and we know now it wasn't you, Kildare, and—and we're sorry. But—"

"We're goin' to keep it awfully dark, Kildare. And we can't weally sneak about the othah chap!"

Kildare bit his lip, and there was a pause.

"Very well," he said at length. "I won't ask you to give me his name. Perhaps I can guess it myself; and I shall keep my eyes open after this. I think I shall be able to spot him, whether he wears his own coat or somebody else's." Kildare picked up a cane. "You know the consequences of getting out of the dormitory at night. You first, Merry!"

"I—I say, Kildare, we—we were going to keep it dark, you know—"

"We—we were really standing by you, you know," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Thank you! I've no doubt you had excellent intentions towards me!" said Kildare sarcastically. "I am obliged to you. You have done me the honour of thinking me a blackguard, and going to keep it dark. You needn't bother!"

"We—we're sorry, you know—"

"Yaas, wathah! I apologise most sincerely, Kildare, deah boy, as one gentleman to anothah," said Arthur Augustus.

"I accept your pologies," said

(Continued on page 28.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—NO. 1,519.

THE MYSTERY RAIDER!

The Midnight Marauder!

"WHO'S that?" Harry Wharton rapped out the question as he sat up suddenly in bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

Midnight had tolled out from the school tower, and Harry Wharton had awakened as the last strokes came faintly through the silence of the night.

Dead silence followed the last stroke of twelve, and Harry turned drowsily on his pillow, to sink into sleep again, when a creak from the dormitory door caught his ear.

In a moment he was wide awake.

There was more than one door to the Remove dormitory, and it was the one nearest to Harry's bed that creaked when it was opened.

The sound was only a slight one, but the junior knew that the door was being opened, and that fact was sufficient to startle him at such an hour.

A raid by fellows of another Form was not an unknown happening in a dormitory at Greyfriars, but midnight would have been an unusually late hour for such a raid. Harry Wharton sat up in bed, and rapped out the question in sharp tones:

"Who's that?"

There was no reply.

A faint creak showed that the door was closing again, and he heard the slight sound of the latch.

Harry drew a deep breath.

The dormitory was very gloomy, only a few faint rays from the stars creeping in at the high windows, and the junior could see only the beds that were nearest to him.

"My hat!" muttered Harry Wharton, as he pushed back the bedclothes. "Whoever opened that door has shut it again, so he must have heard me speak."

For a few moments the junior puzzled over the matter, and then he slipped out of bed. If the unseen visitant had been a raider from the Upper Fourth, he had doubtless retired on finding that one of the Remove was awake. But it might have been a burglar, and Harry Wharton felt that it was "up" to him to make sure about it.

He hesitated for a moment whether to awaken his chums. Bob Cherry was sleeping soundly in the next bed on one side, and Frank Nugent on the other. Farther along Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, was fast asleep.

"No need to call them up," Harry muttered. "It may be nothing at all."

He slipped on trousers and slippers, and crossed quickly to the door. He stepped out into the corridor and looked about him. The passage was very gloomy, a dim light falling in at the high window at the end. Harry Wharton listened intently.

A faint, indefinite sound came from below. Harry went on tiptoe to the staircase and glanced down.

He could see nothing in the gloom. But he was certain that it was a footstep that he had heard, and that it was in the Hall on the ground floor.

There was no further doubt in Harry Wharton's mind.

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By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

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A raider from another dormitory would not have gone downstairs for any reason, and Harry could only conclude that the midnight marauder did not belong to Greyfriars, and that meant that he was a burglar.

A thrill ran through the junior at the thought as he stood listening in the darkness.

He hesitated for some moments, and then stepped quickly to Wingate's door. Wingate of the Sixth was captain of Greyfriars, and the champion athlete of the school. He was probably equal to dealing with a burglar, and the junior preferred calling the school captain to calling a master.

He opened Wingate's door quietly, and stepped into the room and closed it again.

"Wingate!"

He called the name softly.

An unmusical snore from the darkness was the only reply.

Harry Wharton stepped nearer the bed.

"Wingate!"

But the captain of Greyfriars was

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Never has Greyfriars known such a mystery as when someone unknown makes a midnight raid on the school pantry and scoffs a large pie!

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sleeping soundly. Wharton reached out his hand and shook him.

"Wake up, Wingate!"

"Hallo! Why, what—what's the matter? Who's that?"

"I'm Wharton."

"Oh, you are, are you?" growled Wingate, sitting up in bed and reaching out to get a grasp on the junior.

"And I suppose this is the Remove idea of a jape—eh?"

"No, no! Let go my shoulder!"

"Yes, I'll let go your shoulder," said Wingate grimly, "when I've laid a cricket stump about you—not before!"

"I tell you—"

"Is anything the matter?"

"Yes. There's a burglar in the house!"

"Oh!" Wingate released the junior. "That alters the case. How do you know?"

"He opened the door of our dormitory," explained Harry, in a swift whisper. "I called out, and he shut it again. I came out and heard him downstairs. It must have been a burglar, as none of the fellows would be on the ground floor for anything. I thought I had better call you, anyway."

"Good!" said Wingate. "I won't be a jiffy!"

The captain of Greyfriars jumped out of bed, and hastily put on some

clothes. He picked up a cricket bat from the table.

"If I get in a cosh with this, it will stop the giddy burglar burgling for some time, I think," he remarked.

"Downstairs, you say?"

"Yes. Will you take a light?"

"No. Don't want to scare him off. Stay here."

"No fear!" said Harry. "I'm coming, too!"

Wingate laughed shortly.

"Well, come on, if you like."

He stepped out into the gloomy corridor, the cricket bat in his hand. Harry Wharton followed him.

"Shall I call anybody else?" Harry whispered.

"No. We'll make sure there's a burglar first."

"But I tell you I heard him!"

"Perhaps you dreamed it," said Wingate. "Anyway, we'll make sure before we wake up the House. We don't want to make a big bother, and then get cackled at. Besides, if there's only one intruder, I can manage with this bat, I fancy."

"Good!"

Wingate passed silently down the stairs. Wharton kept close to him. The Greyfriars captain went down the lower passage, and looked into the other passages, and into some of the studies. There was no sign of the burglar, and Wingate gave a grunt.

"I think you must have dreamed it, Wharton."

"I'm certain of what I heard," said Harry quietly. "But if there is a burglar here, he has probably heard us, and he is hiding. You will never find him without a light."

"True. I'll get a torch."

And, with a light shining before him, Wingate resumed the burglar hunt. The two went round examining the doors and windows, but there was no trace of any of them having been opened.

Wingate paused at last near the staircase, grunting again in a very expressive manner.

"You dreamed it, Wharton."

"I did not."

"Well, it must have been some fellow wandering about, then. There's no sign where any burglar has entered," said the captain of Greyfriars impatiently. "Jolly good thing we didn't wake the House. We should be laughed at. Let's get back to bed."

"I thought it best to call you—"

"Oh, that was quite right! But it's pretty clear it's a false alarm, so we may as well chuck it."

Harry caught his arm quickly.

"Hark!"

"My hat!" muttered Wingate.

Faintly from the darkness at the top of the staircase came a sound—the sound of a quiet footstep.

"What do you think of that, Wingate?"

"By Jove, it was somebody!"

"He was in the passage above—"

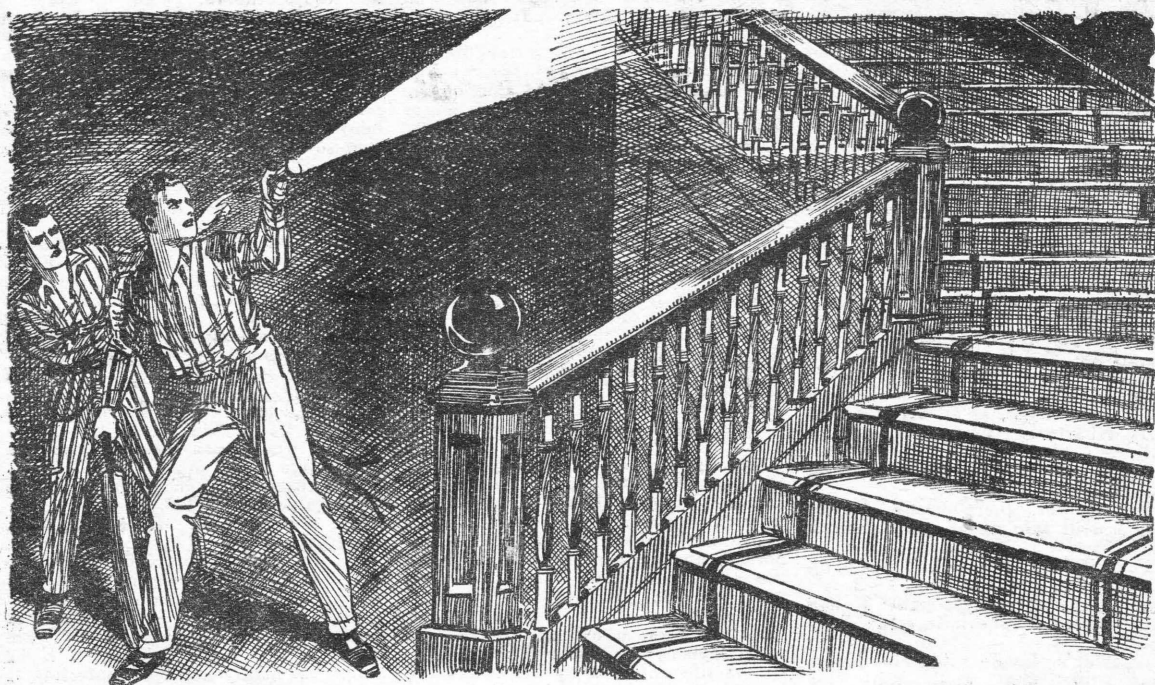
"Come on, kid!"

Wingate hurried to the stairs, holding the torch up before him with his left hand and gripping the cane handle of the bat in his right. He went up three steps at a time. A faint creak was audible in the stillness.

"That's a door opening—"



IN THIS EXCITING STORY OF THEIR EARLY ADVENTURES HARRY WHARTON & CO. FIND THEMSELVES INVOLVED IN A STRANGE MYSTERY.



Harry Wharton caught Wingate's arm quickly. "Hark!" Faintly from the darkness at the top of the stairs came the sound of a quiet footstep. "What do you think of that, Wingate?" "By jove!" exclaimed the Greyfriars captain. "It is somebody!"

"It's a door in the Remove dormitory," muttered Harry Wharton excitedly. "I know that creak. That was what I heard first of all."

Wingate gave a short chuckle.

"It's very likely some Remove fellow been out—"

"Let's see."

They hurried on to the Remove dormitory and entered. Wingate flashed the torch up and down the lofty room. There was no trace of a burglar, and every bed was occupied.

Wingate looked closely at each face in turn, going from bed to bed. He had a strong suspicion that the author of the alarm was a Removite who had been making some midnight excursion for reasons best known to himself. But every boy in the dormitory was fast asleep.

The captain of Greyfriars looked puzzled.

"What do you think now?" asked Harry Wharton quietly as Wingate turned away from the sleeping Removites.

"It wasn't one of these kids, I think." "But he came in here, by this door!"

"Then he dodged out by one of the other doors," said Wingate. "It's pretty clear that he's not here now."

Harry Wharton nodded. He looked up and down the room and under the beds, but there was no burglar.

"Anyway, it's not a burglar," said Wingate decidedly. "The fellow couldn't have had any motive for coming upstairs again and dodging through this dormitory. I suppose it's one of the juniors playing a trick, and probably laughing in his sleeve all the time at the dance he's led us." The expression on Wingate's face became very grim. "I'll find out who that junior is, too, and give him a lesson that will make him think

before he starts in the funny business again. Get back to bed. I'm going."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry sat up in bed. The light on his face had awakened him, and he stared in amazement at Wharton and Wingate.

"Anything the matter?"

"No," grunted Wingate. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Harry.

The captain of Greyfriars quitted the dormitory. Harry slipped off his clothes. Bob Cherry was asking questions, and Nugent and Hurree Singh were awake now. Harry explained in a few words before he got into bed.

"It wasn't a burglar," said Bob Cherry. "Some silly kid playing a little jape on us, I expect."

"One of our own Form, very likely," said Nugent.

"Yes, rather."

"The rafterfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows—"

It was the piping voice of Billy Bunter, a few beds along the row.

"It wasn't a Remove fellow," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Every fellow was asleep when we came in to look."

"Might have been shamming."

"I think not; and Wingate thought the same."

"Then it was probably somebody from the Upper Fourth," yawned Nugent; and he turned over on his pillow.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you, Bunt?"

"Yes, it is, Bob Cherry. What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Well, what are you all awake for?"

"Because we're not asleep, Bunt. Good-night!"

"Really, Cherry, I think you might explain."

"Somebody heard something, and thought it was somebody, and it was something else," Bob Cherry explained lucidly. "Now go to sleep, Bunt."

"But what I want to know is—"

Snore!

"I say, Wharton—"

Snore!

"Nugent!"

Snore!

"I say, you fellows—"

Chorus of snores! Billy Bunter grunted and turned over, and began to snore, too.

#### Who is the Culprit?

HARRY WHARTON was usually one of the first to awaken in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, but when the rising-bell went the following morning he was still fast asleep. He started out of a dream as Bob Cherry shook him vigorously by the shoulder.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Going to stop there all the morning?" asked Bob cheerily.

Harry rubbed his eyes.

"Has the bell gone?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The rafterfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "The honourable bell has rung clangfully while the esteemed Wharton was still reposing peacefully in the arms of Murphy!"

"In the arms of what?" demanded Nugent, looking round with a wet face from his ablutions.

"In the honourable arms of Murphy."

"Ha, ha! You mean Morpheus, I suppose?"

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The Nabob of Bhanipur shook his head gently.

"No, my esteemed chum, I don't mean Morpheus. According to the lessonful instructions I received from my honourable native professor, in Bengal, it is Murphy. The excellent Wharton was still reposing in the honourable arms of Murphy—"

"Well, you get up from the arms of the honourable Murphy," exclaimed Bob Cherry, "or else I'll squeeze this esteemed sponge down the back of your honourable neck!"

Harry Wharton laughed, and slipped out of bed.

"I feel drowsy this morning," he remarked.

"That's through spending the night hunting for burglars who don't exist," said Bob Cherry. "Next time you hear a burglar you'll know that there isn't one, I hope, and stay in bed."

"I say, you fellows—"

"There was somebody wandering about in the night, at all events," said Harry Wharton. "Who it was, I can't say."

"I say, you fellows, has there been a burglary?"

"No, Bunter, there hasn't. Your toffee is still safe under the corner of the mattress."

"That it isn't, Cherry! I woke up a little while ago and ate it. I felt rather peckish, and thought I had better have a snack," said Billy Bunter.

"Wharton's last," said Hazeldene. "Buck up, and we'll wait for you."

The chums of the Remove were the last to quit the dormitory. As they went downstairs Harry Wharton observed several fellows with serious faces in conversation with Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, in the Hall. They were Sixth Form prefects, and their expressions showed that something was amiss.

"Some row on, I suppose," Nugent remarked.

"Looks like it."

"The honourable Carberry has an expression of extreme scowfulness," said the nabob. "Something has happened to disturb his august serenity."

The Removites entered the dining-room. There was a buzz of whispering at most of the tables. As there was no master yet at the Remove table, the Removites allowed themselves full freedom of conversation. The table was in a hum from end to end. Russell leaned over towards Wharton as he sat down.

"Have you heard what happened last night, Wharton?"

Wharton started.

"No. What is it?"

"Blessed if I know; but they are making out that there has been a burglary or something."

"My hat! A burglary?"

"Yes, or something of the sort—in the pantry."

"Are you joking?"

"Not a bit. Ask Desmond."

"Sure, and it's a fact!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "I heard Quelch talkin' about it to Wingate himself, you know. The prefects are going to look into it."

"More like a job for the police, I should think."

"Faith, and ye're wrong! It's not valuables that have been stolen."

"What the dickens is it, then?"

"Grub!"

"What?"

"It's a fact," said Skinner, joining in. "From what we hear, it seems pretty

certain that somebody broke into the pantry last night and boned some grub."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, I see! Some fellow has been robbing the pantry. It's not a burglary."

"Well, it will be jolly serious for the fellow when he's found out, that's all," said Bulstrode. "I heard one of the maids say that the lock of the pantry has been broken."

"By Jove, that will mean a row if it's true!"

"Here's Quelch! Cheese it!"

Mr. Quelch came in and took his place at the head of the Remove table. The master of the Remove was looking somewhat pale and worn, the effects of his recent illness. He had only a day or two before returned to Greyfriars to resume charge of the Form.

In his absence they had been under the rule of the faddist Form-master, who had made various unwelcome alterations in their diet and their manners and customs, and the Remove were very glad to have Mr. Quelch back again.

Since the return of Mr. Quelch the Remove had been on their best behaviour, to show him how glad they were to see him again.

The breakfast-table had resumed its normal appearance under the rule of the old master, and bacon and eggs were placed before the hungry Removites.

Billy Bunter, who had suffered more than anybody else from the extremely simple life enforced by Mr. Chesham, basked in the sunshine of plenty once more.

"Quelchy looks as if he were waxy with us," Nugent whispered. "I don't see what we can have done."

"Of course you don't!" said Levison in an undertone, with a very perceptible sneer upon his face.

Nugent looked at him quickly.

"What do you mean, Levison?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"You do!" said Nugent sharply. "You're hinting that I've been up to something to make Quelch waxy, after the arrangement we all agreed to about giving him an easy time for the next week or so. What do you mean?"

"I dare say Wharton could tell you."

"Wharton? How—"

"What do you mean, Levison?" asked Harry angrily. "I'll—"

"Silence!"

Mr. Quelch's voice had an unpleasant edge to it, and the Remove table relapsed into silence once more.

The breakfast was finished without a word being spoken, and then the juniors left the room. The Removites were looking very subdued as they filed into their class-room. Mr. Quelch's face was hard and grim.

"Boys!"

"Hallo! There's a speech comin'!" muttered Bulstrode.

"Boys, I have a few words to say to you before we commence morning lessons," said Mr. Quelch. "There has been an outrage committed during the night—an outrage which I should be very sorry to see traced to a member of my Form."

The Remove were silent and expectant.

"During the night," said Mr. Quelch in measured accents, "the pantry was broken open and a large pie taken away."

"Phew!"

"My hat!"

"Silence! This pie was placed on the kitchen table, and the purloiner ate it there, or most of it, leaving only a few fragments in the dish."

"Must have been hungry!" murmured Billy Bunter. "I can quite understand a chap doing it, too, if he was hungry and had the nerve."

"Now," resumed Mr. Quelch, "you will see that this is not an ordinary breach of rules that can be dealt with lightly. The lock of the pantry was smashed, being forced open with an iron poker, and considerable force must have been exerted. This, added to the fact that so large a pie was almost wholly devoured, leads me to conjecture that there were, perhaps, two boys concerned in the matter, if not more."

There was dead silence.

"Now," went on the Remove master, with emphasis, "if a boy in this Form was guilty of this outrage, I offer him an opportunity to confess at once."

Dead silence.

"If he confesses, he—or they—will receive a sound flogging as a punishment for this unexampled act of audacity!"

"What a temptation!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I should think the guilty bouncer would rush forward to seize a chance like that!"

And there was a slight giggle from the boys nearest to Bob Cherry.

But a glare from Mr. Quelch froze the giggle.

"If the guilty party does not confess," said the Form-master, "strict investigation will be made, and he will certainly be discovered. Then he will be more severely punished. His punishment will be far heavier than if he adopts the manly course of confessing at once."

"There's a chance for someone!" murmured Bob Cherry. "You play up in a manly way, and there's a flogging thrown in with no extra charge!"

"What have you to say, my boys?"

The Remove were silent. Apparently, they had nothing to say.

"I should be very glad," said Mr. Quelch, after a pause, "to think that the culprit would not be found in my Form. Unfortunately, the evidence—such as it is—seems to point towards the Remove."

"I could have told you that!" murmured Levison.

"Did you speak, Levison?"

"I—I, sir?" stammered the new boy in the Remove.

"Yes. Did you speak?"

"Only—only to myself, sir."

"And what did you say?" asked Mr. Quelch grimly.

"N-n-nothing of any consequence, sir."

"You will repeat to me what you said, and I shall judge whether it is of no consequence," said the Form-master.

"I—I—I only said—"

"Go on!"

"I—I said I could have told you so," said Levison reluctantly.

"Yes; I judged from the expression of your face that you made some observation of that kind," said Mr. Quelch, with a grim smile. "I shall be pleased to hear what you know about the matter, Levison."

"I don't know anything about it, sir."

"Then what do you mean by saying that you could have told me that the evidence points towards the culprit being in the Remove?"

"I—I—I—"

"You will be quite frank with me, Levison."

"I don't think I ought to be called upon to sneak, sir."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"I do not look at it in that light, Levison. However, we will pass over the matter for the moment. Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!" said Harry.

"You were awake last night?"



"Yes, sir; at midnight."  
 "Wingate has acquainted me with the circumstances," said Mr. Quelch. "When he learned that there had been a robbery in the kitchen, he thought it his duty to tell me all he knew. It seems that you woke up about midnight, and that both of you looked for a burglar, whom you thought you had heard, for half an hour or more."

"That is the case, sir."  
 This was news to most of the Remove, who had been fast asleep during Harry's nocturnal excursion, and they looked at the captain of the Form with great interest.

"Now," said Mr. Quelch, "in the case of some boys in this Form"—and his glance appeared to linger for a moment on Bulstrode, and then on Hazeldene—"I might have suspected this story of a burglar to be a fabrication, devised to throw dust in the eyes of those investigating last night's affair. But I have every reason to believe you implicitly, Wharton."

"Thank you, sir!"  
 "Therefore, do not imagine for a moment that I doubt your explanation," said Mr. Quelch. "But I think you made a mistake last night. It was not a burglar that you heard, but the culprit who robbed the pantry."

"I suppose so, now, sir."  
 "It seems that you heard him open the door of the Remove dormitory?"

"Yes, sir; that was really what woke me."  
 "Can you perceive any reason why he should attempt to enter the Remove dormitory at all—if he did not belong to the Remove?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.  
 "No, sir, I cannot."  
 "Then is it not more likely that the door was opened, not from the outside, but the inside, and that what you really heard was some member of the Form leaving the dormitory?"

Wharton gave a start.  
 He had not thought of that before, but it was really a simple explanation. Now that it was mentioned, he could see that it was in all probability true.  
 "I did not think of that, then, sir."  
 "But now that you think of it—"  
 "It looks like it, sir."

"Later, after a fruitless search for the burglar, you heard someone go upstairs again, and tracked the sound to the Remove dormitory?"

"Yes, sir."  
 "The individual, whoever he was, entered that dormitory; but, so far as you know, he did not leave it again?"  
 "He might easily have done so without my knowledge."

"True. But no reason can be given why he should take the trouble to enter the Remove dormitory at one end and leave it by the other."

Wharton was silent.  
 "You see, now," said Mr. Quelch, "how it is that the evidence points strongly towards the culprit being in the Remove. There is no evidence of the sort to point to any other dormitory. For my part, I may as well say I am quite convinced that the culprit is in the Remove."

The juniors were silent.  
 From the way the keen-witted Form-master had worked out the evidence, it seemed pretty plain that the burglar of the pantry was in the Remove, and there was a general wondering as to whom it could be.

More than one accusing eye was turned in the direction of Billy Bunter. Nobody would have suspected Bunter of an action that required nerve and determination, but for the fact that it

was a pie that had been taken by the unknown marauder. Bunter was more likely than anybody else in the Remove to burgle a pie.

"And now," said Mr. Quelch, "having explained to you that it is clear that the culprit is in this Form, I again offer him the opportunity of confessing, and thus clearing up this painful matter, and mitigating his own punishment."

"Buck up, Bunter!" muttered Bulstrode.

Billy Bunter glared round indignantly through his big spectacles.

"What did you say, Bulstrode?"

"Now's your chance, Owl!"

"Do you think I scoffed the pie?"

"Who else would do it?"

"Well, I didn't!"

"Rats!"

"You are talking, Bunter! What is it?"

"Bulstrode seems to think that I burgled the pantry, sir," said Billy Bunter indignantly. "He thinks I scoffed the pie."

"And did you?"

"I, sir? I only wish I had had the chance—I mean, I wouldn't do such a thing for worlds! I know what pie it must have been, because I saw the cook take it out of the oven yesterday, and—"

Mr. Quelch concealed a smile.

"Were you out of bed last night, Bunter?"

"Certainly not, sir! I'm sorry that you should attach any importance to this absurd suspicion of Bulstrode's. I didn't wake up last night till I heard Wharton and the others talking."

"That is quite true, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Possibly. Wingate also assured me that all the boys in that dormitory were

asleep when he looked at them," said Mr. Quelch dryly. "But it seems to me perfectly evident that at least one boy was pretending."

"And that one was Buntly!" murmured Bulstrode.

"It wasn't, Bulstrode—"

"Silence! As the culprit refuses to confess, the matter must be left where it stands. We will now commence first lesson."

But there was little attention given to lessons that morning by the Remove. And, for the first time since his return, Mr. Quelch began to give out impositions right and left.

**A Little Loan!**

"**R**OTTEN!" said Nugent emphatically.

Nugent made that remark as the Remove crowded out of the class-room after morning lessons.

Relations had been strained between master and juniors, and impositions had fallen heavily upon the Removeites.

Nugent's remark was endorsed by all.

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" Hurree Singh remarked. "The worthy instructor sahib seems to have got his honourable wool off this morning."

"No wonder," said Harry Wharton, with a laugh. "Nobody was paying any attention to the lessons."

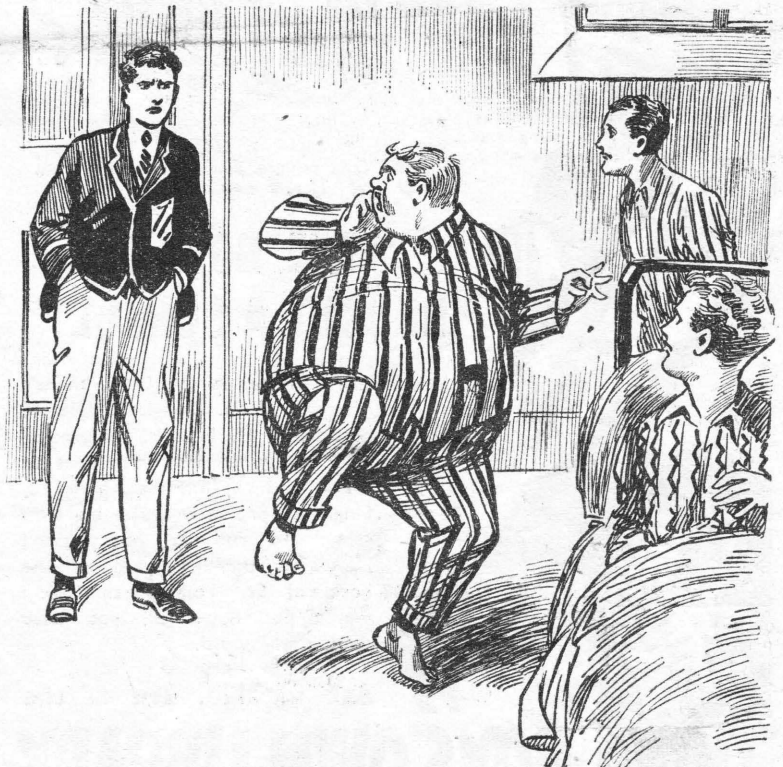
"In the circumstances that was natural enoughfully."

"But you couldn't expect Quelch to take it lying down."

"Perhapsfully not."

"What I say is that the guilty party ought to own up," said Levison.

"We all say the same," agreed Bob Cherry. "Quelch has promised to let him down lightly, and the chap really



"My hat!" said Billy Bunter. "That silly ass Carberry has gone without turning the light out. Ill-tempered beast, isn't he?" "Ill-tempered beast, am I?" exclaimed Carberry, and the short-sighted Owl looked round with a start. "You cheeky young rascal!"

has a grand opportunity of getting off cheaply if he comes out at once."

"Ratherfully."  
"It's rather beastly getting on bad terms with Quelch again so soon," Nugent remarked. "We were going to turn over a new leaf and be a model Form, to show everybody that it was only that Chesham ass we were bucking against, and that we know how to keep order as well as the Fifth or Sixth."  
"And this has spoiled the whole thing."

"Yes. It's rough on us, because all our good behaviour the last few days goes for nothing now. We might as well have let things go."

"Yes, it does seem a waste," said Bob Cherry; "all through some gormandiser scoffing a pie in the middle of the night."

"And it's pretty clear that it was a Remove fellow, too."

"It looks like it, at any rate."

"He ought to confess," said Harry Wharton.

"So I think," Levison remarked, with a sneer.

Harry Wharton swung round upon the new junior in the Remove.

"Look here, what are you driving at, Levison?" he asked sharply. "You were hinting at something in class when Mr. Quelch caught you up."

"You can't say I sneaked to him."

"No; it seems to me that you made him suspect that you had a hand in last night's affair."

"You know whether I did or not."

"How should I know?"

"You were out of the dormitory."

"But I did not see the other fellow who was out."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Was there another fellow out?" he said.

Harry turned red.

"What you mean to say, then, is that I was the guilty party myself, and yarped about hearing a burglar to cover up my tracks?" he said hotly.

"I don't say so."

"But you are implying it."

"I only go on the evidence. You can't deny that that's what it looks like, anyway."

"And my word counts for nothing?"

"I don't see why it should count more than another's."

"I've only got one reply to a fellow who calls me a liar," said Harry Wharton, with blazing eyes, and his fists clenched hard.

Nugent pulled him back by the shoulder.

"Hold on, Harry!"

"Let me go!"

"Hold on! It's no good rowing about it, and the cad isn't worth licking."

Wharton gave a short laugh.

"Perhaps you're right. Let him go."

Levison shrugged his shoulders and walked away. It was evident that his suspicious mind was made up. Levison was one of those fellows who always know a little more than anybody else, and whose pride it is that they are never taken in. And, like most suspicious persons, he had a way of jumping to wrong conclusions.

"Don't take any notice of the rotter," said Nugent. "He can't help being an unpleasant beast. He'll get knocked into shape if he stays in the Remove, I fancy."

"Or knocked out of shape!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Yes, one of the two. To come back to business, this is a most unpleasant affair. The ass who went so far as to break a lock to get at a pie ought to be kicked out of the Form. I can understand a jape or a raid, but that's going too far."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Just what I think," said Hazeldene. "The fellow ought to own up. It's pretty certain that he's in the Remove. I wish we could find him out."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, don't bother, Bunty!"

"But, I say, I want to speak to you, you know. I hope you don't suspect me of having burgled the pantry last night," said Billy Bunter. "I knew that pie was there, but I never went near the pantry. You fellows know that I was asleep till you woke me up."

Harry Wharton patted him on the shoulder.

"That's all right, Bunty. We believe you."

"I'm glad of that, Wharton. Of course, if the pantry hadn't been locked, I should very probably have raided the pie. I thought about it, but I knew it wouldn't do to bust a lock, and I quite gave up the idea."

"You young cormorant! You had a big feed at tea-time last night and another at supper," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes; but I've never really recovered from the awful time under Chesham," said Billy Bunter, blinking distressfully through his big spectacles. "He cut down our food till I was reduced to something like a shadow—"

"Ha, ha, ha! A jolly substantial shadow!"

"Well, I know that I felt like wasting away. It had a disturbing effect on my constitution, which I don't know if I shall ever recover from. All I can do is to see I never go short of having anything I fancy. If I am careful on that point I hope to pick up in time."

"Well, you're attending to the cure pretty well, I think!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I've done my best: not because I'm fond of eating, but from a sense of duty. Cherry. And that reminds me. I've run out of cash. I was expecting a postal order this morning, which should have set me up again, but there has been some delay—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, you fellows. It's rather a serious disappointment, for Mrs. Mimble won't trust me with a farthing's worth of anything."

"Knows you, perhaps?" suggested Nugent.

"Well, I think it's very inconsiderate. What I was thinking is that I could do a little matter of business with one of you fellows—"

"We're all sticking to our tin, Bunty."

"Oh, I don't want you to give me anything!" said Bunter loftily. "If you think I've come to you cadging, this discussion may as well end."

"Right-ho!" said Harry Wharton. "It's lasted long enough. Come on, you chaps, and let's get a quarter of an hour at the nets."

"Hold on, Wharton! Don't be in such a hurry. As I was saying, I haven't come to you cadging. I should be sorry to do anything of the sort. It's a mere matter of business. I want you to cash a postal order for me."

"But you haven't got one."

"No; but it's coming by to-night's post at the latest, and it will be for at least ten shillings—"



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"How do you know?"  
 "Well, it can hardly be for less. Still, as I want to treat you generously in this matter, I'll fix the figure at eight. You give me eight shillings now, and you take the whole of the postal order when it comes."

"When?"  
 "You get two shillings interest on a day's loan," said Bunter.

"You're too generous, Bunter."  
 "Well, it is generous, Nugent—but not too generous, considering how very badly I want the ready money," said Bunter. "Of course, like all money-lenders, you get a high interest to pay for the risk. There's just a slight risk that the postal order may not come to-night—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Any risk that it may not come at all?"  
 "Oh, no! That's quite out of the question."

"Anybody feel inclined to start in business as a Shylock, with a capital of eight shillings for a start?" asked Bob Cherry, looking round with a grin.

Harry Wharton laughed and shook his head.  
 "I haven't eight shillings, anyway," he remarked.

"Same here," said Nugent. "And such a rate of interest is too much. I couldn't accept it."

"The too muchfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "The only set-off against the too muchfulness of the honourable interest is the undoubted factfulness that the esteemed postal order will never arrive."

"The interest covers the risk," urged Billy Bunter. "I tell you that there are jolly few fellows who get a chance to lend out eight shillings at such a large interest."

"Go and give some of them a chance, then," said Nugent, yawning. "I say, are we going down to the cricket?"

"Wait a minute, you fellows. If you're too mean to accept my terms, say what interest you'd like. I'll make it higher—"

"Why not make it one hundred per cent?" said Bob Cherry gravely. "It wouldn't cost you any more to settle."

"Really, Cherry—"  
 The nabob was feeling in his pockets. Billy Bunter blinked at the chums through his big spectacles in a rather indignant way.

"Well, I must say you're awfully mean," he remarked. "You see me wasting away before your eyes, and you won't accept a high interest on a small loan!"

"All I have in the world," said Bob Cherry, "is a French penny and a half-penny with a hole in it. You can have either of them."

"Fortunately, I have some plentiful cashfulness," said the nabob. "I will not accept the esteemed Bunter's fat-headed offer, but I will advance him the loanfulness of the semi-crown—"

"The what?"  
 "The semi-crown," said the nabob, extending a half-crown to the eager fingers of Billy Bunter. "You are welcome to that honourable coin, my worthy Bunterful chum."

"Of course, it's understood that this is a loan, to be repaid with interest," said Billy Bunter. "I could not possibly accept it under any other conditions. If you could make it up to eight shillings, Inky, it would save me working out how much interest is due on it."

"That is the totalfulness of the honourable loan."  
 "It would be simpler to stick to round figures. Put another tanner to it, and make it three shillings."

Nugent added sixpence to the nabob's half-crown.

"Good!" said Bunter, wrinkling his brows thoughtfully. "Lemme see. I shall return you three-and-nine for this three shillings, and that will be at twenty-five per cent interest. You will be making a jolly good thing out of it, but the ready money is so necessary to me that I don't mind. I will hand over principal and interest when my postal order comes, and you can settle it between you."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent, grinning.

"The right-hofulness is terrific!"

"And now let's go and get some cricket," said Hazeldene.

Billy Bunter made a direct line for the tuckshop, and the chums of the Remove, laughing heartily, made their way down to the cricket field.

**Under a Cloud!**

**T**HE mystery of the pantry formed an inexhaustible topic of conversation in the Greyfriars Remove that day, and in the other Forms as well.

The prefects, who were supposed to be investigating the occurrence, growled audibly at the trouble and snapped at the Removites. And the Remove were worried. It was a serious matter for them, and it was quite impossible to divine who was the guilty party.

Levison shrugged his shoulders knowingly when the matter was discussed. He looked like one who was sure he knew all about it, though, as a rule, he confined himself to hints.

Most of the fellows were quite puzzled. Some agreed with Levison, some opined that Billy Bunter was the culprit. Nobody had any theory to advance which had much to be said in its favour. The Remove were under a cloud. Suspicion rested on the whole Form until the matter was cleared up, and Mr. Quelch's face remained grim.

The juniors retired that night, still wondering about the mysterious occurrence. Carberry, the prefect, came in to see lights out. He growled in his usual amiable way as he looked into the dormitory.

"Don't keep me waiting, you young sweeps!"

"Don't wait," said Bob Cherry. "Take your face away and bury it, old chap! That's all we ask of you."

"None of your cheek, Cherry! Get into bed. And if there's anybody in this Form wandering about to-night, he'd better look out for squalls!"

"There's a good chance for somebody," said Billy Bunter. "There's a lot of cold rabbit-pies in the pantry."

"How do you know?" demanded Nugent.

"Oh, I happened to see them! I asked the cook to let me have one of them, but she refused quite rudely."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see why she couldn't let me have one. I went down to see if the lock had been mended, you know."

"Thinking of going there, I suppose?" said Bulstrode.

"Well, if the door had been left unfastened, you know, a fellow might have had a rabbit-pie. But the lock has been mended; and, of course, I wouldn't raid the pantry, anyway," said Bunter, suddenly remembering that there was a prefect present.

"Of course you wouldn't!" snarled Carberry. "I dare say you are the

**PEN PALS**

(Continued from page 17.)

J. Green, 48, The Slade, Plumstead Common, London, S.E.18; age 14-18; exchanging butterflies, moths, birds' eggs, etc.; Gold Coast, West Africa.

M. Longmuir, 35, Norton Avenue, Norton-on-Tees, Stockton; age 18; sketching, films, cycling; America, Australia, Scotland.

T. Overthrow, 19, Serlo Road, Dean's Walk, Gloucester; age 15-16; sports, camping, films, books; British Isles.

Cecil Calvert, 276, Castlereagh Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland; age 11-13; stamps, chemistry; Egypt, South Africa.

James McNay, 92, Waverley Street, Glasgow, S.1; wants members for the New Empire Club; surprise for first ten writers; any age.

Miss Dora Goodman, 725, Wakefield Street, East Ham, London, E.6; girl correspondents; age 16-21; pen pals abroad.

Miss Sheila N. Young, 5, Albert Gate, Glasgow, W.2; girl correspondents; age 15-16; all sports, cricket, dogs.

James G. Manion, 51, Millett Street, Hurstville, New South Wales, Australia; stamps, ships, snaps; South Africa, Canada, China, England.

S. G. Scott, 203, Barker Road, Subiaco, Western Australia; age 15-17; stamps, cycling; Newfoundland, Ceylon, India, Egypt.

J. R. Trounce, Box 180, Horsham, Victoria, Australia; age 16-19; stamps, reading, sports; pen pals, anywhere.

Ken Dawson, 117, Mead Street, Peterhead, South Australia; pen pals; age about 14; any part of the British Empire.

L. C. Chuan, 33, Siang Lim Park, Singapore, Straits Settlements; pen pals; age 14-20; scouting, stamps.

Alfred S. Robinson, 56, Bickley Street, Tooting, London, S.W.17; age 19 upwards; stamps, coins, languages, opera.

L. Mason, Stonehurst, Frere Road, Sea Point, Cape Town, South Africa; sport, snaps; age 15-17.

Henry Oswald Bemand, 60, Walton Vale, Aintree, Liverpool; age 12-15; motor-cars, aeroplanes, trains, electricity; Canada.

Mr. J. MacKennie, Mahalapye Station, Bechua Protectorate, South Africa; pen pals; England.

Miss Violet F. Hunt, 27, Brockhurst Road, Gosport, Hants; girl correspondents; age 14-16; sports, dogs, films, snapshots, cycling, reading.

Roger Gee, 49, Morrish Street, Parkville, N.2, Victoria, Australia; age 12-17; exchange stamps and postcards; India, Canada, Britain, Africa.

Miss Sylvia Bederman, 55, Kerk Street, Belgravia, Johannesburg, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 13-15; South Africans preferred.

A. M. Patel, 64a, High Road, Fordsburg, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa; age

12-17; stamps, sports; Egypt, Straits Settlement, New Zealand, Palestine, India.

Morris B. Shepher, 141, Main Road, Parow, Cape Town, South Africa; age 13-16; Rugby; stamps; New Zealand, Australia.

A. Breinsan, 8, Mount Royal, Dunkirk Place, Congella, Durban, Natal, South Africa; age 15-17; stamps, scouting.

Walter Williams, 46, Priory Road, Eastney, Portsmouth; age 15-17; cycling, stamps.

Walter Hughes, 146, Wood Street, Grimsby, Lincs; stamps, photography; France, India, Canada.

Edward Brown, 338, Wavertree Nook Road; S. Wavertree, Liverpool 15; age 14-16; cigarette cards, foreign stamps; Australia, Africa.

Miss Phyllis Harrison, 5, Lauriston Place, Witton Road, Ashton, Birmingham 6; girl correspondent living on farm; age 14-16.

John Bradley, 108, Summerhill Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; age 13-17; stamps, West Indies, India.

Harry Ellis, 125, Royd Street, Ljathwaite, near Huddersfield, Yorkshire; pen pals.

Victor Minar, 72, Overdale Road, Colwick Wood Estate, Nottingham; electrical engineering, constructing, swimming; anywhere in the world.

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young scoundrel, all along, if the truth were known!"

"Not at all, Carberry. I am sorry that you should entertain such a suspicion. You are quite mistaken."

"Oh, shut up and get to bed!"

The door was open, and Carberry gave it a kick and slammed it. Billy Bunter had taken off his glasses, and he blinked round, and without his glasses he was blinder than an owl. He heard the door shut, and concluded that the prefect had gone.

"My hat," he said, "that silly ass Carberry has gone without turning the light out! Ill-tempered beast, isn't he? What are you making faces at me for, Cherry?"

"Ill-tempered beast, am I?" said Carberry, striding towards the short-sighted junior. "You cheeky young rascal!"

Billy Bunter jumped clear of the floor in amazement.

"I—I say, Carberry. I thought you were gone, you know! I—I didn't mean to call you anything. The words slipped out. What I really meant was that you were a jolly good-tempered fellow, whom we all like and respect."

The prefect burst into a laugh, in spite of himself.

"You young idiot, get to bed!"

"Certainly, Carberry!"

The prefect turned out the light, growled again, and quitted the dormitory.

"Ill-tempered beast, isn't he?" said Bunter. "Just like him to make me think he was gone when he wasn't."

"You young ass, it's a wonder he didn't lick you," said Nugent. "It would have served your job well, eh?"

"I don't see it. I'm awfully hungry, Nugent, old man. They are getting very skimpy with supper at this school. Might as well be under Chesham again if we're only going to have bread and cheese for supper."

"You ate enough for a couple of weeks."

"Really, Nugent—"

"Rats! Go to sleep."

"I'm afraid I'm too hungry to sleep. I was going to have a feed after tea, only my postal order hasn't come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's a disappointment, and it's rather unfeeling of you to laugh. Now I shall be able to pay you and luke the money I owe you, with the interest—"

"Hallo!" broke in Bulstrode's voice.

"What's that?"

"Nothing to do with you!" said Nugent.

"What is it, Bunty? Has Nugent been lending you money at interest?"

"Yes; at twenty-five per cent. Iuky and Nugent lent me three shillings

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between them, and I agreed to pay them back three-and-nine."

"My only hat! So that lot in Study No. 1 have started as moneylenders, have they?"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Harry Wharton impatiently. "Iuky and Nugent gave Bunter the money, and he's not going to repay it. It's only his silly gas about paying interest."

"Really, Wharton, you've got no right to say anything of the kind. I'm going to repay the loan, with interest."

"Rats!"

"He's rather a beast, though," groaned Monty Lowther. "He might have let us down lightly, considering that we were standing by him, and keeping his secret. It turns out that he hadn't any secret. Still, we were going to keep it, if he had one."

"Fancy that deep rotter, Cutts, using Kildare's coat," mumbled Tom Merry. "Just one of his tricks—he's been so jolly careful lately with his little games. But a fellow couldn't guess a thing like that, could he?"

"Well, you couldn't," agreed Blake.

"Ow, ow!" said Manners. "Anyway, we've got a thumping good licking. Aid it's all the fault of that ass for blabbing it out! Ow!"

"Bai Jove! It's nothin' of the sort!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I was going to keep it vewy dark, indeed. And you fellows ought to be grateful to me."

"What?"

"The rattiness is terrific."

"Oh, you can't crawl out of that," said Bulstrode. "You've been lending money at interest, and you ought to be jolly well sent to Coventry, you set of rotten Shillocks! You'd be expelled if the Head knew!"

"I say, you fellows, of course I shan't tell the Head. I shall regard it as a point of honour to keep the whole transaction a secret."

"Shut up, ass!"

"Yes, but really—"

"Oh, it's all right!" sneered Bulstrode. "You can't keep a secret from me, anyway. I know what Wharton and his gang have been up to now—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Harry.

"Shan't! I say—"

"If you say another word on the subject, Bulstrode, I'll have you out of bed in a jiffy!" exclaimed Wharton angrily.

Bulstrode yawned.

"Guilty conscience I suppose? Never mind, I'm going to sleep."

"You'd better!"

"The betterfulness is terrific."

Bulstrode yawned and pretended to sleep. The desultory talk of the dormitory ceased at last, and Bulstrode's snore became a genuine one. One by one the Remove dropped off to sleep, till silence and slumber wrapped the dormitory.

Creak!

Harry Wharton started.

It was a close, hot night, and Harry had been sleeping very lightly. The thought of the unsolved mystery, was in his mind, too, and mingled with his dreams. When he started into wakefulness he was thinking of it, and the creak of the opening door made him start.

He sat up in bed with a curious thrill at his heart.

*(Is the Remove raider on the prowl again? Don't miss next week's very thrilling chapters.)*

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "But for me, you would still be undah the impession that old Kildare had acted in a wotten way, when it was that beast 'Cutts' all the time. I told you it would go wong if you went without me—and it did! And I twust," concluded Arthur Augustus, with a solemn shake of the head—"I twust, deah boys, that this will be a lesson to you!"

"Oh, bump him!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake— Yawooh! You wottahs! Oh!"

"Bump!"

And Tom Merry & Co. went their way, leaving Arthur Augustus sitting on the floor, in a state of breathless indignation.

*(Next Wednesday: THE ST. JIM'S CHARITY FUND! Raising funds for a hospital provides Tom Merry & Co. with no end of fun! Read all about it in this sparkling yarn.)*

## STANDING BY THEIR SKIPPER!

*(Continued from page 21.)*

Kildare grimt: "and now hold out your hands."

The scene that followed was painful—very painful! Tom Merry & Co. bore it heroically, but they felt as if life was barely worth living when they crawled out of Kildare's study after it was over. They went down the passage squeezing their hands hard.

"Well, I'm glad," said Blake, with a determined effort to take a cheerful view. "I'm jolly glad it's all right about Kildare, I'm glad we were wrong about him—I mean, that Tom Merry was wrong about him."

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