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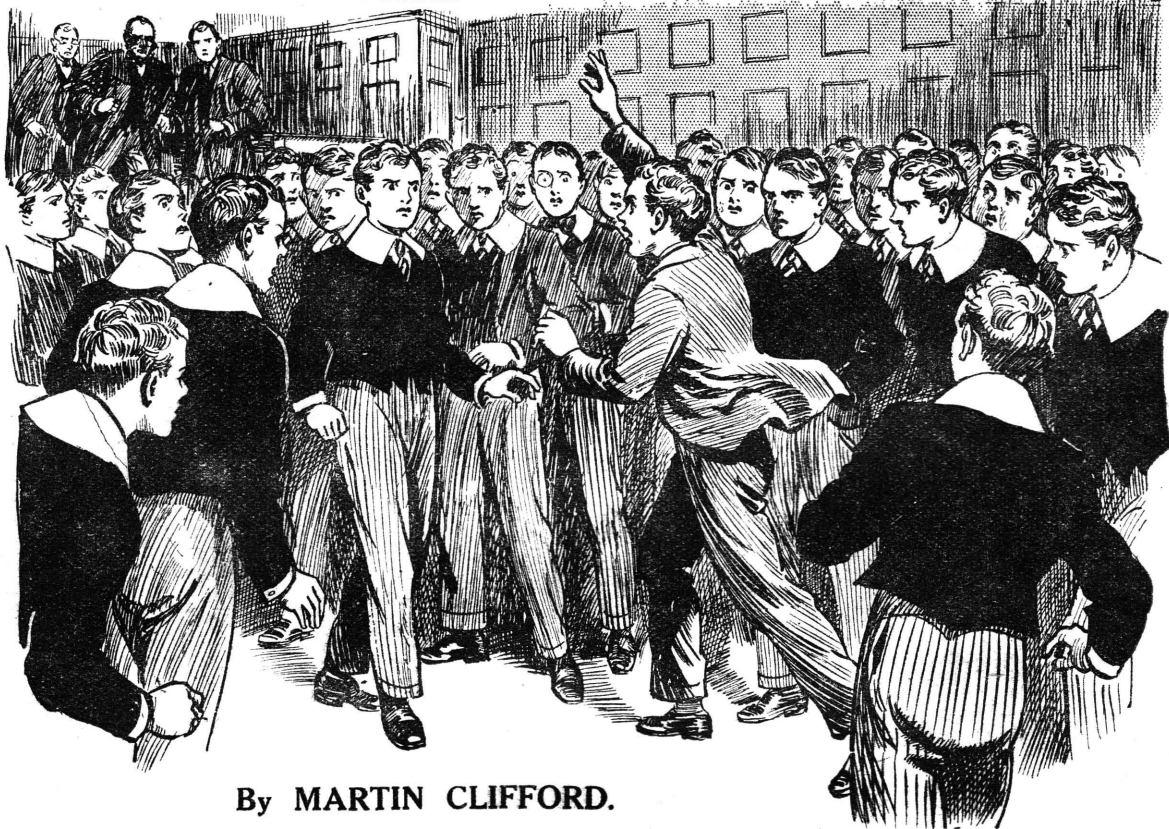
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*Long May
They Reign!*

EXPULSION FROM ST. JIM'S! IT IS THE HOUR OF TRIUMPH FOR TOM MERRY'S RASCALLY DOUBLE!

HE WANTED *to be* EXPELLED!



By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

There was a hubbub of voices as Tom Merry rushed into the crowded Hall, to come face to face with the rascal who had disgraced his name! "I am Tom Merry!" he exclaimed. "That scoundrel is my double! He is Clavering!"

CHAPTER 1. Staunch Pals!

THE Head of St. Jim's sat alone in his study.

It was growing late. Darkness lay upon the old quadrangle. The Head sat at his writing-table, and he held a pen in his fingers, but he was not writing. The Head's brows were contracted in deep thought.

So deep was the reverie into which he had fallen that he did not hear a timid tap at the study door.

Tap!

The knock was repeated more loudly. Dr. Holmes gave a little start.

"Come in!" he said.

The study door opened, and two juniors appeared in the doorway. Dr. Holmes glanced at them, and the deep frown upon his brow relaxed a little.

"You may come in, Manners and Lowther," he said kindly. "What is it?"

The two juniors entered the study. Monty Lowther closed the door. They came towards the Head's table and stood there, flushing and hesitating.

"You wish to speak to me?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir. You—you see, sir—"

began Lowther, looking at Manners.

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"It—that is—we—" said Manners, with a look at Lowther.

Then they stopped.

"You've come to speak to me about Tom Merry, I suppose?" said the Head gently.

The two Shell fellows brightened up.

"That's it, sir," said Lowther eagerly.

"I know that Tom Merry is your friend, and you are naturally concerned about him," said Dr. Holmes. "But I'm afraid I cannot listen to you. Merry has been sentenced to expulsion from the school. To-morrow morning he will be flogged in public and expelled. The whole school knows the reason."

"Yes, sir, I know," said Lowther.

"But—but he isn't exactly our friend now, sir. He's quarrelled with us; he's quarrelled with nearly every fellow in the school. But—he was an old pal, and he was always a splendid chap until he—until he changed. We're not on speaking terms with him now, sir. But—"

"But you wish to plead for him, all the same?" said the Head, with a smile.

"Well, sir, we know he's done wrong," said Manners. "All the House is down on him. We're down on him, for that matter. But—but couldn't you give him another chance, sir? I—I think he must be off his rocker. I—I mean he can't be quite himself, the way

he has been going on lately. If he had another chance—"

"I am sure he would be grateful for it, sir," said Monty Lowther. "He's had a lesson now, sir."

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"I have learned many things about Merry that I did not know before to-day," he said. "I have received reports from his Housemaster, from his Form-master, and from the head prefect of the House. It is impossible for me to allow such a boy to remain in the school. He has deceived me grossly. I am afraid I can do nothing, my lads."

"I am thinking of his guardian, too," said Lowther. "Miss Priscilla Fawcett, sir. This will be a rotten thing for her."

A shadow came over the Head's face.

"Merry should have thought of that."

"I know, sir, but—but he didn't. And—and really I don't think he is quite himself, sir, this last week. After the way he's turned out, most of the fellows think that he has been humbugging all along; but it isn't so, sir. We know that jolly well. There was nothing wrong with him up to a week ago."

"Can you be sure of that, Lowther?" said the Head, drumming uneasily on the table with his fingers.

"Quite sure, sir. We were his chums and his studymates, and we know."

THE FINAL STAGE IN THE PLOT TO RUIN TOM MERRY FOR A FORTUNE MOVES TOWARDS ITS THRILLING AND DRAMATIC CLIMAX!

"It's since that affair with that fellow Clavering, sir," said Manners. "You know that fellow who's his double, sir, and he caused Tom a lot of worry by impersonating him and getting him into rows. Ever since then Tom hasn't been like his old self. It seems to have got on his nerves, somehow, and made him act the giddy goat—I—I mean, it's changed him, sir. That's the only way I can account for it. Up to that time there wasn't a better or more decent fellow breathing than Tom Merry."

"You feel sure of that?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Ask any of the fellows—Blake, or D'Arcy, or Figgins, sir. They'll all tell you the same."

There was a pause.

"But Merry's conduct has been utterly outrageous," said the Head, at last. "His Form-master discovered that he carried a pack of cards. He actually dropped them in Mr. Linton's presence. Kildare found him several times smoking in his study. This evening he was found under the influence of drink. Since then his study has been searched, and intoxicating liquor has been found there, and cards, and a box of cigarettes. I understand that you two juniors no longer share that study with him."

"Not for the past week, sir."

"I do not suspect you in any way of being parties to his conduct," said the Head, "but it is very difficult for me to believe that this wretched blackguardism he has fallen into is the work of only one week."

"But it is, sir," said Lowther. "There was nothing of the kind when we shared the study with him. We know that for certain. He must have got under the influence of some rotter, I should think. Anyway, there was nothing of the kind up to a week ago."

"Any of the fellows will tell you, sir," said Manners.

"Then how do you account for this sudden change in his character?" asked the Head.

"I can't, sir," said Lowther. "I don't understand it."

"It beats me, sir," said Manners. "It beats all the fellows. I can only think that he's not himself—that he's ill or something."

"You should certainly know whether this is a change, or whether he has acted in this way before," said the Head musingly. "If I could take your views, it might make a difference to my decision. But—"

"We give you our word, sir."

There was another pause.

"You may send Merry to me," said the Head, apparently coming to a conclusion. "I will speak to him and see what can be done."

"Oh, thank you, sir! I am sure if you gave him another chance—"

"We will see. Send him here."

"Yes, sir."

And Manners and Lowther, their faces considerably brighter, left the study, leaving the Head in deep thought.

Outside the study door the two Shell fellows exchanged glances of satisfaction.

"There's a chance," said Lowther. "If Tom has any sense he will get out of it this time."

"He doesn't seem to care whether he gets out of it or not," said Manners. "Still, he can't want to be sacked. Come on!"

Four juniors were waiting for them at the end of the passage—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6. They were all looking very serious.

"What's the verdict?" asked Blake. "The Head's going to see him," said Lowther. "There's a chance."

"Good!"

"Yass, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with satisfaction. "It would be wotten for him to be kicked out, though he has acted like a fealful wottah."

Lowther and Manners went up to the Shell passage. The juniors of the School House were all looking very glum and thoughtful. Fellows collected in groups in the passages, talking in low voices. An expulsion was a serious matter, and the sentence had fallen upon Tom Merry, once the most popular fellow in the House.

His popularity certainly had gone. The change that had come over the captain of the Shell had surprised and disgusted all the School House fellows, and one by one his friends had dropped away from him. Manners and Lowther had been his best chums, but they were no longer on speaking terms with him. Study No. 6 ignored his existence. With the exception of Crooke and McIllich, two rank outsiders, he had hardly a friend in the school.

Yet, when the sentence of expulsion from the school fell upon him, his old

Impersonating Tom Merry at St. Jim's in order to blacken his name, Clavering at last gains his end. But there's an eleventh-hour shock for the junior who schemed for his own expulsion!

friends felt it as a blow. They no longer liked him, but they could not forget that they had been his friends, and they would all have done anything they could to save him.

The captain of the Shell was in his study—the study he had shared with Manners and Lowther, when the Terrible Three were inseparable chums.

There was an odour of tobacco smoke as Monty Lowther opened the door. The captain of the Shell was seated in an armchair, his feet on the fender, smoking.

Manners and Lowther exchanged a hopeless glance. The fellow was to be expelled from the school on the following morning; and here he was, breaking one of the most rigid rules of St. Jim's with utter recklessness. What had come over him? It seemed that he was no longer the Tom Merry they had known.

"Tom!" said Lowther quietly. The junior in the armchair jumped up.

"Hallo! What do you want?"

"We've been to the Head, and there's a chance for you yet, Tom."

The captain of the Shell shrugged his shoulders.

"Rot!" he said. "I'm going to be sacked in the morning. The Head himself said so. It's all up. Have you been asking favours for me?"

"Yes."

"Then I'd rather you minded your own business!"

"Well, we haven't minded our own business," Lowther said, keeping his temper with an effort. "We've asked the Head to give you another chance."

"Oh, rats!"

"Tom, think of Miss Fawcett! It would almost break her heart if you were expelled from the school," said Manners earnestly.

"Bosh!"

"Well, you're to go to the Head," said Lowther abruptly. "That's all."

The junior grunted discontentedly.

Manners and Lowther turned, and, without another word, left the study. The door slammed after them.

"He's not going," said Lowther, in a low voice. "He's throwing away his last chance."

"The Head's waiting for him," said Manners uneasily. "He will be awfully ratty if Tom doesn't go."

"We can't do anything more."

"I—I suppose not."

And the two Shell fellows, depressed and worried, went downstairs to the Common-room.

They passed Crooke of the Shell on the stairs.

"Seen Tom Merry?" asked Crooke.

"Yes," said Lowther shortly. "He's in his study."

The cad of the Shell made his way to Tom Merry's study.

CHAPTER 2.

What Crooke Knew!

THE junior who sat in Tom Merry's armchair threw the stump of his cigarette into the fire and lighted another.

There was a sardonic grin on his handsome face.

He did not look like a fellow who was under sentence of expulsion from school. His expression was satisfied, as though matters were going exactly as he wanted them.

Crooke opened the door and looked in. His expression was sardonic, too, as if he was in possession of some joke that was unknown to the other fellows. The captain of the Shell looked round angrily.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"Oh, I've come to see how you're taking it!" said Crooke, entering the study, and closing the door after him.

"Well, now you've seen, you can get out!"

"Thanks! I'm not going yet." Crooke seated himself coolly upon the corner of the table. "You're not very much cut up at being expelled from school!"

"Mind your own business!"

"You want to be sacked—eh?"

The Shell fellow scowled.

"Don't talk like an idiot!" he said.

"Of course I don't want to be sacked!"

"Liar!" said Crooke.

The other junior started.

"What—what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean, Reggie Clavering!"

The Shell fellow stared blankly at Crooke, and a pallor overspread his face.

"Clavering!" he repeated. "Why—why do you call me Clavering? That

—that's the name of the fellow who's like me—my—my double."

"It's your name."

"I—I'm Tom Merry!"

"Liar!"

The Shell captain clenched his hands convulsively.

"Keep your temper," said Crooke, eyeing him warily. "This isn't exactly guesswork, you know. All the fellows have been surprised by the sudden change in Tom Merry—a regular model up to the past week, and since then the biggest blackguard in the school. I was as surprised as anybody; but I found out the truth by accident. I should never have guessed it. I was in the wood on Saturday afternoon, when you met the man you call Gerald Goring."

The Shell fellow's jaw dropped.

"I heard all that was said," resumed Crooke.

"You—you're lying!"

"I'll prove it to you. You made your accomplice tell you all about it, because you wouldn't be left in the dark. There's a Mr. Brandreth, a rich South African mine-owner, who's made Tom Merry his heir, because he used to be a great chum of Merry's father when he was alive. Gerald Goring is the son of Mr. Brandreth's dead partner, and he was to be the old man's heir; but he was expelled from college for some disgrace or other, and then he was cut off. Tom Merry's name was put in the will instead of Gerald Goring's, but with the condition that if Tom Merry should turn out like Goring, he was to be passed over; then the money goes to Goring all the same. The old man is in bad health, and may die at any time. If Tom Merry should act disgracefully, and get expelled from the school, Goring would be a rich man when old Brandreth dies. Haven't I got it right?"

The other junior did not speak. He seemed scarcely able to breathe.

"Goring knew it was no good expecting Tom Merry to get sacked. Although he doesn't know anything about the will, he's not the kind of fellow to get into disgrace. That's where he made use of you. You were so like Tom Merry that you had been taken for him, and that put the idea into Goring's head. Somehow or other, he has managed to kidnap the real Tom Merry, and plant you in his place. That accounts for the sudden change that has surprised the fellows. You came here under Tom Merry's name, with the deliberate intention of acting disgracefully. It was a jolly deep game. Everybody will believe that Tom Merry has disgraced himself, and been kicked out of the school. The real Tom Merry is being kept a prisoner somewhere, until old Brandreth dies. Dare you deny it?"

"I—I deny it! It—it's all lies!"

Crooke laughed again.

"You can deny it, if you like; but you know it's true. I tell you, I heard every word that you and Goring said in the wood."

"You spying hound!"

"May as well be a spy as an impostor and a cheat!" said Crooke. "Mind, I don't care twopence for Tom Merry! And I dislike him as much as you do. I knew all this on Saturday."

"And you kept it dark till now?"

"Exactly! I let you run on," said Crooke coolly. "I knew you were going to pretend to be intoxicated, and let the prefects catch you—that was the

game. In Tom Merry's name, you will be expelled from this school, after losing him all his friends here. You will go to his house in his name, and wear out Miss Fawcett's patience, and make her dislike her ward, too. When old Brandreth dies, the real Tom Merry will be released—he is to be stupefied with drink, and found intoxicated in the streets—and after that he may tell what yarn he likes about having been impersonated here, but nobody will believe him. You see, I know the whole game."

The other fellow's eyes were burning, and his fingers were working convulsively. It was evident that he could scarcely restrain himself from springing upon the cad of the Shell.

The cunning plot for the ruin of the real Tom Merry had been brought to a culmination—and now all was threatened with failure—and the plotters with punishment, owing to Crooke's discovery.

For a word from Crooke would reveal the cheat.

"Keep your temper," said Crooke, with a sneering smile. "No good going for me, you know; that won't help you."

"You—you hound!" Clavering hissed out. "You've found me out, have you—well, you shall pay for it."

"Hold on! I—I— Oh!"

Clavering was upon him with the spring of a tiger.

In his powerful grasp, the cad of the Shell was whirled off the table, and went with a crash to the floor.

Clavering's clutch was on his throat. The outwitted scoundrel was beside himself with rage, and murderous ferocity blazed in his eyes. Crooke's face was white with fear as he looked up into the savage eyes above him. He choked in the grip of the junior and struggled in vain.

"Hands off!" he panted. "Are you mad? I'm not going to give you away. I swear I'm not going to betray you! Hands off!"

"You—you—"

The study door opened, and Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, looked in.

"Tom Merry, you're wanted! Why—what—"

Tom Merry's double released Crooke and sprang to his feet. The cad of the Shell lay gasping on the floor. Kildare eyed him sternly.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

Crooke scrambled up. Clavering stood white and panting. It was all coming out now. He bowed his head as if for a blow, as he stood in anticipation of a torrent of denunciation from Crooke.

But it did not come. Crooke paused for a few moments, thoroughly to enjoy the terror of the junior who had attacked him. Then he spoke.

"It's all right, Kildare," he said. "Tom Merry lost his temper. It's all right!"

Clavering drew a deep breath. Then he was not to be betrayed. Crooke had always been Tom Merry's enemy, and in spite of the way Clavering had handled him, he did not mean to interfere.

"Very well," said Kildare shortly. "Merry, the Head wants you; he sent for you some time ago. You are to come to his study at once."

"I don't want to!"

"That makes no difference."

Kildare's grasp closed on the shoulder of the Shell fellow, and he was forcibly led from the study. Crooke set his collar straight, and chuckled breathlessly. He had deliberately tortured the impostor, like a cat playing with a

mouse, but he did not intend to betray him. Crooke knew a trick worth two of that, as he would have put it. He was unscrupulous and his little game was to fish in troubled waters.

CHAPTER 3.

Given a Chance!

DR. HOLMES looked sternly at the junior as Kildare led him into the study.

The fellow whom St. Jim's knew as Tom Merry wore a sullen scowl. He knew that there was a chance now that he would not be expelled from St. Jim's; and that chance was the last thing he wanted. If he were spared now, it meant that he had to do his cunning work over again. The Head little dreamed of the thoughts that were passing in the mind of the junior before him.

"I sent for you some time ago, Merry!" he said sternly. "Thank you, Kildare; you may go!"

The captain of St. Jim's left the study. The Shell fellow stood sullenly silent. Dr. Holmes regarded him attentively.

"Merry, your friends have been to me—Manners and Lowther."

"Yes, sir."

"They have put the matter in a somewhat new light to me. Your conduct has been disgraceful—utterly disgraceful and worthy only of contempt and disgust. Yet, as I'm inclined to believe that this change in your character has only come lately, and because you have previously had an excellent record in the school, I have decided to give you one more chance."

"I—I haven't asked—"

"I am thinking of your future, and also of your guardian, Miss Fawcett—a most estimable lady, whom I should be very sorry to wound. I think it possible that this lesson may not be lost upon you. Upon further reflection, I have decided to give you a most severe flogging, but to spare you expulsion from the school."

The Shell fellow gritted his teeth.

"I—I'd rather be expelled, and not flogged, sir," he muttered. "I—I don't want to be flogged!"

The Head smiled grimly.

"I dare say that is the case," he said. "But you should have considered that before you acted in a disgraceful manner. You will be flogged in any case. That was my intention, even if I had expelled you also. But the expulsion will be suspended; it will depend upon your future conduct. That is all I have to say to you, Merry. To-morrow morning, before the assembled school, you will be soundly flogged. And, in case of any further act of rascality such as you have been guilty of, you will be expelled from the school. Now you may go!"

"I—I—"

"Enough! Leave my study."

The junior turned and quitted the study. His rage was so great that he could scarcely speak. The thought crossed his mind that by insolence to the Head at that moment he might confirm the sentence that had been rescinded. But insolence to the Head required more nerve than he possessed. Expulsion he wanted, but canings he did not desire.

He left the study, and in the passage outside he stood trembling with rage, and clenching his hands savagely.

"Tom! Is it all right?"

Monty Lowther hurried up to him, the eager question on his lips. In spite of all, Lowther could not forget that Tom Merry had been his pal.

The junior turned on him savagely. It was to Manners and Lowther that he owed this.

"Hang you!" he muttered. Lowther started back. "Hasn't the Head let you off, Tom? I thought—"

Smack! Full across Lowther's face came the Shell fellow's hand in a savage blow. Lowther staggered back against the wall. Manners ran up the passage.

"Tom, what's the matter? Hold on, Lowther!" Lowther's face was white, save where the mark of the blow showed crimson. His eyes were blazing.

"That's for your meddling!" hissed Clavering.

"Tom! Hasn't the Head—"

"Let me alone!" The Shell fellow strode down the passage. But Monty Lowther's grip on his shoulder swung him back.

"No, you don't!" said Lowther, between his teeth. "I don't take that from anybody!"

"Let me go!" "Monty, old man—" urged Manners.

"Do you think I'm going to let him smack my face?" demanded Lowther. "I don't care if he was twenty times my chum before he became a dirty blackguard. I'm not standing that! He'll come into the gym with me!"

"I won't!" "You will! Come on!"

The Shell fellow struggled fiercely in Lowther's grasp. Half a dozen juniors came running up in alarm.

"Don't row here, outside the Head's study!" exclaimed Blake.

"By Jove, I believe that's his game!" Lowther exclaimed savagely. "Lend me a hand to get him away quietly! He's going to stand up to me for what he's done!"

"Let me go!" yelled the Shell fellow, struggling furiously.

"He wants to get the Head here," said Lowther. "Lend me a hand, I tell you!"

The juniors were all exasperated as well as Lowther. The evident desire of the captain of the Shell to bring the Head on the scene was the finishing touch. They grasped him on all sides, and he was swept off his feet and rushed away down the passage.

"Bring the rotter into the gym!" said Lowther. "He's going to fight me. I've been fed-up with him for a long time!"

"The gym's closed," said Blake. "It's close on bed-time, old man. Leave the cad alone till to-morrow."

"I'll fight him in the dorm, then!" said Lowther, between his teeth. "Do you think I'm going to take a blow from that rotter?"

The Shell fellow struggled out of the grasp of the juniors.

"Bed-time, you kids!" called out Kildare down the passage.

And the juniors dispersed to their dormitories.

The captain of the Shell was a prey to intense uneasiness and disquietude as he went into his dormitory with the rest of the Shell. Monty Lowther's grim look told him what he had to expect after lights-out.

CHAPTER 4.

The Dormitory Ragging!

KILDARE came to see lights out in the Shell dormitory.

The juniors had turned in—with the intention of turning out again as soon as the captain of St. Jim's had gone.



Swish, swish! Whack, whack! Swish, swish! Blows descended like rain from both sides as the captain of the Shell ran the gauntlet. He came out at the end of the line, gasping and gurgling. "Make him run through again!" shouted Gore.

There was to be a fight between Monty Lowther and his old comrade in the dormitory. That was settled. It was known now that the expelled junior had been granted a reprieve, if not a pardon, and that he owed it to the intercession of his old chums, whom his conduct had estranged. His black ingratitude to them almost appalled the fellows. There was not one in the dormitory who did not wish to see him soundly licked.

They were anticipating the scene after lights-out. But they did not anticipate what was to happen before lights-out. The captain of the Shell sat up in bed. "Kildare!" he called out.

"Well, Merry?"

"Lowther intends to fight me after lights-out. I call on you, as a prefect, to put a stop to it!"

Kildare started. His glance expressed almost incredulous scorn. There was a murmur from the Shell fellows.

Tom Merry had sneaked.

All his previous conduct was as nothing to this. He had sneaked to a prefect in order to get out of a fight he had brought on by his own savage temper. The juniors could scarcely believe their ears.

"Well, that takes the bun!" muttered Kangaroo, in amazement. "Blessed if I would ever believe it of him!"

"It's the giddy limit!" said Clifton Dane.

"Is that true, Lowther?" asked Kildare.

"Yes," muttered Lowther.

"Well, I forbid anything of the kind, of course. If you have any row with Tom Merry, you can settle it in the gym to-morrow with gloves on. There is to

be no fighting here to-night. Do you understand?"

Lowther was silent.

"Come, Lowther, I must have your promise before I leave the dorm," said Kildare, "otherwise I shall have to report you! Give me your word!"

"Very well," said Lowther, between his clenched teeth, "I won't touch him."

"That's all right."

And Kildare put out the light and quitted the dormitory. There were a few moments of silence after he had departed, then the storm broke.

"Sneak!" "Cad!" "Funk!" "Coward!" "Rotter!"

Every fellow in the dormitory had something to say. The epithets that were rained upon the captain of the Form from all sides might have made any decent fellow squirm. But they did not seem to have any effect upon their object. He was heard to yawn.

"Tom Merry," said Lowther, in a low, concentrated voice, "you used to be my chum. I've spoken up for you to the Head. I'm ashamed that I ever had you for a pal. I'll never speak a word for you again. And I'll lick you to-morrow till you can't stand."

"He's not going to wait till to-morrow!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "The dirty cad isn't going to be sacked, after all, and we're going to take the law into our own hands. We don't allow sneaking in the Shell!"

"No fear!" "Rag the rotter!"

"I've promised not to touch him to-night," said Lowther.

"But we haven't," said Gore.

"You stay in bed, Monty, old man," said Kangaroo, jumping out. "We'll look after that rotten sneak!"

"If you touch me—" began Clavering

"We'll touch you fast enough!" chuckled the Cornstalk. "Light a candle, somebody!"

The captain of the Shell sprang from his bed, but Kangaroo's powerful grasp closed upon him.

"Help!" yelled the junior.

Kangaroo's hand was clasped upon his mouth the next moment. His yell died away in a choked gurgle.

"Pretty specimen, isn't he?" said the Cornstalk contemptuously. "And that's the chap we made captain of the Form! My hat!"

"He jolly well won't be the captain any longer!" said Gore. "We'll stop that!"

"Yes, rather!"

Clifton Dane had lighted a candle, and set it up on a washstand. The Shell fellows were all out of bed now, and surrounding their victim, with the exception of Manners, Lowther, and Crooke. Lowther had given Kildare his word, and Manners, disgusted as he was, did not want to take a hand against his old chum. Crooke, for reasons best known to himself, decided to keep out of the ragging.

The captain of the Shell stood in the midst of a threatening circle. His hands were clenched, and his eyes glittering, but his face was white.

"You've sneaked, you cad!" said Kangaroo. "Now you've got to go through it! Understand? And if you try to make a row we'll gag you!"

He gripped the junior just in time as he opened his mouth. A gurgle died away under the Cornstalk's heavy hand.

"Give me a sponge here!" said Kangaroo grimly.

Gore grinned and handed him a sponge. Kangaroo jammed it coolly into the prisoner's mouth. He tied a towel round his head to keep it there. Clavering clutched at the towel, and immediately another towel was tied round his wrists, securing them behind his back.

"Now bump him!" said Gore.

"Too much row," said Kangaroo, who had constituted himself master of the ceremonies. "We don't want Kildare back again with a cane. We'll make the rotter run the gauntlet. Form in line!"

"Good egg!"

The Shell fellows formed up quickly enough. They planted themselves in a double row, each fellow armed with a knotted towel, or a slipper, or a book. Kangaroo marched the victim towards them.

"Now run!" he said.

The captain of the Shell stood still. He could not speak, but his eyes were burning with rage and hatred.

"Will you run?"

Clavering gurgled.

"No? Then I'll help you!"

Kangaroo planted his foot behind the prisoner with a powerful kick, and he staggered between the two rows of waiting juniors.

Then the blows began to fall.

Swish, swish! Whack, whack! Swish, swish!

"Run, you rotter!"

"Help him along!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

Kangaroo kicked again, and the rascal ran. It was better for him to run now, for the blows were descending from both sides like rain. Every junior was anxious to get in a slash or two.

Clavering ran unsteadily, with his hands tied behind him, lurching from side to side, and ducking in vain efforts to escape the blows that rained on him. He came out at the end of the line at last, gasping and gurgling, and rolled over on the floor.

"Make him run through again!" shouted Gore.

"Hold on! Cave!" rapped out Kangaroo.

There was a footstep in the passage. Bernard Glyn blew out the candle and threw it under the bed, and the juniors dived for their beds like rabbits for their holes. There was only one fellow out of bed when the door opened. It was Tom Merry's double, writhing and wriggling in his bonds.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, stepped in and turned on the light. His glance was amazed as it dwelt on the wriggling form on the floor.

"Merry!"

Gurgle, gurgle!

"What does this mean?"

Deep snores came from some of the beds. Mr. Railton smiled slightly and crossed over to the bound junior and released him. The Shell fellows lay waiting for the thunderclap, so to speak. Mr. Railton was very much down on a dormitory rag. But the thunderclap did not come. Perhaps he knew that the juniors had good reasons for that ragging.

"You had better get to bed, Merry," Mr. Railton said quietly.

The ragged junior spluttered with rage.

"They made me run the gauntlet! They ought to be punished! I've been ragged! They were all in it—Noble, Dane, and Glyn, and—"

Mr. Railton's lip curled.

"Noble!" he said quietly.

Noble sat up in bed, resigned to his fate.

"Yes, sir!"

"You have been ragging Merry?"

"Yes, sir. He's a sneak and a beast and a disgrace to the House!" said Kangaroo.

"We were all in it, sir," said Clifton Dane.

"You will take a hundred lines each, and let there be no further disturbance here to-night," said the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir."

"Get into bed, Merry!" Mr. Railton could not suppress the contempt in his tone. "You will not be disturbed again."

"They ought to be caned!"

"That is for me to decide. Get to bed at once, or you will be caned!"

The captain of the Shell sullenly crawled into bed. Mr. Railton switched off the light and left the dormitory. He knew that there would be no further ragging that night.

"Well," murmured Kangaroo, "we go off cheap that time! I expected a licking."

"Railton knows the rotter ought to be ragged!" growled Gore.

"The sneak!"

"The rotter!"

"The rotten outsider!"

And the Shell fellows, debarred from any further ragging, continued to tell their Form captain what they thought of him till they grew sleepy. They dropped off to sleep one by one, the victim of the ragging being the last to slumber. He was aching from the

punishment he had received, and he was troubled with fears and apprehension for the morrow.

In the morning a flogging awaited him, and after that there was Crooke, who had only to speak a word to wreck all his carefully laid plans and hand him over to the punishment he had richly earned. It was not surprising that Reggie Clavering, as he lay there, aching, sleepless, and apprehensive, anathematised Gerald Goring, whose cunning and greed had led him to play the part of Tom Merry at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

A Bid for Liberty!

WHILE Tom Merry's double was playing—with so much discomfort to himself—the role of the captain of the Shell at St. Jim's, where was Tom Merry?

In those very moments, while Clavering was suffering the punishment of his sins at the hands of his ragers, the real Tom Merry was pacing a room with barred window and bolted door—a prisoner.

Tom Merry had changed during the week he had been a prisoner in the lonely house on Luxford Hills.

At first he had hoped for release or for escape. A dozen plans had been formed in his mind for outwitting his gaoler, but formed in vain.

Twice a day a masked man brought him food and drink.

That was the only link he had with the outer world.

The close confinement in the locked room had changed him. His face was pale, his health was suffering from want of exercise.

But worse than the confinement was the worry that preyed on his mind.

He had been kidnapped from St. Jim's in the hours of darkness; he had awakened from a drugged sleep, to find himself here. Since then he knew nothing of what had happened at the school.

That he owed his imprisonment to his mysterious enemy, Gerald Goring, he was certain—to Goring, and to Reginald Clavering, his double, who had caused him so much trouble earlier by impersonating him.

But that Clavering was even now impersonating him at St. Jim's, taking his place in the old school, Tom Merry never dreamed. The boldness, the reckless daring of the plot made it impossible to suspect.

Tom Merry believed that he was missed from school, that he must be searched for, and each weary day he hoped for rescue.

"I've got to get out of this!" he muttered again and again, as he paced the narrow prison. "Where am I? What are they doing it for? What does it all mean?"

He pressed his hand to his throbbing brow.

Escape was his thought—and it was impossible. The barred window was impossible to pass, and the bars, placed at a distance from the glass, made it impossible for him to reach the panes to break them. The panes were all ground glass, and he could not see beyond them.

More than once he had thought of trying conclusions with the masked man who brought him his food. But the man was burly and powerful, and he never came to the room without a bludgeon in his hand, which he was quite ready to use if necessary. A struggle with him would have been hopeless.

But Tom Merry was getting to the pitch of desperation now.

He flung himself upon the bed at last, but it was long before he slept. He was thinking of St. Jim's—thinking of his friends there. Would he ever see the old school again? He had been a prisoner for a whole week now—it seemed like years to him.

He slept at last, and woke when the morning sun was streaming through the ground glass of the window.

He rose with a new and desperate determination in his heart. When the gaoler came again he would fight for his liberty. It was better to fight and be beaten than to endure this imprisonment without a struggle. He felt that he had no chance, but he was desperate now.

There were footsteps outside on the landing at last. Tom Merry clenched his hands, his eyes gleaming. The moment was at hand. He heard the grating of the bolt as it was withdrawn, the click of the key in the lock. The masked man appeared, his face covered with a cloth tied round the back of his head, pierced for sight and breathing. He had a tray in his hands, and his cudgel hung by a thong from his waist. It was only a boy he had to deal with, but he was never off his guard.

"Here's your grub," he said, as he set the tray on the table, keeping between Tom Merry and the door. "Now, then, keep your distance! Don't play the fool!"

Tom Merry panted. "Will you let me go?"

There was a chuckle under the black mask.

"Not if I know it! Eat your breakfast, and be thankful that you git it, young shaver! You'll be let go all in good time, I reckon!"

The man backed towards the door, never taking his eyes from the junior. Tom Merry stepped to the table and took up a jug of water—the drink provided for him. The man was stepping backwards from the doorway, when Tom suddenly hurled the jug.

Crash!
"You young 'ound!"

The masked man raised the cudgel just in time. The jug crashed on it and broke, and fell in a score of fragments to the floor. The water splashed over the rascal. At the same moment, the desperate junior sprang at him.

"Ands off, you young fool!"

Tom Merry closed with him savagely. Burly as the man was, for a moment the junior's fierce attack bore him backwards. They reeled together through the doorway out upon the landing. On the verge of the stairs they struggled. But the ruffian's sinewy arms were wound round the junior, and, in spite of his desperate efforts, he was whirled off his feet and dragged back through the doorway.

"Let go!" hissed the ruffian, breathing hard from his exertions.

He freed his right hand, grasping the cudgel. Tom Merry clung to him, struggling with all his strength. The cudgel circled in the air, and a savage blow was struck.

Tom Merry's fierce grasp relaxed. He staggered back into the room, his hands catching helplessly at the air, and fell like a log to the floor.

The masked man leaned on the door-post, panting for breath.

"E would 'ave it!" he muttered. The fallen junior did not stir. He had been stunned. The ruffian bent over him and placed him on the bed.

Then he quitted the room, locking and bolting the door behind him.



For a long time the hapless junior lay motionless on the bed, scarcely seeming to breathe. His senses came back at last, and he raised himself dazedly on his elbow, looking wildly round him. His head was aching and throbbing. He ran his hand through his curly hair, and felt the bump there where the cudgel had struck. He groaned. He had made his bid for liberty, and he had failed. He was still a prisoner, helpless, in the hands of his enemies.

CHAPTER 6.
The Flogging!

ST. JIM'S was in a buzz of excitement that morning.

The order had gone forth for the whole school to assemble in Big Hall, after prayers, to witness the flogging of the captain of the Shell.

Seniors and juniors crowded in from both Houses. When the school was assembled, there was only one fellow who was missing from his place. Tom Merry was not to be seen in the ranks of the Shell.

The Shell fellows whispered to one another. The Head was expected to enter at any moment. Taggles, the porter, whose duty it was to "hoist" the junior, was ready at his post. But the condemned junior was not there.

"Where is he?" Kangaroo muttered. "Isn't he coming?"

"I saw him going into his study," said Gore, with a grin. "Perhaps he isn't coming. I fancy he'd rather be sacked than flogged. And if he refuses to come—"

"He'll be fetched!" said Dane.

"The Head may change his mind and sack him instead," Kangaroo remarked. "It's queer, but it really seems as if he'd prefer that. I can't understand him."

Whatever might be the condemned junior's motive, certainly he was not there.

Kildare glanced over the Shell, looking for him.

"Where is Tom Merry?" he asked. "In his study, I think, Kildare," said Gore.

Kildare frowned. "He should be here! Go and tell him to come at once, Gore!"

"Right-ho!"

George Gore left the Hall and, at the same moment the Head entered by the upper door. Dr. Holmes' face was very grave. He glanced at the table where the birch lay, and then glanced over the assembled school. The buzz died away into respectful silence.

"Merry!"

The Head's voice, low but deep, was heard in every corner in Big Hall. There was no reply, and no one stirred.

"He isn't here, sir," said Kildare awkwardly. "I've sent for him."

Dr. Holmes frowned. The junior had been ordered to be in his place, and he had evidently defied that order.

"Very well, Kildare," he said quietly. Gore came back into the Hall. He came alone. Kildare turned to him sharply.

"Well, where is Tom Merry?" he asked.

"He says he won't come."

There was a gasp from all the fellows. Dr. Holmes' frown grew darker.

"You had better go, Kildare," he said quietly. "You will see that Merry comes immediately. Take Darrell with you."

"Yes, sir."

The two prefects left the Hall. There was a grim and uncomfortable silence. The Head stood like a statue, his face expressing no emotion. Tom Merry was keeping the Head and the whole school waiting! It was, as Figgins whispered to Blake, the giddy limit.

In a few minutes footsteps were heard outside the door.

Kildare and Darrell came in, with the recalcitrant junior between them. The fellows who had expected to see a struggle were disappointed. The Shell fellow walked quietly between the two seniors, each of whom held him by the arm. Certainly resistance would not have availed him much. His face was dark and sullen.

Kildare and Darrell marched the junior up the Hall to where the Head stood waiting, then they fell back and left him there.

Dr. Holmes fixed his eyes upon the junior with a glance that made him shrink.

"You were ordered to be here, Merry," he said quietly. "Why were you not in your place?"

The junior was silent.

"You have chosen to add insolence to your wicked conduct," said the Head. "It is almost incredible that you, Merry, who seemed until quite lately a credit to the school, should act in this unheard-of manner. Do you wish to make me regret that I have decided not to expel you?"

"I'd rather be expelled than flogged," said the junior sullenly.

"That would be a coward's choice. I have given you the opportunity, Merry, to make an attempt to recover the good name you have lost, to regain the position you have recklessly sacrificed. Remove your jacket."

The junior did not stir.

"He must be dotty!" murmured Blake in amazement.

"Do you hear me, Merry?"

The Head's voice was not loud, but it seemed to the assembled school like the rumble of distant thunder.

"Yes."

"Then obey me."

"I won't!" said the junior deliberately.

Dead silence.

The St. Jim's fellows could not believe their ears.

"It's the sack now," murmured

Lowther to Manners. And that opinion was general.

The Head's brow was like a thundercloud. Never had it happened to him before to be defied by any boy belonging to St. Jim's. He made a sign to Taggles.

"Remove his jacket," he said quietly.

Taggles laid hands upon the junior. For a moment it looked as if the latter would resist, and two or three of the prefects made a movement forward; but the junior's courage failed him, and he submitted quietly.

Then Taggles hoisted him, and the Head picked up the birch.

Then came the flogging.

The St. Jim's fellows had seen floggings before, but seldom or never a flogging so severe as that.

The junior squirmed, struggled, and yelled as the blows descended upon him like rain. The punishment was no more than he deserved. He had, as the fellows said, asked for it. But it was very severe.

Twenty strokes were laid on, and each of them was hard and heavy. By the time the castigation was finished the wretched junior was sobbing and shrieking.

Taggles set him down at a word from the Head.

The punished junior stood gasping and weeping with pain.

"Now, Merry," said the Head quietly, "you have had your punishment. I trust that it will be a lesson to you, and that I shall not have to repeat it. But I shall not hesitate to do so if occasion should arise. You will now beg my pardon for disobedience."

The insolence had been taken out of the junior by that time. He would gladly have defied the Head, but he knew that it would not lead to expulsion now; it would lead only to a further flogging.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir!" he stutted out.

"Very well. The matter is now ended. Dismiss!"

The Head left the Hall by the upper door.

The boys dispersed, leaving the weeping, writhing junior alone.

CHAPTER 7. The Meeting!

IN the Shell Form Room that morning the flogged junior sat with a white face and trembling lip.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, passed him over lightly in the Form work. He knew that he was in no condition for it, and he was lenient.

But from the Shell fellows he received no sympathy.

The most reckless fellow in the Form had a great respect for the Head, and the sullen junior's defiance of their headmaster alienated all sympathy.

When the Form was dismissed after morning lessons, no one addressed a word to the punished junior.

He quitted the Form-room by himself, and went out into the quadrangle, his face black and sullen, his eyes glinting under his bent brow. He was still feeling the ache of his punishment; he was likely to feel it all that day.

Kangaroo had intended to call a meeting of the Shell that day to "sack" Tom Merry formally from his position of captain of the Form; but he let it go. As the Cornstalk remarked, with contemptuous pity, the poor rotter had had enough just then.

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The outcast went down to the school gate, and out into the road towards Rylcombe. He entered the wood by the footpath, and plunged into the trees. In ten minutes or so he was in a secluded glade, and there a man was standing, leaning against a tree, smoking a cigar, and waiting for him.

It was Gerald Goring.
Goring put up his eyeglass, and looked curiously at the white-faced junior.

"I have been waiting. I thought you'd probably come," said Goring. "You were to come here, and tell me if all went well. I can see that something has happened. You've been flogged, I suppose?"

"Yes," snarled Clavering.
"Well, it's all in the game. You mustn't mind being hurt a little, considering what there is at stake."

"You didn't get it—and I did!"

Goring smiled, and twisted his black moustache.

"Well, it's over now," he said.

"It's not over."

The man with the black moustache started.

"Not over! What do you mean? I had the note you wrote me last night. You said you were to be expelled this morning."

"So I was, but the Head let me off."

"Let you off! You fool—you fool!" hissed Goring, his coolness forsaking him for a moment. "Why did you let him?"

"Do you think I could help it?" snarled Clavering.

"Those rotters—Tom Merry's old pals—interceded for me. I didn't want them to. I didn't know till afterwards. Goodness knows, I've done enough to choke them off! The Head flogged me, and didn't expel me. I've got it all to do over again."

Goring gnawed his moustache savagely.

"What infernal luck!" he said.

"Of course, we might have foreseen something of the kind. Tom Merry was a model schoolboy—until you took his place. I suppose it's natural that the Head should want to go easy with him. Well, it only means a little more time. You can soon feed him up."

"I haven't told you all yet," growled Clavering, seating himself on a log and lighting a cigarette.

"What more is there?" Goring's eyes scanned the junior's face. "You don't mean anything is discovered?"

"Yes; one fellow knows."

"Knows you are not Tom Merry?" gasped Goring.

"Yes. He spied on me when I came to meet you last Saturday. He listened in the trees there, and he heard all you said to me. He knows the whole story now—about old Brandreth, in South Africa, and his will, and what Tom Merry is to be disgraced for. He knows that I'm not Tom Merry, and guesses from that that Merry has been kidnapped, and is being kept a prisoner somewhere."

Gerald Goring's face was pale now.

"But—but the fellow must have suspected something, or he wouldn't—"

"Yes, he would. He's a spying cad!" said Clavering.

"And now he knows—all?"

"All!" said Clavering, with a nod.

"What kind of a boy is he?"

"A rotter clean through!"

Goring drew a breath of relief.

"That's better. We can manage him, then. What is his name?"

"Crooke. He is in my Form."

"He hasn't given you away yet?"

"No."

"He must have a reason for keeping

his tongue quiet," said Goring. "I suppose he wants to make something out of it. Is that it?"

"I suppose so. He told me last evening that he knew, but I haven't spoken to him about it since. Of course, he's on the make, or he would have given us away already."

"He's not a friend of Tom Merry's."

"Not likely. He hates him!"

"All the better. Then he isn't concerned about what happens to Merry in any way?"

"Not in the least. He's only thinking of what he can make out of the thing without risk to himself. That's the kind of fellow he is."

"We can thank our lucky stars that he is that kind of fellow," said Goring. "It's awkward, but we can keep his mouth shut. I suppose he can keep a secret, if it's to his advantage?"

"He could be as close as an oyster if he liked. But it will have to be made worth his while."

"Then we can deal with him. He will try to screw money out of you to keep this dark," said Goring, his eyes glittering.

"That's his game, of course."

"Then it's safe. Let him have some money; and, once he's taken it, he's made himself a party to the conspiracy. If he betrayed us after that, he would have to own up that he was an accessory, and that he had blackmailed you. You can stand him a fiver."

Clavering's eyes opened.
"He's thinking of quids, not fivers," he said.

"That's the idea. Fivers can more easily be traced," said Goring coolly. "Once he has passed a banknote taken from you, he can never deny it afterwards. It can be traced by the number, and that will be proof against him."

"By gad!" said Clavering. "I never thought of that! Give me the fiver, and I'll plant it on the cad, and after that—"

"After that he will be as much in our hands as we are in his," said Goring. He took out his pocket-book, and extracted a five-pound note. "I got this from Joliffe, at the Green Man. I've got the number safe. Once Crooke has passed that note, he will have to hold his tongue, or convict himself of conspiracy and blackmail."

Reggie Clavering chuckled as he put the note in his pocket. It tickled him very much to think of catching the cunning Crooke in that way.

"That's settled," said Goring. "And now about our plans. You will have to try again, and the Head won't let you down easy a second time. You must make it something deadly serious—something he can't pardon. Half-measures are no good, and the blacker you make things for Tom Merry, the safer it will be for both of us. Remember, there's a fortune of fifty thousand pounds at stake. Tom Merry must be expelled from St. Jim's—for theft!"

Clavering shifted uneasily.

"I don't like the idea—it's too risky."

"It's the only way," said Goring firmly. "There mustn't be a chance next time of the Head pardoning you. It must be too serious for that. You will be guilty of theft, and you will confess when you're caught. Nothing easier. And it must be done soon. The whole game is risky enough, and there may be suspicion at any minute. Crooke knows already—others may

guess something. It's impossible to think of every point and make everything secure. It's the only way, Reggie."

Clavering nodded sullenly. "I suppose so."

"And we must not risk meeting here again," said Gerald Goring, with a glance round at the silent trees. "We've been spied on once, and it might happen again. Write to me when it's all right, and we'll meet at a distance—on Wayland Moor, say, at the ruined house there. It's lonely enough, and miles from here."

"All right."
"Now get back to the school."
And the two rascals parted.

The plot was nearing its climax now, and ere long the name of Tom Merry would be branded with black shame, never to be eradicated—unless— But what could happen now to baffle the conspirators? Gerald Goring, as he walked back to Rylcombe, thinking it over, could think of nothing that could defeat that rascally plot, and he smiled with satisfaction. He was very near now to the prize he had plotted and schemed for—very near! And to the unhappy boy whose name was to be branded, whose life was to be shadowed by undying shame, the plotter did not give a thought.

CHAPTER 8.

Crooke's Whack!

TOM MERRY'S double came in to dinner with the rest of the School House fellows. There was a cloud upon his face. That was natural enough in the circumstances, and the other juniors did not guess the thoughts that were passing in his mind.

The imposture had been so easy. The St. Jim's fellows were so far from suspecting that he was not really Tom Merry that Clavering had been quite confident till now. But the thought that Crooke knew the truth gave him a new uneasiness. More than ever, he wished that the ordeal was over, that the grim scheme was played out, and he was safe outside the walls of St. Jim's.

Nobody spoke to him when he came out after dinner. It had not been openly suggested to send him to Coventry, but the fellows seemed to have agreed upon it tacitly. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with him, and they made it plain enough.

The only exception was Crooke. He joined Clavering in the quadrangle, with a mocking smile upon his keen, sharp face.

"Ready to talk business?" he asked, dropping upon the oaken bench under the old elms, where the junior was seated in gloomy thought.

"What do you want?"

Crooke smiled cheerfully.

"Can't you guess?" He cast a cautious look round. "I've held my tongue. One good turn deserves another. You and your precious pal stand to make a big thing out of this. It's no business of mine about Tom Merry—he's no friend of mine. But it's got to be a case of sharing out, or else—" He paused.

"Or else?" asked Clavering.

"Or else all St. Jim's will know jolly soon that you are—"

"Hush!"

"I'll hush all right, if you make it worth my while," said Crooke. "I don't deny that I'm on the make. You stand to get plenty of money, and when

you get it, my son, I'm coming in for my whack, I warn you of that. And I'm going to have a few quids to go on with. You've got plenty of dibs. Shell out!"

"If you'll hold your tongue I'll make it five pounds," said Clavering.

"Good enough! And when that's gone, you'll make it five pounds again," said Crooke coolly. "I'll be reasonable, but I mean to have my share. I'm running a certain amount of risk in knowing this and not telling. I'm going to be paid for the risk. Where's the quidlets?"

Clavering took the banknote from his pocket.

"There you are!"

"I'd rather have it in cash."

"I haven't any cash. I suppose a fiver's good enough?"

Crooke looked at him hard.

"A fiver's good enough," he agreed. "I don't doubt that it's a good fiver, but I've got sense enough not to leave a trail behind me like a snail. You can go to the tuckshop and change that fiver—it's yours."

Clavering looked at him with suppressed rage and hatred in his glance. It was not so easy to pin down the cad

"What do you want?" asked Crooke, pausing.

"I—I—I'll change the note," stuttered Clavering.

"I'll give you five minutes to do it in," said Crooke. "If you're not back here with the quids in five minutes, you know what to expect."

"Wait for me," muttered Clavering, almost choking with rage. Crooke nodded, and the Shell fellow hurried away to the little tuckshop in the corner of the quadrangle. He came back in less than five minutes.

Crooke glanced round, and stepped in the shadow of the trees to receive the money. He slipped it into his pocket and grinned.

"Thanks!" he said carelessly. "And after this, my son, don't play any rotten tricks to catch your uncle. You might as well try to catch a weasel asleep. And when you see your pal Goring again, you can tell him, from me, that I shall want a whack in the loot, or there will be trouble. See?"

Clavering muttered something indistinctly, and turned away. Crooke strolled jauntily towards the School House, and met Mellish and Gore.

"Coming to the tuckshop?" he asked airily.

"Hallo! Somebody left you a fortune?" asked Gore curiously.

"My pater's stumped up pretty well," said Crooke. "I've had a remittance. Now, who says ginger-pop?"

"Ginger-pop!" said the two juniors together immediately.

And they accompanied Crooke to the tuckshop very willingly. Crooke threw two half-crowns on the counter.

"My treat!" he said. "Order what you like!"

"Mine's jam tarts!" said Mellish. And Crooke was treated with most marked respect by his friends after that. A fellow who stood treat in the tuckshop was worthy of respect—from their point of view, at least.

After lessons that day Crooke sauntered down to Rylcombe and dropped in at the Green Man to see Mr. Joliffe. Whenever Crooke was in funds, he had a fancy for backing horses, and Mr. Joliffe was always ready to oblige his young friend in that way—a fact that accounted for Crooke being so frequently out of funds.

Crooke grinned as he saw Gerald Goring smoking a cigar in the inn garden. He wondered what Goring would have said if he had known that it was his money he had come there to lay on Bully Boy.

The cad of the Shell walked back to St. Jim's in a mood of great satisfaction. Mr. Joliffe had solemnly assured him that Bully Boy was practically certain to win at four to one, and Crooke had the happy prospect of changing four pounds into sixteen in a couple of days. The only drawback to that happy scheme was the unfortunate circumstance that, when the race was run, Bully Boy came in seventh, and Crooke's four pounds vanished for ever, instead of coming back in the shape of sixteen pounds.

CHAPTER 9.

Gussy is Wrathful!

BAI Jove! What's the mattab, Wally, deah boy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked the question in quite an anxious tone. He had suddenly come upon his minor in the School House, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

TAKING NO RISKS!

"Never know where I'm going to land!"

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rubbing his head, and very nearly on the point of blubbing. D'Arcy minor would have fiercely resented any suggestion that he could possibly blub in any conceivable circumstances whatever, but, all the same, he was very near to it now.

"That wottah Knox been bullyin' you, kid?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"No!" growled Wally.

"Is it Cutts of the Fifth, the awful wottah?"

"It isn't Cutts."

"Then what's the mattah? You've got quite a big bwuise on your head!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's wrathfully. "I ordah you to tell me who it was, Wally, and I will go and give the wank wottah a feahful thwashin'."

"You can't!" grunted his minor dispiritedly. "Tom Merry could make rings round you, Gus."

"Was it Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes; the beast lammed me over the head with a cricket-stump!" gasped Wally. "Made me see stars for a minute! I only just chipped in because he was bullying Curly, and he lammed me as if he wanted to brain me, the horrible hooligan!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We'll make him sit up for it!" said Wally ferociously. "He'll find that he can't handle the Third Form in this way, the rotter. I used to like Tom Merry, but he's turned out the beastliest bully in the House—worse than Gore ever was. And he used to hammer Gore for bullying the fags."

"He is a wank wottah!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "He is wathah big for me, I know, but I'm goin' to thwash him, all the same. I wegard it as bein' up to me as a D'Arcy. Come and see me do it, Wally!"

"Look here, Gussy! You can't handle him—"

"Wats! Come on!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched off indignantly in search of the captain of the Shell. It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday, and most of the juniors were thinking of cricket. The School House juniors were to play Figgins' team from the New House, and Kangaroo was captaining them. Tom Merry had dropped out of his old place as junior cricket captain. One of the things that helped to disgust the juniors with their former captain was the fact that he had "chucked" cricket.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake, as D'Arcy joined a crowd of School House juniors outside the House. "What's the row, Gussy? Wherefore that ferocious frown? Who's going to be slaughtered?"

"Tom Mewwy! Where is the wottah?"

"What's Tom Merry been doing now?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Look at Wally!"

The juniors inspected Wally.

"Looks much the same as usual," commented Manners. "He wants a wash, and he's wasted a lot of ink in ornamenting his collar. Also his tie wants putting straight."

"You silly chump!" began Wally.

"Look at his head!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"Nothing in that!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at that feahful bump on his nappah. Tom Mewwy did that with a cricket-stump."

"Great Scott!"

"The brute!"

"The rotter!"

"And I'm goin' to thwash him for THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,526.

it," said Arthur Augustus. "I am sowwy to have to thwash a fwieend of yours, you Shell chaps."

"He's no friend of mine!" said Lowther shortly.

"Nor of mine," said Manners.

"The chap who'd treat a fag like that wouldn't be owned as a friend by any decent fellow," said Talbot. "That licking he had yesterday doesn't seem to have done him any good. He's asking for more."

"Yaas, wathah, and he's goin' to get it," said Arthur Augustus. "You fellows can come and see fair play."

"What about the cricket?"

"Lots of time to thwash that wottah. We don't play for an hour yet," said Arthur Augustus, "and as he's not playin', it doesn't mattah how much I hammah him. Anybody know where he is?"

"He's in the quad," said Blake. "Look for him, chaps. He ought to have a jolly good hiding for that. Better leave it to me, though, Gussy."

"Wats! I wefuse to leave it to anybody. It's up to me to thwash him for lammin' my minah with a beastly cwicket stump." Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed the quadrangle. "Bai Jove! There he is!"

Arthur Augustus rushed towards the elms, where he had caught sight of the captain of the Shell. The other juniors rushed after him. There was no stopping the swell of St. Jim's when he had made up his mind; but they felt extremely doubtful about the result of the "scrap" between him and Tom Merry.

True, the Shell fellow had shown many symptoms of "funk" lately; but he had always hitherto had the reputation of being a very great fighting-man, and certainly more than a match for the elegant Fourth Former. Jack B'ake consoled himself with the reflection that, if Gussy were licked, he would proceed to wipe up the ground with the captain of the Shell afterwards.

"Tom Mewwy, you wottah!"

The Shell fellow jumped up, eyeing the crowd of juniors uneasily.

"You have been waggin' my minah," said Arthur Augustus. "You have tweated him in an outwageous mannah! You have lammed him on the nappah with a cwicket stump. You might have bwained him, if—"

"If he'd had any brains," remarked Reilly of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Weilly—"

"He cheeked me!" growled the Shell fellow. "I'd do it again, too!"

"I wathah think you won't, aftah the lesson I'm goin' to give you," said Arthur Augustus. "Hold my jacket, Blake. Pway take care of my monocle, Digby. Now, you wottah, come on!"

The Shell fellow backed away.

"I'm not going to fight you!" he said sullenly.

"You wotten funk, you are weady enough to lam a fag with a cwicket stump. Now put up your hands and be thwashed!"

"I won't! I—"

"Funk!" yelled the juniors.

The Shell fellow glanced round him with a white face full of hatred and rage. But he did not put up his hands.

"I warn you," said Arthur Augustus, in a suffocating voice, "that you are not goin' to sneak out of it like that, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' to hit you. Put up your beastly paws!"

And Arthur Augustus rushed to the attack, hitting out furiously. The Shell fellow put up his hands then, and fought like a wild cat; but it did not serve him. A terrific upper-cut carried him right off his feet, and he crashed on the ground. Arthur Augustus danced round him.

"Get up you wottah!"

The captain of the Shell did not move.

"I'm done!" he gasped.

"Wats! I haven't thwashed you yet! Get up!"

"I won't!"

"Rotten funk!" growled Blake. "Let him alone, Gussy. You can't hit a chap who won't hit back. Let him alone!"

"But I haven't thwashed him—"

"He's got a prize nose, at any rate," grinned Kangaroo. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, the Shell at St. Jim's doesn't want a coward and a bully for captain. After the House match there's to be a meeting of the Form, and Tom Merry will be sacked from the captaincy of the Shell. That right?"

"Right!" chorused the Shell fellows.

"Good! You hear that, Tom Merry? After the match you're to turn up in the Common-room, to take the order of the sack."

"Hang you!" groaned the junior on the ground.

"If you don't come, you'll be fetched, and if you're fetched you'll very likely get hurt!" said Kangaroo.

And then the juniors turned their backs upon the Shell fellow and walked away in contempt.

CHAPTER 10.

The House Match!

KANGAROO and his merry men arrived on the cricket ground ready for the match with the New House. Figgins & Co. were already there, in great form, and in great spirits. They intended to beat the School House hollow, and they had more chance than usual, now that the enemy were deprived of the services of their old captain and best batsman. The loss of Tom Merry was a very serious one to the School House junior team.

Kangaroo caught sight of the captain of the Shell as he came out of the pavilion. He wondered whether Tom Merry wanted to play, after all, and his brow clouded at the thought.

The once popular junior was so heartily disliked now, that it was doubtful whether any of the eleven would consent to play with him; yet Kangaroo, as skipper, realised what an advantage it would be to have that reliable bat at his service. He considered a moment or two, and then walked over to the captain of the Shell.

"Are you thinking of playing, Tom Merry?" he asked.

"Of course he isn't!" called out Bernard Glyn. "And if he is, he can't. I jolly well won't stay in the team if he's in it, Kangy."

"Same here!" said Blake emphatically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Shell captain looked round with a bitter sneer.

"I'm not thinking of playing," he said. "I've chucked cricket, and I don't intend to take it up again. I'm here to see you licked by the New House, that's all. It will be rather amusing."

"You uttah wottah!"

"Oh, get out!" said Kangaroo contemptuously, and he turned his back on

his Form captain. "I might have known that you didn't want to do anything that a decent fellow would do. And you won't see us licked, if I can help it, you cad!"

"Wathah not!" Kangaroo tossed with Figgins for choice of innings, and the School House went in first to bat. The captain of the Shell stood leaning idly on the pavilion, watching them. Some of the fellows were surprised to see him there. After the way Tom Merry had turned out, they had not expected to see him take any interest in the old game at all.

His interest did not last long. While Kangaroo and Jack Blake were batting, the Shell fellow turned and went into the pavilion. It had been crowded before the match began, but now there was no one there, and the junior had it to himself.

"Soon fed-up with watching cricket!" Figgins remarked to Fatty Wynn, with a sniff, as the field crossed over.

"He's gone!" said Fatty, glancing towards the pavilion.

"He's gone into the pav. Smoking, very likely!"

Kangaroo heard the remark, and frowned. If the outcast of the Shell started smoking in the cricket pavilion, the Cornstalk meant to have something to say to him about it. But just then Kangaroo was too busy to think of Tom Merry.

Blake was getting the bowling now from Fatty Wynn, and Fatty was showing all his old form. The New House fellows in the crowd—and their name was legion—cheered Fatty loudly as Blake's bails came down.

"How's that?" chuckled Figgins. "Out!"

Blake made a grimace, and carried out his bat. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took his place at the wicket. He received only one ball—it knocked his middle stump out, leaving the wicket looking quite toothless.

"Bai Jove!" "What price ducks' eggs, Gussy?" "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus tucked his bat under his arm, and walked off the field with his noble nose high in the air. He refused to answer impertinent queries as to the market price of ducks' eggs.

Monty Lowther came in, and lived through the rest of the over. Then Figgins bowled to Kangaroo, and the Cornstalk piled up runs; but at the last ball of the over there was a yell from the New House fellows:

"Well caught! Oh, well caught, sir!" The ball was in Kerr's hand.

Kangaroo grinned ruefully, and went back to the pavilion, and nodded to Talbot to go in and take his place. The innings went on, Talbot and Lowther keeping their respective ends up manfully against the New House bowling.

"Wathah hard luck on us, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "I had fully intended to make a centuwy, so that Kanga could have declared, without givin' you fellows the twouble to bat at all!"

"Go hon!" murmured Blake.

Kangaroo went into the pavilion. He had not forgotten Figgins' remark. Kangaroo was feeling annoyed. The New House were getting the better of that innings, and more than ever the School House missed Tom Merry's steady bat at the wickets.

That Tom Merry should have turned out such a "rotter" was bad enough,

but that he should have thrown up cricket at the beginning of the season was the most exasperating thing of all—at least, it seemed so to Kangaroo at that moment. If he found the fellow smoking in the pavilion, he meant to talk to him in extremely plain English.

He heard a movement in the dressing-room, and looked in. "Hallo!" he exclaimed.

The Shell fellow was there, and he swung round suddenly, with a startled exclamation.

He had been standing close to where the Cornstalk junior's jacket was hanging on a peg. He stared blankly at Kangaroo.

Noble looked puzzled. There was no tobacco-smoke in the room, and he did not see why the fellow should be so startled.

"I—I thought you were batting."

"I'm out," said Kangaroo. "I thought perhaps you were smoking here, Tom Merry, as you've made that one of your favourite amusements lately. And if you had been, I was going to pitch you out on your neck!"

"I—I wasn't smoking."

"I can see you weren't. What the deuce were you doing, then? Nothing to stick in here for, that I can see!" said Noble, puzzled.

"Find out!"

Kangaroo cast a glance about the room, wondering what was the cause of the Shell fellow's look of confusion. He suspected some jape on the cricketers; but their belongings did not seem to have been meddled with.

The other was watching him like a cat. Kangaroo shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and walked out. After a



The door opened and the masked man, carrying a lamp, entered the room. Behind the door, gripping the chair-leg tightly, Tom Merry tensed himself ready to spring on his captor.

few minutes the captain of the Shell followed him, and strolled away towards the School House.

Kangaroo & Co. soon forgot all about him. The cricket claimed all their attention. The School House wickets were going down fast; and as it was a single-innings match, they had no chance of making up lost ground in a second innings. Fatty Wynn was at the top of his form, and he made hay of the sticks. In a little more than an hour the School House team were all down for fifty.

"Rotten!" was Jack Blake's terse but expressive comment. Then the New House side batted, and they made the for fly. Figgins and Redfern knocked the ball everywhere. When the New House score reached fifty-one, the side had still five wickets to spare. Figgins & Co. smiled blissfully as they came off the field.

"Five wickets victory!" grinned Figgins. "Who's Cock House of St. Jim's at cricket—what?"

"New House!" chuckled his followers.

But the School House fellows looked glum. They had had bad luck, and it was as much as anything due to losing their best man, Tom Merry. If Tom Merry had been kept out of the match by detention or by being crooked, it would have been different. But to be deprived of his services because he had chosen to become a rotter, instead of playing the game—it was no wonder that the feelings of his House fellows towards him were very bitter indeed. Kangaroo's brow was dark as he put on his jacket in the pavilion.

The meeting of the Shell was to be held after tea to "sack" Tom Merry from the position of Form captain, and Kangaroo was greatly inclined to throw in a ragging as well.

"Better luck next time!" said Talbot, as cheerfully as he could.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake suddenly.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"Who's been monkeying with my jacket?" growled Blake, feeling in the pockets. "I left my pater's letter in this pocket. Some silly ass has been joking!"

Kangaroo started.

"Nobody's been in here, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Tom Merry has!" said Kangaroo.

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps the wottah has moved your lettah for a sillay joke, deah boy. I wergard it as a wotten twick to meddle with a chap's cowwespondence!"

"It's not only the letter," said Blake, with a worried look. "There was a postal order for a quid in it. Anybody's welcome to the letter, but I want the quid!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Kangaroo's jaw set squarely.

"Feel in your pockets, you chaps, and see if anything else is missing," he said; and he set the example himself.

He uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Missed anythin', Kangy, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy anxiously.

"My wallet. I keep it in this inside pocket—here! It's gone!"

"Anythin' in it?"

"Two pounds."

"My hat!"

"I cashed a postal order this morning with Mrs. Taggles," said Kangaroo. "I may as well mention that Tom Merry was in the tuckshop, and saw me do it!"

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes," said Kangaroo grimly; "and he was in this room while we were playing cricket. I came in and found him here. He looked startled and scared, and I thought there might be some jape

on, but I couldn't see anything wrong. But now—"

The School House fellows gazed at one another aghast. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy closed the door quickly. Every face was dark and serious now.

"It's impossible!" said Lowther at last, in a low voice. "He's turned out an awful rotter—a bully and a blackguard, and all that—but a thief—impossible!"

"It can't be!" said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah, it does seem imposs, said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "I can't quite believe it, even of him. It's imposs, Kangy, deah boy!"

"It looks like it to me, anyway," said Kangaroo grimly.

"But, sure, he's not short of money," said Reilly.

"How do we know? He's taken to smoking, drinking, and gambling. We know that. Money soon goes when you play cards and make bets on horses!"

"That's twee enough."

"Better keep it dark, anyway," said Blake uneasily. "It means the sack, short and sharp, for him if this gets out!"

"Jolly good thing, too—and the sooner the better!"

"Give him a chance," said Lowther, who was very pale. "Give him a chance, Kangy. He—he may have done it for—a lark!"

"Fellows don't handle other fellows' money for a lark," said Kangaroo. "But I don't want to shout it out from the housetops. If he hands the money back, we'll say no more about it, if only for the good name of the House!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" said Kangaroo. "We've got to have a meeting in the Common-room, and he's got to be there. Better get it over!"

And the School House fellows, in silence, with gloomy faces, followed the Cornstalk. After the way Tom Merry had turned out, they would have said that nothing he did would have surprised them. But this! The evidence was all against him, and yet it was impossible—surely impossible! But one thing was certain—if Tom Merry had added dishonesty to the list of his rascalities, his career at St. Jim's was at an end; for that there could be no pardon.

CHAPTER 11.

Proof of Guilt!

THE Shell crowded into the Junior Common-room in the School House. The New House portion of the Form—a third part of the Shell—had come over to attend the meeting. The deposition of the Form captain was a matter that concerned them all, School House and New House fellows alike. And it was a matter upon which they were all in agreement.

The fellow who had become the outcast of the school still held the position of captain of the Shell, to which he had been elected long before almost unanimously. He was to hold it no longer. The Shell were determined upon that. Several of the Fourth had come in to see the proceedings, but they, of course, were not taking part.

All the Shell were there now with the exception of Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Tom Merry. Kangaroo and Dane had gone to fetch the Form captain, who had refused to turn up of his own accord. They came into the Common-room with the unpopular junior walking between them. His face was sullen, but he made no resistance.

There was a murmur as he came in. Kangaroo closed the door of the

Common-room. His face was grave and hard.

The outcast of the Shell looked round sullenly.

"You know what you're wanted for," said Kangaroo abruptly.

"I know you're going to play the fool in some way, that's all," answered the junior sullenly. "Get it over, and let me get out. I'm fed-up with you."

"We shall take our own time," said Thompson of the New House, "and if you give us too much lip you'll get a ragging into the bargain."

Kangaroo glanced round at the crowd of juniors.

"Gentlemen of the Shell, you are called together to decide whether you will have Tom Merry any longer for your Form captain! You all know the kind of rotter he is. The whole House is ashamed of him."

"Hear, hear!"

"He is a bully, and a cad, and a rotter, and a thorough blackguard," pursued Kangaroo; "but you all know it! Hands up for sacking him from the captaincy of the Form!"

Every right hand went up.

"Unanimous?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes, rather!"

The Cornstalk looked at the captain of the Shell. His face was sullen, and his manner expressed nothing but insolent impatience.

"You hear that, Tom Merry?" said Kangaroo steadily.

"I hear it."

"You are no longer captain of the Shell, or junior House captain! We've done with you!"

The junior shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want to be captain of the Shell or junior House captain! I'm fed-up with it. I've got other things to do."

"Such as smoking cigarettes, or drinking whisky-and-soda!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"That's my business."

"Well, you understand, now—you're not captain of the Shell. We've finished with you, and it's a good riddance."

"I suppose I can go now, if you've finished playing the fool?" said the junior insolently.

"Not just yet," said Kangaroo, stepping between him and the door. "There's another thing got to be settled yet."

"Well?"

"I found you in the cricket pavilion this afternoon while we were playing. What were you doing there?"

There was a hush in the room now. Every eye was fixed upon the deposed Form captain. Not all the fellows knew of the theft in the pavilion; and those who were not in the secret looked on in wonder. The accused junior flinched, and his eyes dropped before Kangaroo's steady glance.

"I—I—what was I doing?" he stammered.

"Yes. What were you doing?"

"I—I suppose I've a right to go into the cricket pavilion if I choose?"

"Nobody denies that. But what did you go in for?"

"I don't choose to say."

"Then I will say it for you," said Kangaroo grimly. "You went in to go through the pockets of the jackets that were left there!"

"Oh, my hat, draw it mild!" ejaculated Thompson, and there was a murmur from the fellows who had not been in the pavilion.

"I know what I'm talking about," said Kangaroo quietly. "After the match, I missed my wallet, and Blake missed a letter containing a postal order."

"Great Scott!"
 "I ask this fellow what he has done with them," pursued the Cornstalk, his eyes grimly on the flushed and uneasy face before him. "He has taken the money. I don't intend to say anything to the Housemaster about it. But he has taken the money, probably to pay some filthy gambling debt; and he's got to hand it back. Then the matter can drop, so far as I'm concerned. I don't want to make it public."

"Wathah not," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy anxiously. "For goodness' sake, don't let's have a wotten scandal!"

"You hear me, Tom Merry? Will you hand back what you've stolen?"

"I—I didn't—"
 "Then what were you doing in the pavilion?"

"I—I—I—"
 "Enough said!" rapped out Kangaroo. "No good piling on lies. We don't believe them. If you want the matter kept dark, hand back the money at once."

"Let the rotter be shown up," said Gore. "We don't want a thief in the School House."

"I shan't take any step in the matter," said Kangaroo. "It isn't my business to act the policeman. But the rotter's got to give the loot back. Will you hand it over, Tom Merry?"

"I—I've not got it."

"If you don't hand it over, we shall collar you and search you."

"Don't act the giddy goat, Tom," said Monty Lowther huskily. "We're willing to believe that you did it for a lark."

"Are we?" said Gore, with a sniff. "Speak for yourself."

"Shut up, Gore! It's bettah not to have a wotten scandal!"

"Oh, rats!"
 "For the last time," said Kangaroo. "Will you hand it over, Tom Merry?"

The junior cast a hunted look round him, and made a sudden rush for the door. It was as open a confession of guilt as could have been wanted. There was no chance of his escaping, however. Three or four fellows were in the way, and they grasped him at once, and swung him back into the middle of the room.

"Let me go! Let me go!" shrieked the junior, struggling. "I—I—"

"Hold him!" said Kangaroo grimly. "You go through his pockets, Skimpole, as none of the stuff belongs to you. He might be capable of pretending that we planted it on him if we search him."

"Certainly!" said Skimpole.

And, while the outcast of the Form writhed in the grip of Dane, Glyn, and Gore, Skimpole went through his pockets, blinking apologetically through his big spectacles as he did so. There was a sudden exclamation from

Kangaroo as Skimpole's bony hand brought a leather wallet to light.

"That's mine!"
 Skimpole handed it to him. Kangaroo opened it; the money was inside. There was a loud buzz from the crowd of fellows in the room. It was proof positive, and now there was grim condemnation in every face.

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "that settles it, deah boys! The awful wottah is a thief, after all!"

Monty Lowther bit his lip. This was the fellow who had been his best chum—the fellow he had liked even better than Manners, whom he had known longer. The shame and humiliation of it cut him to the heart. But there was no compassion in his breast now for the wretched junior. The old friendship was dead now. He could not feel a spark of pity for a thief.

Skimpole turned out another pocket. A letter, plainly addressed to Jack Blake, was revealed. Blake took it quietly, and looked into it.

"Is the postal order there?" asked Kangaroo.

"No; it's gone."

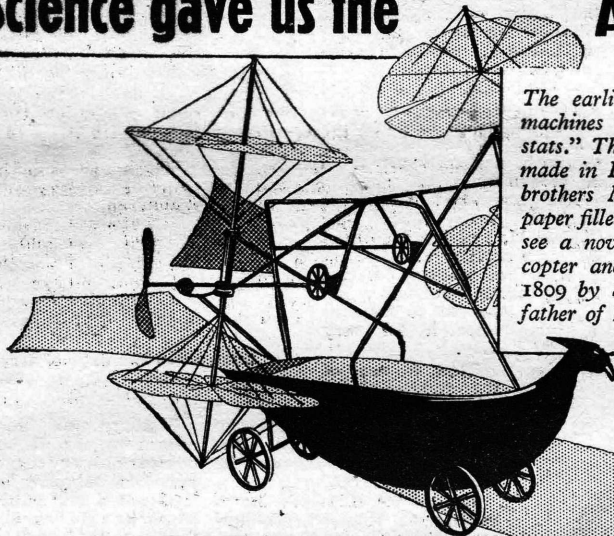
"What have you done with Blake's postal order, Tom Merry?"

"Hang you!"

"You've got to hand it back. Where is it?"

(Continued on page 16.)

Science gave us the AEROSTAT



The earliest balloons and flying machines were known as "aerostats." The first known flight was made in France, in 1783, by the brothers Montgolfier's balloon of paper filled with hot air. Here you see a novel combination of helicopter and aeroplane planned in 1809 by Sir George Cayley, the father of British flying.

Now science gives us AERO

HERE is an entirely new kind of chocolate, more delicious and exciting than any chocolate you have tasted before. It is Aero, and it has a wonderful 'honeycomb' texture — so light and smooth that Aero literally melts in your mouth.

Only a special new process discovered by scientists has made Aero possible. It has a grand flavour — it helps to give you extra energy, too. That's because it digests more quickly than ordinary chocolate.

Try a block of Aero yourself — today. You get its scrumptious flavour at the very first bite.

Smooth, light — easy to bite, with a new, exciting flavour!



1p and 2p

LOOK AT THE TEXTURE!



Look at Aero's wonderful new 'honeycomb' texture. This texture is the secret of Aero's delicious taste. It excites the taste-buds on your tongue — gives you the full, rich flavour right away.

Patent applied for

ON Wednesday, as Big Ben booms out twelve, and guns roar in every capital city in the Empire, a mighty tumult of acclamation will swell up over the streets of London: "Long Live the King!"

And in every corner of the world, in distant cities, in the depths of tropical jungle, on lonely islands far out in the ocean, on ships—everywhere which can be reached by the long arm of radio—the cry will be taken up.

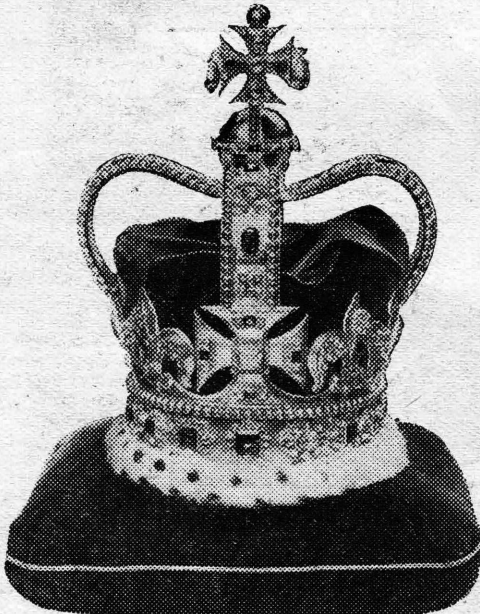
A tall, slim man with a lot of quiet humour in his face, a man who fought in a gun turret at the Battle of Jutland, who broke bounds at Oxford with a fine disregard of authority, who plays tennis well enough to hold his own at Wimbledon, will have been crowned King of the greatest empire in the history of the world.

For a space the years will be rolled back, and in the lofty aisles of Westminster Abbey the days of chivalry will once more come to life. Heralds in gorgeously embroidered tabards will blow fanfares on silver trumpets; Gold Sticks in Waiting will play the part of footmen; pages will stand beside their lords; peeresses arrayed in kirtles and coronets will move in their age-old order of precedence; the Lord Great Chamberlain, the Barons of the Cinque Ports, the Keeper of the Royal Jewel House, Norroy King at Arms, Pursuivant, Bluemantle—these and many others will perform their appointed tasks as the pageant unfolds.

For a thousand years the coronation ceremony has remained unchanged. The King takes the oath, and receives the regalia of his kingship—the Golden Orb, the two Sceptres, and finally the crown itself—in exactly the same way as William the Conqueror did.

If you have ever been to the Tower of London and looked at the Crown Jewels, you may have been surprised to find that the King has no less than three crowns. The one which the Archbishop of Canterbury will place on his Majesty's head during the coronation ceremony is St. Edward's Crown, the Crown of England. (You can see what it looks like in the photo below.)

This is an exact copy of the crown worn



The Crown of England, copied in the time of Charles II from the ancient crown worn by Alfred the Great, has been used in the coronation of every monarch since those days.

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The Crowning



Another Page in the
will be Written on
Crowning of



Ever since the days of George III this magnificent coach seen in use at the coronation of

by Alfred the Great and all the Kings of England that followed him up to the time of Charles I. We might have had that same crown to-day, but Cromwell, blind to its incalculable historical value, classed it with the other "baubles" which he disliked so much, and ordered it to be broken up.

The present Crown of England was made for Charles II, and has been used for every coronation since. It is made of solid gold, and weighs seven pounds, so it's no fun to have to wear it for very long.

That is one of the reasons why the King will change it for the Imperial Crown of State before he starts in the procession which follows the Abbey ceremony.

Whereas St. Edward's Crown belongs to England, the Imperial State Crown is the personal property of the King, and although it is only made of silver, it is by far the more valuable of the two, for it holds 2,783 diamonds and 277 pearls, besides sapphires, emeralds and rubies.

As the King rides by in the procession you may catch a flash of red fire from the Black Prince's Ruby, set in the front of it. In the dim past this famous stone probably came from India, but its verified history does not start until five hundred years ago, when Don Pedro the Cruel murdered the King of Granada to get possession of it. Later on he presented it to the Black Prince in exchange for the aid of British archers in the Battle of Najera, and thereafter King Henry V wore it in his helmet at the Battle of Agincourt.

Murder and bloodshed have been caused by it; it has even altered the course of history; and yet it is practically valueless. Experts have discovered that it is not a real ruby, but a spinel, and hence its value as a gem does not exceed five pounds.

The King's third crown will not be in the Abbey on Coronation day. This is the Imperial Crown of India, and it was made for a peculiar reason. When George V was going to India to be crowned Emperor, it was found that the Laws of England would not permit either of the existing crowns to be taken out of the country. So a new crown, costing £70,000, had to be made—to be worn just once in the life of every king!

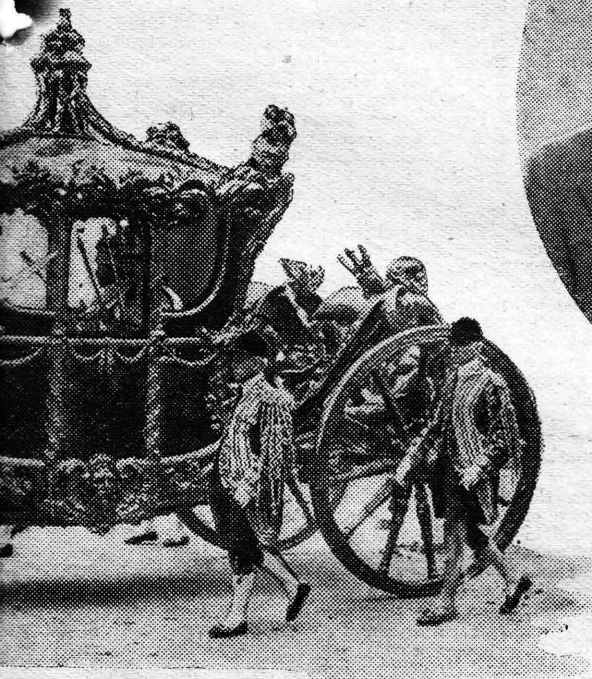
The most valuable jewel of the Regalia is not in any of the crowns but in the Sceptre of the Cross. This is the Great Star of Africa—the biggest perfect diamond in the world.

Thirty years ago Frederick Wells, surface manager of the Premier Diamond Mine, spied a huge chunk of something half buried in the clay. He pulled it out, and found in his hand a diamond weighing a pound and three-quarters. It was named the Cullinan Diamond, and later on South Africa gave it to Edward VII as a birthday present.

But it proved too large as it was, and

g of the King.

History of England
Wednesday, with the
King George VI.



which has been used in the coronation of kings. It is here
of the late King George V in 1911.

it had to be cut up. Four large diamonds were cut from it, and these are all in the Crown Jewels. The largest, the Great Star of Africa, is about the size of an egg.

But the most famous gem is that which sparkles from the front of the Queen's Crown, the Koh-i-Noor or Mountain of Light.

It is a gem of mystery, for no one knows where it came from. Some people think it is the lower half of the fabulous Great Mogul diamond which disappeared mysteriously in India about the time when Cromwell was senselessly breaking up the Crown Jewels. If this is true, then the famous Orloff diamond which was stolen from the eye of an idol in an Indian temple by a French soldier, and became the centre stone of the Imperial Russian Crown, may well have been the top half.

But there's no evidence to show that the Great Mogul ever was cut in half. It just disappeared.

The first owner of the Koh-i-Noor who is known was an Indian potentate named Auranzeb, and the stone certainly brought him plenty of bad luck. Twice he was nearly murdered for it, and then a Persian named Nadir Shah, with an invading army at his back, tricked him out of it.

But the run of bad luck didn't stay with Auranzeb; it followed the jewel.



Nadir Shah was murdered by his own officers, and one of them was eventually starved into surrendering it to another potentate, Runjit Singh.

Runjit Singh kept it until he died, after which it came into the possession of the British East India Company and was presented to Queen Victoria. The run of bad luck seems to have stayed in India.

But who owned the stone before Auranzeb? That we shall probably never know.

English kings have not always been crowned in

Westminster Abbey. Arthur of the famous Round Table was crowned amongst the prehistoric pillars of Stone-

henge, and many of the Saxon kings who ruled before William the Conqueror overran the country were crowned on the stone which you may still see at Kingston-on-Thames. The place gets its name from this Kings' Stone.

Westminster Abbey was completed by Edward the Confessor and largely rebuilt by Henry II, who had to pawn the Crown Jewels to pay the bill. William the Conqueror was the first king crowned there.

But to-day the King still sits on a stone as he receives the crown, just as those old Saxon kings did. It is the famous Scone Stone, which rests on a shelf under the seat of the

special coronation chair kept in the Abbey.

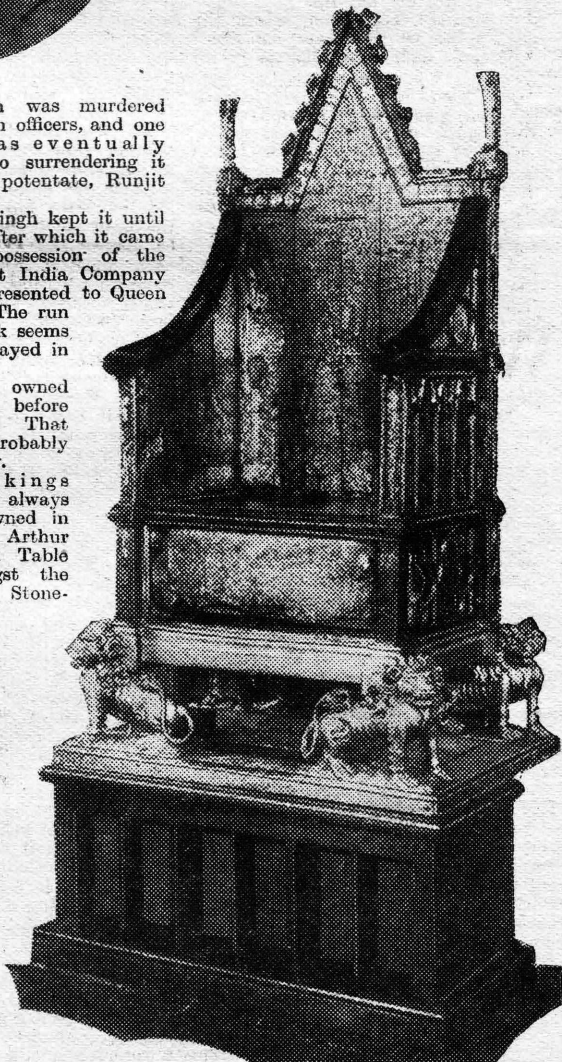
The chair was made at the command of Edward I by Adam the Carpenter out of good English oak. He charged 100 shillings for the job. But the stone is much, much older.

Legend has it that, with his head on this stone, Jacob saw his vision of angels ascending and descending from Heaven at Bethel. Thereafter the Children of Israel carted it about as a relic and eventually took it into Egypt, whence it was taken to Ireland by way of Spain, and set up on the Hill of Tara as a throne for the Irish kings when being crowned.

But the stone still hadn't reached the end of its wanderings, because a Scotsman named Fergus took a liking to it and carried it off to the Monastery of Scone in Scotland.

Ever since 1153, the kings of Scotland have been crowned on the stone, and when Edward I conquered the Northern Kingdom, he naturally took good care that no further use should be made of it. So he dispatched it to Westminster Abbey, and it has remained there ever since.

King George VI will be the twenty-ninth monarch who has been crowned on it. Long may he reign!



The Coronation Chair, in which the King will be seated when the Archbishop of Canterbury places the Crown of England on his head. The Scone Stone, referred to in this article, can be seen under the seat.
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"Find out!"

"We'll find out fast enough," said Kangaroo savagely. "Bump the cad, and keep it up till he tells what he's done with Blake's postal order!"

"Yes, rather!"

The junior struggled violently in the grasp of the angry Shell fellows. But he struggled in vain. He was swept off his feet, and banged hard on the floor of the Common-room.

"Oh!" he roared. "Ow! Help, help, help!"

"You fool!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Do you want to bring the prefects here? Do you want this to get to the Head?"

"Let me go! Help, help!"

"Well, if he asks for it, he can have it! Bump him again!"

Bump!

"Help, help!" shrieked the junior.

The door of the Common-room was thrown open, and Kildare strode in, his face angry, and his hand gripping a cane.

"What's this row about?" he demanded sharply. "What are you ragging Tom Merry for? Let him alone! Do you hear?"

"He's a thief!" shouted Gore.

"What!"

"Dry up!" murmured Blake.

But Gore did not dry up.

"He's a thief! He's been picking the pockets in the pavilion, and he won't say what he's done with Blake's postal order!"

"Great Scott! Is it possible?" Kildare fixed his eyes upon the outcast of the Shell. "Tom Merry, is this so?"

The junior struggled from the hands of his Form-fellows. He did not reply, but his silence was enough. And Kildare's face grew as hard as iron as he looked at him.

CHAPTER 12.

Free at Last!

"WHEN will he come?"

The prisoner in the house on the hill muttered the words to himself again and again as the light faded from the barred window of the room.

The sun, that had gone down upon such a strange scene at St. Jim's, seemed to sink with maddening slowness to the lonely lad in the prison chamber.

For Tom Merry was waiting—waiting for night, waiting for his captor and gaoler.

His first bid for liberty had been a failure. He still bore under his curly hair the mark where the cudgel had brutally struck. But he had determined upon a second attempt—an attempt yet more desperate.

From the moment he recovered his senses after that stunning blow the imprisoned junior had had only one thought—to get the better of the masked man by any means in his power, even at the risk of causing him serious injury.

His first need was a weapon. Nothing had been placed in the room that could serve as a weapon; but Tom Merry's ingenuity was equal to that. If he broke a leg from the table or chair, the gaoler would observe it the moment he entered—his eyes were never at rest—during the day; but after dark it was different.

After dark the man came with a lamp in his hand, and it was not so easy for him to observe a detail in the room. When the sun was down, and dark shadows were thickening in the lonely room, Tom Merry wrenched a leg from the chair, and propped the chair against the table, so that it was concealed as much as possible.

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He had a weapon now. Certainly it was no match for the gaoler's bludgeon, as he was no match for the burly man himself. But he did not mean to encounter the rascal openly. That was asking for defeat and failure.

He arranged the bolster and pillow in the bed to give it the appearance of containing a sleeper. He had spent most of the day lying down, and he had been lying down during his gaoler's last two visits, affecting to feel the result of that stunning blow on the head more than was really the case.

The rascal would probably expect to find him in bed—at all events, would not be surprised to see the form of a sleeper there.

But the sleeper would be a dummy. Tom Merry would be concealed behind the door when it opened, his club in his hand.

If luck was with him, he would get in one stunning blow before the man knew what was happening to him, and that was Tom's only chance.

If he failed, he knew that he would have to resign himself to imprisonment so long as Gerald Goring and his confederates chose to keep him there.

If he succeeded, he was free. He was pretty certain that there was no one else in the lonely house save the masked man who guarded him. Sometimes he believed there was no one in the house at all save himself, but then the lock and the bolt held him a prisoner in the garret. But the masked man always came in time to give him his meals.

"Will he never come?"

To the impatient junior the sun seemed slow in setting; the masked gaoler seemed later than usual.

Darkness descended, and from the lonely garret faded the last vestige of the light of day. Tom Merry stood in complete blackness. But his eyes were accustomed to it, and in that he would have an advantage over his enemy, who would come in from the light outside, lamp in hand.

There was a sound of footsteps at last, a gleam of light under the door. The gaoler was ascending the garret stairs.

Tom Merry's heart beat harder. It all depended upon the next few minutes now. He had taken off his boots to be more silent. The boots stood in full view beside the bed, to aid the impression that the junior was asleep there.

Silent, white, but firm and full of resolve, Tom Merry drew behind the door, the improvised club firmly gripped in his hand.

Strangely enough, in that moment of strain and excitement, his thoughts wandered to St. Jim's, to the old school he had not seen for a weary week.

What were the fellows doing now?

It was time for evening preparation. Manners and Lowther would be in the old study, working away, without their chum. Little did Tom Merry dream of what was really passing at St. Jim's in those moments.

A hand fumbled on the door.

All thoughts but of the desperate business in hand left Tom Merry. His attention was concentrated on the door.

He stood in black darkness, broken only by a beam of light that penetrated under the door.

There was a grating sound as the bolt was withdrawn.

Tom Merry's heart beat almost to suffocation.

The moment was at hand. His grip tightened upon the weapon. There was a repugnance in his breast, his whole nature recoiled from lying in wait for an enemy to strike him down without warning. But he remembered the brutal blow, the callous brutality with which

the ruffian had used his weapon upon an unarmed boy, and all scruples vanished. And it was his liberty he was to strike for!

He set his teeth and waited, impleachable.

Click!

The key turned in the lock.

The door opened, and the lamplight gleamed into the room. As usual, the masked man stood for a moment and looked into the room before entering. But the opened door hid the ambushed junior from his sight. His glance went at once to the bed. He made out the form of a sleeper there. He saw the boots beside the bed, and not a doubt crossed his mind.

He entered the room, his hand outstretched to set the lamp upon the table.

Then Tom Merry, his teeth set, his eyes glittering, sprang.

His weapon swept through the air with all the force of his arm behind it, and thudded upon the head of his gaoler.

The masked man uttered a gasping cry and whirled round.

For one sickening moment Tom Merry thought his blow had failed, and that all was lost.

But it was only for a second that the man kept his feet.

Then he pitched over heavily, crashing on the floor at the feet of the junior, with one faint groan, and then he was silent.

Tom Merry stood with thumping heart, almost choking. His weapon was ready to strike again if the rascal moved; but he did not. The seconds passed. Still he lay motionless at the feet of the junior.

And then a new dread invaded the junior's breast. He had feared at first that he had struck too lightly, but now—if he had struck too hard! He shuddered at the thought. He bent over the man and dragged the cloth from his face. A still and insensible face met his view—a rough, stubby, brutal face he had never seen before. But he drew a breath of relief. The man was breathing, his heart was beating. He had not struck too hard.

He could see the man was already recovering from the blow. In a few minutes his senses would return.

But those few minutes were Tom Merry's.

He closed the door, though the deep silence of the house made him pretty certain that there was no other occupant below. Then he twisted his handkerchief and tied it round the thick, sinewy wrists of the gaoler. He knotted it as tightly as he could, and rose again with a breath of relief.

That was the beginning. He had the upper hand now, and he was safe. More leisurely now he took a sheet from the bed and tore it into strips, and proceeded to bind the insensible ruffian hand and foot. The rascal's eyes opened while he was still so engaged. He glared dazedly at Tom Merry. Tom met his glance with a grim smile.

"The tables are turned now, you hound!" he said.

The ruffian made an attempt to rise, but sank back again. He looked down at his bound limbs and understood.

"You—you young 'ound!" he panted. "Let me go!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Let me go! I tell yer—"

"You will stay here till the police come for you, you scoundrel!" said Tom, tying the last knot, and then rising to his feet. His heart was light

now. He knew that the house must be empty save for himself and his gaoler, or the rascal would have called out for help.

Tom Merry put his boots on, the bound ruffian watching him with glaring eyes the while, pouring out a torrent of threats, promises, pleading. Tom did not even listen to him. He finished lacing his boots and put his cap on, and moved to the door, taking the lamp.

He stepped out of the room, closed the door, and locked and bolted it on the outside. The gaoler, now a prisoner, was doubly secure now. It would take him hours to struggle out of his bonds, and then the lock and the bolt would keep him as secure as they had kept Tom Merry.

The savage voice was still shouting imprecations as Tom turned the key in the lock.

On the landing lay the tray which the masked man had not yet taken into the room when he was struck down. Tom Merry hastily thrust the bread into his pocket. He was hungry, but he would not stay to eat then. He did not intend to lose a second in getting out of the house. There was a chance that other enemies might come, and he would run no risks.

He hurried down the garret stairs. Below were several rooms evidently unused, and one room, with an open door and a fire burning, where the gaoler had had his quarters. The lonely house had been taken by Gerald Goring solely for the purpose of keeping the kidnapped junior prisoner. Tom understood that. He opened the house door, and the wind smote upon his face for the first time since he had awakened to find himself a prisoner. He left the house, closing the door behind him.

He was free!

Where he was he had not the faintest idea. A mile, or a hundred miles, from St. Jim's—he could not tell. Round him was the darkness of the night. The few stars in the sky glimmered upon a lonely hillside, with a dim track outside the ragged, unkept garden that surrounded the house. Tom Merry left the garden behind him, and followed the path down the hill—whither he knew not, but he was free!

CHAPTER 13.

GUILTY!

IN the Common-room in the School House at St. Jim's a dead silence reigned.

Kildare's eyes were fixed upon the miserable junior who was known to all St. Jim's as Tom Merry, whose real identity only Croke knew.

The crowd of juniors stood round, with grim faces, silent.

The deposed captain of the Shell was the centre of all eyes.

His guilt had been proved up to the hilt, and little did any of the juniors dream that that was his object—that the theft had been committed, and the discovery made, simply as part of the dastardly scheme of Tom Merry's double and his confederate.

Clavering was acting his part well.

Probably the scorn, the bitter contempt in all the faces round him, cut through his thick skin a little, and made him feel some sensation of shame, which added to the appearance of guilt he was deliberately assuming.

Kildare broke the silence at last.

"I am waiting for your answer, Merry," he said quietly. "You are

accused of having committed a theft in the cricket pavilion."

"We found the things on him," said Gore.

"Whose property was it?" asked Kildare, glancing round. "You understand, of course, that this matter must be taken before the Head?"

"I don't want to say anything," muttered Blake.

Kildare looked at him sharply. "You have had something stolen, Blake?"

"Ye-es."

"What was it?"

"A letter with a postal order in it."

"Have you found it on him?"

"We've found the letter."

"And the postal order?"

"He's still got that," said Blake reluctantly.

"That's what we were bumping him for, to make him say what he'd done with it," said Gore. "He ought to be made to give it back."

"Has he stolen anything else?"

"Kangy's wallet and cash in it. But we've taken that back."

"What have you to say, Merry?"

The junior was sullenly silent.

"You say that he still has your postal order, Blake?"

"I suppose he has. We found the letter in his pocket, but the postal order had been taken out of it."

"Of course, he's got it," growled Gore, "unless he's cashed it already!"

"Well, my name was on it," said Blake. "He couldn't cash it without filling in my name, and that would be—"

"Forgery!" said Gore. "Well, he must have intended to do it, or he wouldn't have taken the postal order. He didn't take it for fun, I suppose?"

"Have you that postal order about you now, Merry?"

Sullen silence.

Kildare strode towards the sullen junior and dropped a hand upon his shoulder.

"Come with me," he said briefly.

"Are you going to take him to the Head?" asked Blake breathlessly.

"Yes."

"I—I say, Kildare, he—he'll be sacked!"

"And the sooner the better!" said Kildare sternly. "Do you want to keep a thief in the school?"

"No fear! But—"

"Pewwaps it's bettah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If he stayed here now he would have a weally awful time."

"He won't stay," said Kildare grimly. "There's no danger of that. The Head won't let him stay in the House another night after this. There's a train from Rylcombe this evening, and he will take it if I know anything about the Head. Come! You had better come, too, Blake."

"All right," said Blake resignedly.

The sullen, silent junior was led from the Common-room, with Kildare's grasp on his shoulder. Jack Blake followed them.

Then a buzz of voices broke out in the room. All the fellows knew that it was the finish. The blackguard of the Shell had escaped justice once—the Head had pardoned him—but it could not happen again. To a thief taken red-handed Dr. Holmes could show no mercy, especially after the junior's previous conduct. He would not be allowed to pass another night under the roof of the old School House.

Not a word did the wretched junior speak as he was taken to the Head's study. Kildare was grimly silent, too. He knocked at the Head's door, and Dr. Holmes' voice bade him enter.

Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, was with the Head, and both



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the masters looked surprised as Kildare walked in, his hand on the shoulder of the sullen junior, with Jack Blake following.

"What is this?" asked the Head. "A very serious matter, sir," said Kildare. "I thought it best to bring Tom Merry to you at once."

"Is that junior in trouble again?" asked Dr. Holmes, his brow darkening in stern lines. "I warned you, Merry, what you might expect. What has he done, Kildare?"

"He is a thief, sir."

"What?"

"A thief!" repeated Mr. Railton.

Kildare explained. The Head and the Housemaster listened in grim silence. Then Dr. Holmes spoke.

"Merry, do you deny this?"

"What's the good of denying it?" growled the junior.

"Then it is true?"

No reply.

"You have Blake's postal order about you, I understand," said the Head. "Kindly hand it over to Blake at once."

The Shell fellow made no movement.

"Call in the page, and let him be searched," said the Head briefly.

Toby, the School House page, was called in. He was instructed to search the junior, and he went through his pockets as Skimpole had done, but without success. The postal order did not come to light.

"Tain't ere, sir," said Toby.

"What have you done with it, Merry?" said the Head. And then, as the sullen rascal did not reply, he went on: "You understand, of course, that this is the end of your career here? You will not be allowed to remain at St. Jim's another night. I shall send you home in charge of a prefect. You have brought disgrace enough upon this school. Yesterday you were flogged. I shall not, therefore, flog you again, but unless you hand over Blake's property I shall cane you severely."

"It—it's in the lining!" muttered the junior.

"Produce it!"

The Shell fellow opened his waistcoat and showed a cut in the lining. From the lining he produced a crumpled postal order that had been hidden there. He handed it to Toby, who passed it to the Head.

"This postal order is payable to J. Blake," said the Head. "That is your property, Blake?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. You may take it."

Jack Blake took the postal order, and, with a last half-commiserating and half-scornful glance at the Shell fellow, he left the study. Dr. Holmes' eyes were fixed upon the shrinking junior.

"Merry," he said, in a deep voice, "I will not dwell upon the heinousness of your conduct. You have gone from bad to worse, as if you were deliberately seeking to sink to the lowest depths possible. Such an utterly unprincipled boy, I am glad to say, I have never known before. Tell me! Why did you do this?"

"I—I was in debt!"

"What kind of debt?"

"I—I'd lost money on horses," muttered the junior. "I—I've had bad luck the whole term!"

"The whole term!" said Dr. Holmes sternly. "Then this blackguardism has been going on a long time, and is no new thing, as your former friends believed and assured me?"

The junior was silent.

"You have been gambling, and you

have stolen money to pay the debts incurred," said the Head. "You confess that?"

"Ye-es."

"Very well. You will be expelled from this school in the presence of your schoolfellows this very night," said the Head. "I will not suffer so base and unscrupulous a boy to remain here one night longer in this school. The reason of your expulsion will be explained to all St. Jim's in your presence, and if you have a sense of shame left, you may feel ashamed of yourself then. After that, you will be sent home in charge of a prefect, who will deliver you into the hands of your guardian, with a letter from me explaining the circumstances. May I ask you, Kildare, to take charge of this wretched boy, and conduct him to his home?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Kildare.

"Very well. Take him now, and let him pack his box. And will you, Mr. Railton, assemble the school in an hour's time, in Hall, to witness the expulsion of Tom Merry."

"Quite so, sir!"

And Kildare led the condemned junior out of the study. A few minutes later all St. Jim's knew that Tom Merry was to be expelled in public that evening, and that he was now packing his box under the eye of the captain of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 14.

Goring's Defeat!

"MY hat! Who's that?"

Tom paused in the darkness of the hill path.

In those very hours, while the false Tom Merry was bringing to a climax the record of his ill-doing, the real Tom Merry had won his fight for freedom, and was tramping down the hill with a light heart, the house that had been his prison swallowed up in the darkness behind him.

Tom still held in his hand the improvised club with which he had felled his gaoler, keeping it as a weapon till he was sure that he would have no further need of it. The hill path stretched before him. In the distance he could see the lights of a town now, and for that town he was tramping as fast as he could go, when a step on the path in the darkness before him startled him.

Probably it was only some casual passer, but Tom Merry was on the alert. If Gerald Goring should visit the lonely house to make sure that his prisoner was safe—as he probably did at intervals—a meeting was possible. It was not likely, but Tom Merry was on his guard lest the unseen wayfarer should prove to be an enemy.

A tall figure in an overcoat loomed up in the darkness, and Tom caught a gleam of an eyeglass, and then he knew. It was Goring!

He remembered the monocle the rascal had worn on the occasion he had seen him with Reggie Clavering.

Tom Merry halted, his hand gripping his weapon hard. He looked round once, but there was no cover. The hillside was bare of all but grass. And the man had heard his footsteps, too; his ears were equally keen. Tom could see that he had quickened his pace.

There was no avoiding the encounter, and once again it was to be a struggle of a boy against a man; but Tom Merry's hand, concealed behind him, held the weapon that had served him well before.

He hardly regretted the meeting. This was the man who had kidnapped him, who had kept him shut up in a

prison-chamber for a week or more. This was the scoundrel to whom he owed all that he had suffered. He would not easily be recaptured by him!

There was a sharp exclamation from Gerald Goring—it was Goring. It was that evening he had chosen to visit the lonely house to assure himself that the prisoner was still safe, though he did not doubt it, for that matter. And he had come in time to meet the escaping junior on the lonely hillside, far from help! Tom Merry's freedom was not won yet.

"Clavering!" Goring exclaimed, as he saw the junior's face in the starlight. "What are you doing here? Why have you left school?"

Tom Merry started.

Goring, so sure was he that his prisoner had not escaped bolts and bars and gaoler, fancied for the moment that it was Clavering who stood before him. Tom Merry understood the mistake. But what did Goring's words mean? Had Clavering, then, been at the school—been at St. Jim's?

"You young idiot!" Goring went on passionately. "I told you not to come here. And why are you away from the school? You have not been expelled yet. I told you to write, and to meet me on Wayland Moor when you were expelled. Are you mad, to run risks like this? Have you—?" He broke off as the truth burst upon his mind, and he understood. "By heavens! Tom Merry!"

"Yes, you scoundrel, Tom Merry!" said the junior, his hand still hidden behind him to conceal his weapon. "Tom Merry, yes, Goring, you kidnapping scoundrel!"

"You—you have got loose, but I am in time!" panted Goring.

He sprang like a tiger at the junior.

Tom Merry's hand came from behind him then, and his club came with a crash fairly across Goring's face.

The man staggered back with a yell of pain.

Right across the handsome face was the mark of the blow, and for a moment Goring was dazed and bewildered with pain.

That moment was enough for Tom Merry.

He dodged past the reeling scoundrel and ran.

Down the sloping path on the hill, with a speed he had never shown on the running-track at St. Jim's, the junior dashed.

Goring spun round in the path. Dazed and dizzy as he was, he realised that his prisoner was escaping—that the success or failure of his whole cunning plot hung now upon a thread. He dashed in pursuit.

Tom Merry heard the heavy footsteps crashing on the path behind him. He ran his hardest, and he had little fear. He was the best sprinter at St. Jim's, and quite prepared to hold his own in a race, even against a grown man.

His long confinement in the lonely house had told upon his strength; but the danger behind him, and the freedom that lay before him, seemed to lend him wings. He ran down the hill path like a deer. Behind him Gerald Goring came panting—a good dozen yards in the rear. And the distance between them was increasing.

Ahead of him now Tom Merry could see the lights on a road, and closer and closer the lights of the unknown town. Once on the high road he would be safe. There help would be within call. Goring realised that, too, and only fifty yards lay now between Tom Merry and the point where the path entered upon

the high road. There was a lamp at the corner, and Tom was already dashing within the radius of its light. Within sight now were the outlying houses of the little town.

Gerald Goring, his face white and desperate, halted, groping in his pocket. "Merry!" he shouted. "Stop, or I swear I will shoot!"

A revolver glimmered in his hand. There was too much at stake for the kidnapper to hesitate or scruple at that moment. Tom Merry heard him, but he did not halt. That the scoundrel would fire he had no doubt—not to kill him, perhaps, but to disable him, and render his capture certain.

Once more his voice rang out in warning: "Stop!"

Tom Merry dashed on. But he was swerving now as he ran—zigzagging on the path, to render the aim of the scoundrel behind more difficult. In the uncertain light it was not easy to hit a dodging figure, and at that moment Gerald Goring's nerves were not so steady as usual.

Crack!
The sharp report of the revolver rang over the silent hill. Tom Merry saw the dust knocked up only two feet from him. He caught his breath for a moment, but he ran on. He was right in the light of the roadside lamp now, and he heard the crack of the revolver behind him again. He made a desperate leap into the high road. There was a sharp "plonk." The bullet had struck the telegraph-post within a foot of him.

Then Tom Merry was speeding down the road towards the lighted town.

Goring muttered an oath, and ran on again. The junior had disappeared into darkness again. At the next lamp—

A big, heavy market-cart came lumbering along the road. Tom Merry dodged round it, and ran on swiftly. He was close to the town now. He was passing dotted houses along the high road. Lighted windows gleamed upon him as he passed, with an assurance of safety. Surely the desperate scoundrel would not dare to keep up the pursuit now!

Tom Merry glanced back. The figure of Gerald Goring, running hard, was in full view in the lighted road, but the revolver was out of sight now. That, the scoundrel dared not use again.

Tom Merry made a desperate spurt, and ran on into the town. He stopped, panting, outside a lighted shop. He was safe now. There was a policeman within sight, and never had the hunted junior been so glad to see the familiar blue uniform. He looked back—his pursuer had disappeared.

The sight of a policeman, so comforting to Tom Merry, had had quite a different effect upon the man with the black moustache. The desperate flight and pursuit were over. Goring had disappeared into the darkness, desperation in his heart.

Tom Merry remained a few minutes resting, till he had recovered his breath. Then he walked on farther into the town as calmly as he could. He did not know where he was, but that it was easy to discover.

Indeed, now that he looked about him, the street was familiar. He remembered that he had cycled through the town once or more, when on a long spin with his chums. He was within measurable distance of St. Jim's, then; and soon he remembered the name of the town—Luxford, twenty miles or thereabouts from the old school.

And the evening was yet early—before long he would be back at St. Jim's. He

was eager to get to the school, more eager than ever since he had heard the mysterious words that had dropped from Gerald Goring's lips, in the surprise of meeting him.

Clavering was at St. Jim's—Clavering was to be expelled—evidently in Tom Merry's name. The junior was amazed, but a dim glimmer of the plot was dawning upon his mind. He remembered how Clavering had impersonated him before, and had been exposed in that rascally attempt to disgrace him. He understood now why he had been kidnapped from St. Jim's in the hours of darkness that night a week ago. Clavering had taken his place there—under his name! It was clear enough

That was enough for the chauffeur. The taxi glided away, and in a few minutes was racing at top speed along the high road for Wayland.

Tom Merry sat in the taxi, resting, and munching the bread he had placed in his pocket. His heart was beating fast. He was safe from Goring now—safe from his enemies—speeding back to St. Jim's as fast as the taxi could race. Wayland town appeared, and was passed, and the taxi rushed on to Rylcombe, through the old familiar lane. Through Rylcombe they went, and down the lane to St. Jim's. The drive had been swift—swift enough even for Tom Merry's eager impatience.

The gates of St. Jim's loomed up.



Crack! The sharp report of Goring's revolver rang out as Tom Merry dashed madly down the path, and the dust was knocked up only two feet from him. His enemy was utterly desperate now!

now—the whole mystery, which had baffled and troubled him, was clear.

Clavering was at St. Jim's—and known as Tom Merry there! The daring of the impersonation almost dazed Tom as he thought of it. And what had Clavering been doing—in his name, in his place?

Tom could guess. His brow became dark, his eyes glinted as he thought of it. As soon as he reached St. Jim's there would be a grim reckoning with his double!

He paused at the railway station. He remembered that he had no money. Outside the station were a couple of taxicabs. Tom Merry stopped at the nearest; the driver detached himself from the station entrance.

"St. Jim's—near Rylcombe—as fast as you can go!" said Tom Merry.

The taxi-driver stared. "That's a good twenty miles, sir," he said.

"All right—I'm in a hurry—go your hardest, and I'll give you double fare!" said Tom, jumping into the taxi.

The taxicab came to a halt outside the gates. Tom Merry jumped out, and rang furiously at the bell.

CHAPTER 15.
Face to Face!

MEANWHILE, the school had assembled in Big Hall.

In the passage a box lay packed and corded. It was Tom Merry's box, which his double was to take away from St. Jim's with him. In Kildare's charge he was to depart, to be handed over to Miss Priscilla Fawcett at Huckleberry Heath, with an explanatory letter from the Head of St. Jim's.

In the Hall the condemned junior stood waiting for his doom.

The impostor was pale, but he did not look as Tom Merry might have been expected to look under that heavy sentence. Indeed, some of the fellows, as they looked at him, seemed to read

relief in his face, as if he were glad that it was all over.

As a matter of fact, there was relief in Clavering's breast. The universal contempt of St. Jim's pierced even his thick skin. He was glad to get away from scornful eyes; he was glad to have the difficult part he was playing come to an end; he was glad to know that soon he would be safe outside the school.

But only Crooke of the Shell guessed his true feelings.

The Big Hall of St. Jim's was packed. Silence fell upon the assembly as the Head entered.

Dr. Holmes' face was grave and set. He had an unpleasant task to perform, but the utter rascality of the condemned junior made it less unpleasant to him. He could not find in his heart an atom of pity for the junior who had disgraced himself, his House, and his school.

In the ranks of the Shell, Manners and Lowther stood silent and grim.

A week before they would never have dreamed that it could come to this—that their chum Tom Merry would be expelled from the school, and that they would be glad to see him go.

But it had come to that. They did not pity him; they had no regret that he was going—they would be glad that he had shaken the dust of St. Jim's from his feet.

All eyes were upon the junior who was to go. His own eyes sought the floor; he could not meet the glances of the St. Jim's fellows.

If there was one glance that had something of compassion in it, it was that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It's wuff!" the swell of St. Jim's murmured to Blake. "Wathah wuff! He used to be such an awfully decent chap, you know."

Blake grunted. "Then he's changed," he said. "But my belief is that he was spoofing us all along. Fellows don't change so suddenly as all that."

"Howevah—"
"Silence!" called out Kildare.
And there was a hush.
"Tom Merry"—the Head was speaking—"come forward!"

Clavering advanced towards the Head, his eyes still upon the floor.

Dr. Holmes looked at him fixedly. "Merry! Only two days ago you were sentenced to be expelled from this school, for conduct that was abominable and inexcusable. I pardoned you—I gave you one more chance, considering the good record you had hitherto borne among us. That record, as it now appears from your confession, was a lie and a deception. While you were keeping up appearances, and deceiving your masters, and even your schoolfellows, you were leading in secret a life that was unsuspected. Is that true?"

"Yes."
The junior's voice was low, but all the fellows heard it.

"You smoked, you drank, and you gambled. Is that true?"
"Yes."

"Finally, you have stolen money from your schoolfellows, to pay debts contracted by gambling. Is that true?"

"Yes."
The junior muttered the word sullenly, his eyes still on the floor. There was a low murmur in the crowded Hall—a murmur of disgust and scorn. Dr. Holmes raised his hand, and the murmur died away.

"I am not surprised, my boys, that you express your contempt for this wretched lad," said the Head, in his cold, clear voice. "I regret—I am ashamed—that such a boy has ever been sheltered within the walls of this school! Had I had the faintest inkling of his true character, I need not tell you that he would never have stayed here. I can only say that I am thankful that the truth has come to light—that by his own recklessness the boy has betrayed himself. This night he will leave the school he has disgraced, never to return!"

There was a moment's pause. In that moment a sound of hurried footsteps was heard outside. Some of the juniors turned their heads towards the door. Dr. Holmes frowned.

He resumed quietly:
"Tom Merry, you are expelled from the school! Go!"

The junior turned to move down the Hall towards the door. At the same moment the door was flung violently open, and a breathless junior rushed in. There was a gasp from all the fellows.

PEN PALS

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PEN PALS COUPON
15-5-37

All eyes were turned upon the newcomer. Clavering's eyes fell upon him, and he stopped, rooted to the floor.

The breathless junior paused—face to face with him!

And all the fellows craned their heads round to look, for, with the exception of the clothes they wore, the two juniors were exactly identical in appearance—they were doubles!

"My hat!" gasped Jack Blake. "It's Clavering—Tom Merry's double!"

But Blake was referring to the newcomer. The truth had not dawned upon him.

But Tom Merry's voice rang out loud and clear—the voice the St. Jim's fellows knew of old.

"I am Tom Merry!"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

Everybody was speaking at once. Dr. Holmes raised his hand for silence, but he raised it in vain. The Hall was in a tumult!

And in the midst of the tumult the impostor stood, white as death, with starting eyes and despair in his heart.

CHAPTER 16.

Light at Last!

TOM MERRY had reached St. Jim's in the nick of time.

He had jumped from the taxicab and rung peal upon peal on the bell at the gate, wild with impatience. But Taggles was slow to come. The old porter came down to the gates at last, and blinked at the junior through the bars.

Taggles almost fell down as he saw the face outside.

"Master Merry!" he gasped.

"Open the gate—quick!"

"B-b-but—"

"Quick!" shouted Tom Merry, shaking the bars of the gates in his impatience. "Let me in, Taggles! Don't you know me? I'm Tom Merry!"

But Taggles only stared at him stupidly.

"You—you're in the Big 'All! You're being expelled!" he stuttered. "I mean, I s'posed you was! 'Ow did you come 'ere?"

"Let me in!"

A light broke on Taggles.

"You ain't Tom Merry!" he said deliberately. "You're that cove wot is like 'im! I know you, Master Reggie Clavering! You git off! You can't fool me! None of your tricks on an old bird!"

And Taggles walked back to his lodge, chuckling as he heard the junior outside the gate yell furiously after him.

"Taggles! I tell you I'm Tom Merry! You fool! Come and open the gate!"

Taggles went into his lodge and slammed the door.

Tom Merry panted. The taxi-driver was eyeing him curiously.

"Look 'ere, sir—" he began. He was thinking of his fare.

"Wait!" said Tom Merry shortly.

He ran along the school wall, jumped, and caught with his hands. In a minute he had clambered over—in a familiar spot where more than once he had broken bounds in the old days.

He dropped into the quadrangle.

Taggles' words had set him on fire with impatience. He was supposed to be in Big Hall, being expelled from the school at that very moment. Taggles had taken him for Clavering, and if Clavering once departed from St. Jim's, expelled, Tom realised how difficult it would be for him to prove that it was not he—the real Tom Merry—who had been driven forth in disgrace. The



whole of the iniquitous plot was clear to his eyes now. He was only just in time! Minutes were precious now!

He picked himself up and raced across the quadrangle. Lights were gleaming from the stained windows of Big Hall.

He rushed madly into the House. Toby, the page, was in the passage. He started back at the sight of Tom Merry, his eyes growing round with amazement.

"Master Merry! But you— Oh lor!"

Tom Merry did not heed him. He rushed on to Big Hall. He reached the heavy oaken doors, and threw them savagely open. The Head's voice reached his ears through the door. He knew that he was only just in time.

Only just in time—but in time!

Face to face he met the scoundrel who had taken his name and disgraced it. Face to face they stood in the crowded Hall, masters and boys looking on in amazement—face to face at last! And Tom Merry's clear voice rang out above the din:

"I am Tom Merry!"

There was a hubbub of voices. The Head was speaking, but he could not be heard. The prefects shouted for silence, but in the din their voices were lost. Only one voice rang out, clear and like a trumpet-call—a voice strengthened by desperation:

"I am Tom Merry! Manners—Lowther—you know me! Stand by a pal! I am Tom Merry! That scoundrel is my double! He is Clavering!"

Monty Lowther gave a wild shout.

"Tom!"

He raced across the Hall to the new arrival. He knew the truth now. He knew that clear, true voice. Manners followed him fast.

"Tom—Tom, old man!"

There was a revulsion of feeling in the crowd. At first they had taken this for some new reckless stroke on the part of Tom Merry's double, but a moment's reflection enlightened them. Tom Merry's double was Tom Merry's enemy, they knew that. He would not have appeared there at the moment when Tom Merry was being expelled.

It had been his object, in his previous impersonation, to get Tom Merry expelled. He would have let well alone if he had been Clavering. The conclusion was obvious. The newcomer's claim was true. He was Tom Merry, and the expelled junior, the blackguard despised by the whole school, was

Clavering—the double, the cheat, the impostor!

"Tom Merry!"

"Bwavo! It's Tom Mewwy!"

"Collar that scoundrel!"

"Tom, old man!" Monty Lowther was gripping his old chum's hand.

"You know me, Monty?" panted Tom Merry. "Manners! You know your old pal?"

"Yes—yes! It's you, Tom! It's really you! But—that fellow—we believed—" Manners stammered, scarcely knowing whether he was on his head or his heels. "He's been pretending to be you! Where have you been?"

"I've been a prisoner for a week—"

"Oh!"

"Silence!" shouted the Head angrily, forcing his way through the crowd of juniors who thronged round Tom Merry.

"Silence, I say!"

The hubbub died away.

"Now," said the Head, fixing his eyes upon the dusty, breathless junior—"now, you say that you are Tom Merry?"

"Yes, sir," panted Tom.

"And this—"

"That fellow is Clavering—my double."

"It's a lie!" panted Clavering desperately. "I'm Tom Merry! All the fellows know I'm Tom Merry!"

"Liar!" howled Lowther. "We know you now!"

"Silence!" said the Head. "Silence! This is amazing! Boy, you say you are Tom Merry? That this boy has played your character here, taken your name, your place?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then where have you been?"

"I have been kidnapped—a prisoner. I escaped this evening. I can tell you where I have been imprisoned—a lonely house near Luxford." Tom Merry spoke quickly but clearly. "I have been there a week—a prisoner. I shall guide the police there to-morrow. They will see that it is true. But I'll prove easily enough that I am Tom Merry! Ask me any question you like, Mr. Linton!" Tom Merry swung towards the master of the Shell, who was regarding him dumbfounded. "You are my Form-master. Ask me any question about the Form work we were doing last week! I'll answer it! Ask me what you said to me in your study last Thursday week—the day you called me in because I had put glue in Cutts' hat! Ask me how many strokes you gave me when you caned me! I'll answer!"

Mr. Linton gasped.

"That is well said, sir!" he exclaimed, turning to the Head. "If this boy can answer such questions he is Tom Merry."

"True."

"Ask him first," said Tom, pointing to the cowering cheat. "Ask him first and see what he says. Then I'll answer."

Mr. Linton fixed his eyes on Clavering.

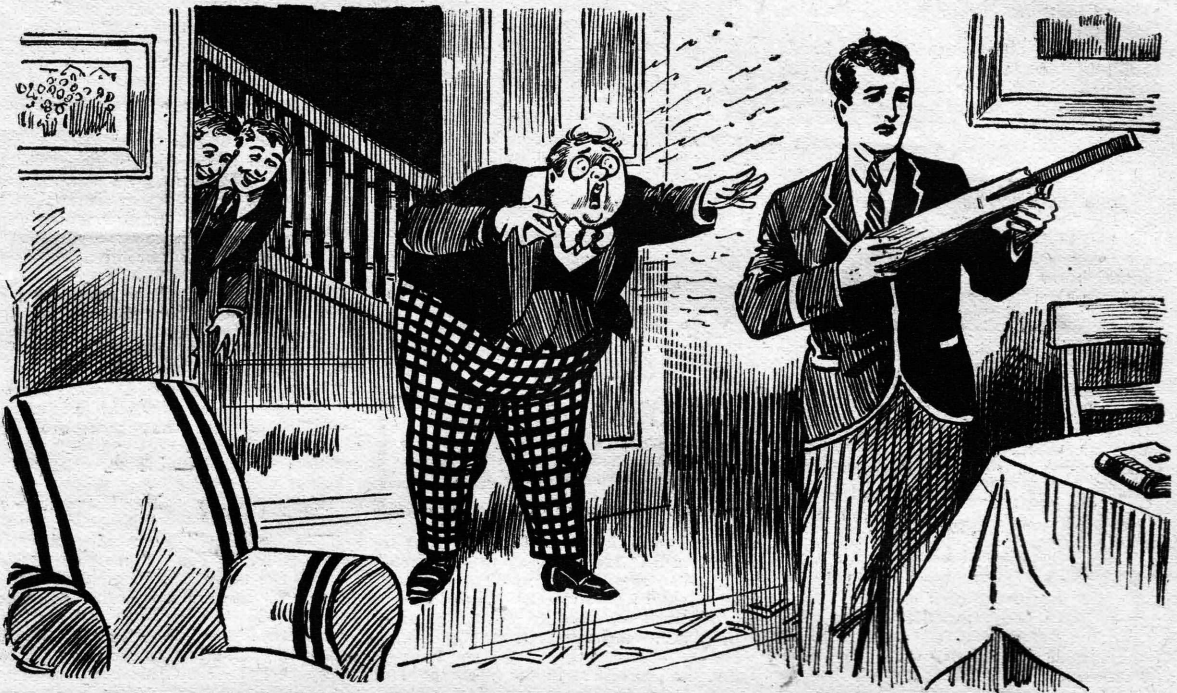
"If you are Tom Merry, I caned you last Thursday week for a trick upon Cutts. How many strokes did I give you?"

There was a hush of silence. Clavering's throat was dry, his eyes were wild. How could he answer that question—concerning an incident that had occurred nearly a week before his imposture began at St. Jim's? He could only answer at random, hoping that his answer would be the correct one.

"Two!" he gasped.

"False!" shouted Tom Merry

PUTTING ON THE 'FLUENCE SPELLS TROUBLE WITH A LARGE "T" FOR WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER!



Wingate was examining a cricket bat, and he was too busily occupied to notice Bunter enter. It was the amateur hypnotist's chance, and he began making hypnotic passes at Wingate's back. In the passage, Levison and Skinner watched with amused interest.

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

Imagining himself to have a natural gift for hypnotism, Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove at Greyfriars, takes up the subject with enthusiasm.

Ernest Levison sees an opportunity for a joke with the amateur hypnotist, and persuades him to put the 'fluence on Mr. Quelch. Bunter fails, of course, and is booked for a licking, when Levison owns up to save him.

Later, being stony broke and hungry, Bunter tries to bring the tuckshop dame under his spell. Mrs. Mimble, however, thinks he is mad, and allows him to take away a basket of tuck.

Bunter stands a feed in Study No. 1 to Harry Wharton & Co., but afterwards comes a summons from Mr. Quelch for Bunter to go to his study.

(Now read on.)

A Hypnotist in a Fix!

MR. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, was waiting for Billy Bunter in his study, and his brow was knitted—a sign of a thunderstorm to come. Bunter entered the study with an inward quake, and quaked still more as he saw his Form-master's face.

"Bunter!" rapped out Mr. Quelch in a voice that made the junior jump.

"Y-y-yes, sir?"

"I have heard a most serious complaint about you."

"I'm very sorry, sir, but—"

"You have affected insanity for the purpose of frightening Mrs. Mimble."

"Nothing of the sort, sir."

"You deny it?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked at Bunter with a very keen expression. Mrs. Mimble had been to him in a state of great excitement with her complaint. She had evidently believed that the Owl of the

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Remove was really mad. But Bunter's denial was explicit.

"Now, Bunter, we must get to the truth in this matter," said the Remove master more mildly. "Mrs. Mimble has complained to me that you entered her shop in a state of dangerous lunacy and threatened her life with a ham knife. She was almost in hysterics, and claimed protection, and also ten

"Is it true that she supplied you with ten shillings worth of goods?"

"Yes, that part is quite true."

"Had she previously refused to give you credit?" asked the Form-master.

"Yes, sir," said Bunter.

"Then why did she give you credit for such a large amount after previously refusing to do so?"

"She changed her mind, I suppose, sir."

"Why?"

"I—I— You see, sir, as I have a postal order for ten shillings coming to-morrow morning, I thought she ought to trust me—"

"Be brief."

"So I—I hypnotised her," stammered Billy Bunter.

Mr. Quelch had taken up a cane. He dropped it in his blank amazement.

"You did what?" he gasped.

"Hypnotised her, sir."

"You stupid boy! Is it possible that you really believe that you hypnotised Mrs. Mimble?"

"I'm quite certain of it, sir," said Bunter. "You see, sir, she trusted me with the stuff."

"And is it possible that you are too stupid to know her motive for doing so?"

"She was hypnotised, sir. It is only lately that I've discovered my wonderful powers as a hypnotist, and—"

"Absurd! She supposed from your absurd antics that you were mad."

"Impossible, sir."

"I believe now that you did not purposely assume the part of a maniac—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"And I suppose the ham knife part of the story is due to Mrs. Mimble's terrified imagination. But she certainly believed that you were insane, and she gave you the goods under that impression. Now, you must cease playing these absurd antics, Bunter. Mrs.

BUNTER THE HYPNOTIST!

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

shillings for goods, which she alleges she supplied to you under fear."

"Mrs. Mimble is quite mistaken, sir. I don't remember ever seeing a ham knife. I certainly did not pretend to be insane," said Bunter indignantly.

"Did you act in a way that caused Mrs. Mimble to believe that you were mad?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

YOU'LL ROAR WITH LAUGHTER OVER THE FURTHER EXPLOITS IN HYPNOTISM OF THE FAMOUS FAT BOY OF GREYFRIARS.

Mimble must be paid, in the first place."

"I have a postal order coming to-morrow morning—"

"Very well, you will repay Mrs. Mimble to-morrow morning, and report the matter to me when you have her receipt."

Bunter's face fell a little.

"I—I— It is possible there might be some slight delay in the post, sir."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch grimly.

"The postal order may not come until night, sir. There's frequently some delay in the arrival of my postal orders. I've thought of writing to the Postmaster-General about it."

"Very well, you will be allowed until Monday to pay Mrs. Mimble—"

"It is barely possible that the postal order may not arrive till next week."

"I thought so," said Mr. Quelch. "If it does not come by Monday, Bunter, I shall write to your father and enclose Mrs. Mimble's account."

Bunter's jaw dropped.

"I—I—I'm afraid my father would be waxy, sir. You see, a fellow's parents never understand these matters—"

"No, I suppose they would not understand a boy frightening an old woman into giving credit—"

"I didn't frighten her, sir; I hypnotised her."

"Even if your absurd statement were correct, your conduct would be absolutely dishonest. Bunter. You have allowed Mrs. Mimble to supply you with goods you know you cannot pay for."

"If my postal order comes, sir, I—"

"But if it does not come?"

"I can borrow the money of the fellows, or they will pay her. Wharton often pays things for me."

"Ah, I see! You think that in the last resource you can extract the money from your studymates."

"I should borrow the money, sir."

"With no prospect of ever returning it?"

"Of course, I should pay up sooner or later. Besides, they'd rather cash up than have a fellow in their study set down as a—a—"

"A defaulter, I suppose you mean," said Mr. Quelch sternly. "Now, Bunter, I cannot allow Mrs. Mimble to be swindled—"

"Oh, sir!"

"But I forbid you to borrow the money of your studymates to pay her."

"But, sir—"

"But if she is not paid on Monday the account will be forwarded to your father to deal with as he thinks fit."

"But I say, sir—"

"One word more. If I hear anything further of this hypnotism nonsense I shall cane you very severely."

"But, sir—"

"You may go."

"I wanted to point out—"

"Leave my study, Bunter!" thundered the Form-master, losing patience. And Billy Bunter skipped out like a frightened rabbit.

He met the chums of the Remove in the passage. They were coming out, looking very contented with the feed they had enjoyed in Study No. 1. They stopped and surrounded the lugubrious-looking Bunter.

"Licked?" asked Bob Cherry cheerfully.

Bunter shook his head.

"Then what are you looking down in the mouth for?"

"Mr. Quelch says Mrs. Mimble's to be paid on Monday, and if my postal

order doesn't come, I don't know what's to be done."

"But you said it was certain to come when you wanted to borrow something on the strength of it."

"Yes; but there's always a doubt, you know."

"The doubtfulness of the honourable Bunter's postal orders is terrific!" said Hurree Singh.

"I'm in a beastly fix! You see, Quelch forbids me to borrow the tin of any of you fellows."

"Good old Quelch!"

"The question is—what am I to do?"

"Better take to honesty for a change!" suggested Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Why didn't you hypnotise Mr. Quelch?"

"Well, you see, he's a chap who doesn't believe in hypnotism—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at in that. There are difficult subjects and easy subjects, and Quelch is a difficult one. Mrs. Mimble's an easy one, and she is the slave of my will."

"Your slave has got you into a fix, though!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The fixfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, you might be sympathetic, at least. I've stood you a

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*Billy Bunter has enjoyed the feed which his wonderful powers as a hypnotist had wheedled out of the tuckshop dame. Now he has to face the reckoning—with his Form-master!*

~~~~~

good feed. What are you going to do, Wharton?"

"I'm going to the gym," said Harry, laughing.

"I mean, what are you going to do to help me out? You've helped me before when I've been in a fix—"

"Well, that's pretty cool!"

"If you encourage people to depend on you, you can't go back on them," said Billy Bunter. "I look to you to get me out of this fix."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'll do my best," he said.

"What are you going to do?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I'm going to speak to Quelch. You fellows go on, and I'll join you in the gym."

And Harry Wharton walked away towards the Form-master's study. Billy Bunter, his face clearing now that he felt that he had shifted off his burden upon other shoulders, returned to Study No. 1, and was soon busy on the remains of the feed.

Levison Knows!

"IS that you, Wharton?"

It was Levison's voice, and the new boy in the Remove came out of the dusk of the passage as he spoke. Harry Wharton stopped.

"Yes. Did you want to see me?"

"Not particularly," replied Levison, in his sour way. "I've got something to say to you, though."

"Well, you couldn't speak to me without seeing me, could you?" said Harry,

determined to be good-humoured.

"What is it?"

"You were good enough to give me your lordly approval for owning up in class this morning when I put Bunter up to japing Mr. Quelch."

"Yes; I thought you acted decently, and I said so."

"I don't exactly see what concern it was of yours, and I think it was like your cheek to imagine for a moment that I should act otherwise," said Levison. "But one good turn deserves another. I've something of the same sort to say to you."

"What do you mean?"

"About Billy Bunter. I put him up to a jape in the class-room, and owned up and took the licking when Quelch got into a wax. Are you going to do the same?"

"What should I own up about?"

"Billy Bunter's affair. You put him up to scaring Mrs. Mimble to get you a feed, and now he's in a row again over it."

"In the first place," said Harry Wharton quietly, "Bunter did not intend to scare Mrs. Mimble. He thought he was hypnotising her."

"Mrs. Mimble thought he was a dangerous lunatic."

"Bunter didn't know that. In the second place, I had not the faintest idea that Bunter was doing anything of the kind."

Levison closed one eye.

"Bob Cherry, or Nugent—I forget which—suggested in a joking way that Bunter should hypnotise Mrs. Mimble," went on Harry, "but none of us thought for a moment that he would be idiot enough to attempt anything of the sort, and certainly we never imagined that the affair would turn out as it did."

"You had the feed."

"That is no affair of yours."

"Bunter is in a row for it. You ought to get him out of it. You were very much concerned about me in a similar case."

Harry Wharton bit his lip.

"I'm afraid the fellows are right, Levison," he said quietly. "I'm beginning to think that you're a hopeless cad, and that you'll never be anything else."

"Really!" said Levison, with irritating coolness. "Much obliged for your opinion. Are you going to own up to Quelch?"

"Once more, I've nothing to own up to."

"Then you're going to make a scapegoat of that ass Bunter?"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" broke out Harry Wharton angrily. "You're asking for trouble, and you'll get it!"

"Really? Because you licked me the other day I suppose you think you can bully me as much as you like," said Levison unpleasantly. "You'll find out your mistake if you start."

Harry Wharton controlled his temper with difficulty. He had made up his mind that he would not quarrel with Levison, whatever the provocation. And Harry, in spite of a naturally quick and passionate temper, had an iron resolution when his mind was made up.

"I don't want to argue with you," he said. "Let the matter drop. I'll do as I think fit without consulting you."

"Are you going to own up?"

Levison probably knew that the

repetition of the question, as if all Wharton's replies amounted to nothing, was the most irritating rejoinder he could make. But he had to deal with one who was determined not to be provoked.

"I've nothing to say to you, Levison."

And Harry pushed roughly past and strode on. A sardonic smile crept over Levison's lips and he strolled slowly away.

Harry walked on to Mr. Quelch's study and knocked. The Form-master's deep voice bade him come in, and Mr. Quelch looked slightly surprised at the sight of the captain of the Remove.

"May I speak to you, sir, about Bunter?" said Harry.

"Certainly, Wharton!"

"I don't know whether he has quite explained to you, sir. The young ass—I mean Bunter—thinks he's a hypnotist," said Harry, colouring, "and he thought he had hypnotised Mrs. Mimble. He didn't mean to frighten her at all."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"Yes, I understand that. But he did frighten her, and led her to trust him with goods he cannot pay for."

"He stood the feed in the study, sir, and, of course, we don't mean to let Mrs. Mimble lose the money," said Harry. "We shall pay the bill, and I will arrange with Mrs. Mimble to pay it off a bit each week till it's clear. She will agree to that."

"I've no doubt she would, Wharton; but I don't think you ought to be victimised in this way."

"Well, Bunter stood us a treat."

"As a matter of fact, Wharton, I think the difference between meum and tuum ought to be made more distinct to Bunter. He does not mean to do anything dishonest, but he is the kind of boy to slide into dishonesty out of sheer stupidity and want of thought. I think he requires a lesson."

"I dare say you are right, sir, but—"

"But you would rather see him through," smiled the Form-master. "If you get into the habit of shouldering other people's burdens, Wharton, you will never be at a loss for a load to carry."

Harry Wharton coloured.

"He's such a helpless little duffer, sir."

"All the more need of a lesson in time. I have forbidden him to obtain the money from his studymates, with the intention of making him realise that he must learn to think and act for himself, and not shift his troubles to other boys' shoulders in this careless and selfish way. He must pay Mrs. Mimble, or else the matter will be placed before his father. It is the only way to treat him with effect."

"Very well, sir," said Harry.

There was nothing more to be said, and he quitted the Form-master's study. Mr. Quelch's decision seemed hard, but he was probably quite right, and, in any case, was not to be argued with.

Harry went to the gym, and after an hour there the chums of the Remove returned to Study No. 1. They found Billy Bunter reclining in the only easy-chair, with his head on a cushion and his feet on the fender, a fat smile of contentment on his face.

"I say, you fellows, don't make a row," he said. "I'm very comfy. I should have been dozing in another minute if you hadn't come in."

"Been feeding again, Fatty?"

"I thought I'd better have a snack. Some of the grub mightn't have kept

over the night in this hot weather, and I thought I'd make sure of it."

"Well, you've got to move now, Bunter. We've got to use the table, and you're sprawled all over the room."

"Oh, don't disturb me! It's bad for the digestion to move about after eating. Couldn't you fellows go back to the gym for another hour or two?"

"Scarcely!"

"I say Wharton, what have you done about that affair? Is it all right?"

"No, Bunter, it isn't all right. It's all wrong."

Bunter sat upright.

"You don't mean to say that you haven't managed it?"

"Quelch wouldn't have it."

"That's all very well, Wharton, but I can't have you letting me down like this, after urging me to place the matter in your hands."

"You young ass! Quelch won't allow me—"

"Bother Quelch! You took charge of the matter."

"I said I would do what I could."

"Well, I left it to you. It's no good coming to me at this time of the day to say that you can't do anything. I expect you— Stop jerking this chair, Bob Cherry!"

"Shift, then!"

"I can't shift— Ow-wow-wow-wow!"

Bob Cherry tilted the chair forward and Billy Bunter shot out of it upon the hearthrug. He rolled across the study with the impetus given him by the chair and brought up against the bookcase. There he sat up and stared blankly.

"Yoa beast, Cherry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've given me a fearful shock."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I shall very likely have indigestion to-night!"

"The probableness is great, considering that the amountfulness of the esteemed beastly Bunter's gorging is terrific."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, start on the jam tarts, Bunter, and give us a rest."

"Well, that's not a bad idea, come to think of it," said Billy Bunter thoughtfully. "I could eat a few tarts. I may as well take the bag."

And he took it.

The 'Fluence Fails!

"BED-TIME, you young sweeps!"

Carberry looked into the Junior Common-room and grunted out the words. And there was a stir among the Removites. The smaller boys in the Form showed great activity in getting ready for bed.

Carberry the prefect was a bully, and it was usually the small boys who received his growls and cuffs. Harry Wharton & Co. and other stalwarts of the Form, as a rule, escaped the prefect's kind attentions. They were too troublesome to be lightly tackled. They had a way of "getting their own back" which was not conducive to the comfort even of a Sixth Form prefect.

"Don't keep me waiting," said Carberry.

Nobody was keeping him waiting, but that was his way. The Remove went quietly up to their dormitory, and Carberry shut the door with a slam, after announcing that he would be back in five minutes to extinguish the lights, and that he would bring a cane with him.

"Nice sort of chap, isn't he?" said Bob Cherry as he began to undress. "It has often occurred to me that it's the

duty of the Remove to educate Carberry."

"We might give our attention to it," assented Nugent. "He's a rotter, and ought to be made to bend the knee in addressing the Remove."

"It's all right," said Billy Bunter. "I've got a surprise in store for the rotter. I say, you fellows, you just watch."

"What are you going to do, Bunter?"

"I'm going to hypnotise him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hypnotised Mrs. Mimble, and she's a very obstinate and unreasonable old lady. I shall make short work of Carberry."

"He'll make short work of you if you start any nonsense," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Better wait for a safer subject."

"Well, I've promised Levison and Skinner and some of the fellows that I'll make an example of Carberry," said Bunter, with great importance. "Don't trouble to undress, you fellows. Are you going to bed, Bulstrode?"

"Yes, rather!" grunted Bulstrode.

"There's no necessity. I'm going to hypnotise Carberry, and we can go to bed what time we like. I'm going to make Carberry stand on his head and stick his napper in a basin of water."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, it will be very funny."

"Very funny, I expect," said Bulstrode, grinning. "But I think I'd rather see the fun from my bed."

Bulstrode's opinion seemed to be shared by the others. All were in bed by the time the ill-tempered prefect returned, with the exception of Billy Bunter. The latter was sitting on his bed, fully clad.

Carberry came in and stared at the fat junior.

"Why aren't you in bed, Bunter?"

Bunter's reply was startling. He rose to his feet, faced Carberry, and began to make mysterious passes with his hands. The prefect stared at him in amazement.

Like former victims of Bunter's wonderful powers, he was too amazed to move or speak for a moment, and Bunter took this as a sign that the 'fluence was on.

"Hold up your right hand!" he commanded.

There was a giggle from the beds and a gasp of amazement from Carberry.

"What!"

"Hold up your right arm."

"Are you dotty?"

"Obey me, slave of my will!"

"I suppose," said Carberry slowly, "that this is a little joke. You've been scaring Mrs. Mimble by pretending to be mad, but you ought to know better than to work off a wheeze like that on me."

"Hold up your right arm!"

Billy Bunter repeated the order in a faltering voice now. Carberry certainly did not look as if the 'fluence were working. He came towards Billy Bunter with swift strides.

Bunter made the passes specified by Professor Foozleum, but they seemed absolutely without effect on the angry prefect. He reached Billy Bunter, who skipped over the bed just in time to escape.

"I say, Carberry—"

"Come here, you young scoundrel!"

"I'll go to bed, Carberry."

"So you will, after you've had a licking for your cheek," said Carberry, pursuing Bunter round the bed.

Bunter made a desperate clamber over it again, showing remarkable agility considering his circumference

and the supper he had eaten. Carberry sprawled over the bed just too late to catch him.

"Will you stop, you young monkey?" "I'll—I'll go to bed."

Carberry jumped over the bed and rushed at him. Bunter scrambled over the next, which happened to be Nugent's. Nugent gave him a helping hand, and shoved him over, and the next moment Carberry was on the spot. Bunter had dragged most of the clothes off Nugent, and Carberry gave the latter a sound slap in passing.

"Oh!" roared Nugent. He lunged out with one leg and his foot caught Carberry in the ribs as he crossed over the bed, and sent him rolling on the floor.

Bunter plunged over Wharton's bed, as the safest place, and lay there palpitating. But the prefect's attention was turned to Nugent now. He jumped up and rushed straight at Nugent, pinned him down, and began smacking him.

That was more than the chums of the Remove were likely to stand. Nugent was yelling and squirming, and Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Singh scrambled out of bed in a twinkling and rushed to the rescue. Hazeldene and Micky Desmond were only a moment behind.

Carberry was seized and pulled away from his victim, and dragged over on the floor, with the juniors sprawling over him.

"You—you young villains!" he gasped. "Let me go! I'll teach you to lay hands on a prefect! Ow! Oh!"

He was sent rolling along the floor, and then the chums of the Remove stood waiting for him to come on.

Carberry scrambled to his feet, white with rage. He glared at the juniors, but even in his fury he hesitated to attack the group of determined juniors. If the fear of a prefect did not move them, physical force could not do it.

"You—you young scoundrels!" gasped the prefect. "I'll have you flogged for this. Lay your hands on a prefect, will you?"

"You can go to the Head if you like," said Harry Wharton, "and when you make your complaint tell him how you treated Nugent. If you don't, I will."

"Rather!" said Bob Cherry. "The ratherfulness is terrific."

Carberry gritted his teeth. Serious matter as it was for juniors to resist a prefect, he had placed himself quite in the wrong by his brutality. His authority would only be upheld by the masters as long as it was not abused, and he had abused it.

Billy Bunter crawled out from under a bed and took up his position behind Harry Wharton & Co. He rubbed his spectacles, replaced them on his fat little nose, and gasped for breath.

"Keep him off, you chaps!" he panted. "If you keep him off for a bit I'll stand behind you and make the passes, and hypnotise the beast."

"Get aside, you young rascals!" rapped the prefect. "Bunter is going to have a licking."

Harry Wharton did not stir.

"Nothing of the sort," he said coolly. "If you had licked Bunter for being such an ass—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Shut up, Bunter! If you had licked Bunter for being such an ass it would have served him right; but you shouldn't have started bullying."

"Are you teaching me a prefect's duties, Wharton?"

"Well, you ought to learn them, you know. You've done quite enough in this dormitory and you'd better get out."

"I'm going to thrash Bunter." "You're going to do nothing of the sort."

"I shall report this to your Form-master, Wharton," said Carberry.

"Report what you like!"

Carberry extinguished the lights and quitted the dormitory. The juniors scrambled into bed in the dark.

"I say, you fellows, I wish he hadn't gone away so suddenly," said Billy Bunter. "I was just making the passes over Wharton's shoulder, and—"

"You young duffer!" "The fluence would have been on in another minute."

"Oh go to bed! I don't think, somehow, that Carberry will say anything about this to Quelch. He's afraid to face the music."

And Harry Wharton was right. Nothing further was heard about the Remove's defiance of the prefect.

Bunter's Last Resource!

BILLY BUNTER looked for the postman the following morning with unusual anxiety. The fat junior had a touching faith in his postal order, but he admitted that there might be delay in its coming. If it did not come, he was certainly in a fix.

He had troubled the chums of the Remove often enough to get him out of difficulties. He would have troubled them again, but that was impossible now. Mr. Quelch had forbidden it, and Bunter was left to his own resources. Outside Study No. 1 he did not know of anyone who would be likely to take the trouble to help him.

The postman came and there was a delivery of letters, but not one for

Bunter. The fat junior looked dismayed. He looked out for Harry Wharton. He found him talking to Hurree Singh and Bob Cherry, and tapped him on the arm.

"I say, you fellows—"

"The honourable Bunter wears the distressful expression on his benign countenance," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur

"I feel pretty rotten."

"Indigestion last night?" asked Bob Cherry

"No; it's about Quelch. He says I'm to pay Mrs. Mimble. Of course, I intended to do so; but there's been some delay in the post, and my postal order hasn't arrived."

Harry Wharton smiled.

"It's all very well for you to grin, but what am I to do?" asked Billy Bunter, getting exasperated. "Nice sort of a chap you are to go and leave a fellow in the lurch, when he relies on you!"

"Quelch has forbidden me to interfere, Bunter."

"Well, you needn't tell him. You fellows can raise the tin, and I'll tell him it was sent me in a postal order."

"You won't tell him any lies with my concurrence," said Harry Wharton dryly.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Who's talking about lies?"

"You are, I imagine."

"Nothing of the sort. If I pay you chaps back when my postal order comes, that amounts to paying Mrs. Mimble with the postal order, doesn't it? It's exactly the same thing in the long run."

"You can't work it that way," said Wharton. "I don't exactly know what's to be done, but I'm turning it over in my mind. Leave it over till



In a twinkling Harry Wharton & Co. seized Carberry, pulled him away from his victim, and dragged him over on the floor. "You—you young villains!" he gasped. "Let me go. I'll teach you to lay hands on a prefect! Ow! Oh!"

Monday, and we will see what can be done."

Billy Bunter's face cleared.

"Very well, I'll leave it entirely in your hands, Wharton."

"I didn't suggest that."

"That's all right. I'll leave it entirely to you, and you can raise the tin in any way you think fit. If there's any left over after you've paid Mrs. Mimble, you can hand it over to me."

And Billy Bunter, having thus got rid of his responsibilities, walked away with a more cheerful expression on his fat face. The chums of the Remove looked at one another and burst into a laugh.

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Bob Cherry

"The cheekfulness of the esteemed Bunter is great," the dusky nabob remarked, "and his nervefulness is terrific!"

"I suppose we shall have to get him out of it somehow," Harry Wharton remarked. "But how it's to be managed, I really don't see yet. Well, we have a couple more days to think it over."

"And there's the breakfast-bell," said Bob Cherry.

The Remove went in to breakfast. Bunter's gastronomic feats overnight had not impaired his appetite in any way, and he did full justice to the breakfast.

Mr. Quelch looked at him curiously once or twice, somewhat puzzled by Bunter's light and cheerful way. When the boys went out of the dining-room, the Form-master tapped the fat junior on the shoulder.

Billy Bunter blinked round at him.

"I wish you wouldn't jab me in that

sudden way, Bulstrode, you ass!" he said.

"It is I," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I'm sorry, sir. I'm a little short-sighted, and I thought it was Bulstrode. I'd never call you an ass, sir, if I thought you could hear me, and—"

"You seem to have quite got over your little trouble, Bunter."

"Oh, yes, sir, thank you!"

"Has the postal order arrived?"

"Well, no, sir. It hasn't exactly arrived," said Bunter doubtfully.

"There's been some delay in the post."

"I imagined so. You will not forget that you are to pay Mrs. Mimble on Monday, at the latest."

"That's all right, sir."

"I hope it is all right, Bunter, for your sake!" said Mr. Quelch significantly. And he passed on.

"I wish he wouldn't bother me!" murmured Bunter. "I can rely on Wharton, after his taking the matter out of my hands as he has. Hallo, Russell!"

"It's not Russell," said the voice of Levison.

"Oh, is that you, Levison? Can you lend me ten bob?"

"Will you have it in silver or coppers?" asked Levison sarcastically.

"You needn't make fun of me. I've got to raise ten bob. I've placed the matter in Wharton's hands, but I feel that something may go wrong, though he has persuaded me to leave it to him. If you can lend me the ten bob, you can have my postal order which is coming this afternoon."

Levison laughed.

"Not good enough."

"Well, I don't see how I'm to raise the money."

"Why not hypnotise one of the seniors and make him lend it to you?" asked Levison, with a grin.

"Well, that's not a bad idea. Wingate is bound to have ten bob, and as my postal order is coming soon, it would be all right to make him lend it to me. I'll try after morning lessons."

"It's a ripping idea!" said Levison.

"What do you think, Skinny?"

"What's the wheeze?" asked Skinner.

"Bunter's thinking of hypnotising Wingate to make him lend him ten bob to pay Mrs. Mimble."

Skinner chuckled.

"Spiffing!"

"Do you think I could do it?" asked Billy Bunter anxiously. "I couldn't manage it with Carberry, you know."

"But you achieved a howling success with Mrs. Mimble," said Skinner.

"Yes, that's true enough. She couldn't resist my wonderful powers as a hypnotist."

"Wingate would knuckle under like anything."

"You'd be able to hypnotise him quite as much as you did me," declared Levison.

"Do you really think so?"

"I'm certain of it."

"Then I'll jolly well try. I may as well make him lend me a pound while I'm about it, as I can set aside my next two postal orders to repay him, and then I shall have some cash in hand."

"Good wheeze!"

Billy Bunter walked away, quite satisfied in his mind. He left Levison and Skinner roaring with laughter, as they pictured to themselves what would happen when Bunter started hypnotising the captain of the school.

Kicked Out!

"H AVE you seen Wingate, Wharton?"

Bunter asked the question soon after the Remove had come out after morning lessons. Saturday was a half-holiday, and the juniors had the rest of the day to themselves till call-over. Harry Wharton & Co. were going out, and were making their preparations for the trip, when Bunter looked into the study.

"No," said Harry, looking up. "I think he went to his study some time ago. He's playing in the Sixth Form match this afternoon, so he won't be gone out."

"Good!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" called out Bob Cherry, as Bunter was turning away. "What's on, Bunter? I can see you've got some fatheaded idea in your noodle!"

"You'll see soon, Cherry!" said Bunter mysteriously.

And he vanished down the corridor. Levison met him in the passage with Skinner. The two practical jokers of the Remove looked as if they anticipated fun.

"Have you found Wingate?" asked Levison.

"Wharton says he's in his study. I'm going there."

"Good! Catch him before he goes out."

The door of the captain's study was half-open when Bunter reached it, and the athletic form of the Greyfriars captain could be seen within. Wingate was examining a cricket bat, and he was too busily occupied to notice Bunter enter.

Billy Bunter did not give him warning of his entrance. He thought that, in the circumstances, it might be just

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as well to get in a few passes before the captain of Greyfriars was aware of his presence. That would give him a start, as it were, if the senior were inclined to resist the 'fluence.

Levison and Skinner, in the passage, watched the amateur hypnotist with great interest. It was some moments before the captain of Greyfriars looked round, and Bunter was busily making hypnotic passes all the time.

Wingate looked round at last with a start.

"Blessed if I didn't think there was somebody here!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens do you mean by coming in without knocking, Bunter? And what, in the name of all that's idiotic, are you performing those antics for?"

Billy Bunter did not reply.

He made pass after pass in the most approved fashion of Professor Fozzleum, and if there had been anything in the professor's methods, Wingate ought certainly to have yielded to the 'fluence.

But he did not. He stood with the cricket bat in his hands, staring at Bunter, with blank amazement written on his face. All of a sudden comprehension seemed to dawn on him, and he burst into a laugh.

"Oh, you're the amateur hypnotist, are you?"

"Hold up your right arm!" said Bunter in a deep voice.

"My hat, I've heard of you, you young rascal, and—"

"Hold up your right arm!"

Wingate held up his right arm, with a curious twinkle in his eyes.

Bunter's fat face glowed with triumph. The 'fluence was on at last!

"Now put it down again— Oh!"

Wingate put his right arm down, with a clump on the amateur hypnotist that sent him staggering.

The captain of Greyfriars burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! Wasn't that right?" he demanded.

"No! Ow! No!"

"Try again!" said Wingate. "I'll put up my right arm again, and you can stand close to me and—"

Bunter promptly backed away.

"N-n-no! I don't think I—"

Wingate stepped towards him quickly, grasped him by the shoulder, and gave him a shake that made his head swim.

"Now, you young ass, I've been going to speak to you about this foolery before!" he said. "You're to stop it! No more of your precious hypnotism! You've made Mrs. Mimble ill with your funny tricks! You ought to have a licking for your confounded cheek in trying to work this off on me!"

"Oh, really, Wingate—"

"But I'm going to let you off, because you're a young ass and don't know any better!"

"But, really—"

"I'm not going to lick you, but I will if I hear anything more of this rot! I'll just sling you out of my study for the present!"

"I—I can walk, if you like, Wingate!"

Wingate laughed.

"Out you go!"

He gave Bunter a swing that sent him tumbling out of the study, helped him from behind with a hearty drive of his boot, and flung the door shut after him.

Billy Bunter staggered into the passage and collapsed in a heap at the feet of Levison and Skinner. Those two worthies were yelling with laughter.

Bunter sat up rather dazedly.

"It didn't work!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at, Levison. It didn't work, but I did my best to put the 'fluence on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," said Bunter, scrambling up, "if you don't shut up, I'll jolly well hypnotise you again, Levison, and make you stand on your head in the Close!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You young ass!"

"I did it once—"

"You duffer!" said Levison, choking.

"You couldn't hypnotise a dead cat."

"I jolly well hypnotised you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The truth dawned on Billy Bunter as he saw the two juniors in convulsions of mirth. He blinked indignantly through his big spectacles.

"Do you mean to say that you were only rotting, Levison?"

"Of course I was!"

"Well, that was a mean trick. Wharton says you're a hopeless cad, and I rather think he's right."

"What does Wharton say?" asked Levison suddenly, ceasing his laughter, and a gleam coming into his eyes.

"He said you would never be anything but a hopeless cad," said Bunter defiantly. "And don't you start pitching into me, Levison, or I'll tell Wharton, and he'll give you a licking as he did the other day."

Levison gritted his teeth. Skinner looked at him curiously and walked away. There was trouble coming, and Skinner did not wish to be mixed up in it.

"Wharton was quite right," said Bunter emphatically. "You've got me into more than one row with your rotten lies. You're a cad!"

As Levison made a threatening movement towards him, Bunter scudded along the passage, and took refuge in Study No. 1. The chums of the Remove were just about to leave the room, when Bunter ran in and collided with Bob Cherry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob, seizing him by the collar. "Can't you see where you're going, you young duffer?"

"I'm sorry, Cherry!"

"Oh, all right! You chaps ready?"

"If you're going on a picnic I'll

come with you, if you like," said Bunter.

"We're going to walk over the Black Pike," said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "You can come, if you like, Bunty."

"Thanks, I'd rather stay here!" said Bunter promptly. "I'm not going to climb any hills in this weather. I say, you fellows—"

"I want to speak to you, Wharton."

It was Levison's voice at the door. "I'm just going out," said Harry Wharton. "You can see me when I come back."

"I want to speak to you now."

"You fellows go on," said Wharton. "I'll sprint and catch you up at the gates."

"Well, don't be many minutes," said Nugent.

The Removites went out of the study and Levison came in. There was an extremely unpleasant look on his face. He confronted Harry Wharton with a glitter in his eyes.

"Well, what is it?" said Harry, with a touch of impatience in his manner.

"I can't spare many minutes!"

"One minute will be enough. I only want to speak a few words—to tell you what I think of you."

"If you've come here to quarrel—"

"I haven't. I don't want to quarrel with a fellow who says behind a chap's back what he doesn't care to say to his face."

"And is that your opinion of me?" said Wharton.

"Yes."

"And what ground have you for holding that opinion?" asked Harry, keeping his temper.

"Only what I've just heard. You were good enough to express the opinion that I should never be anything but a hopeless cad."

Wharton started, and Levison's eyes glinted as he noted it.

"You see, I know all about it," he observed. "You might as well have said it to my face."

"I don't want to quarrel with you," said Wharton, as quietly as he could, "and I don't intend to be called over the coals for any words I may have uttered."

"Any words you have uttered, you mean."

"In any case, I don't feel inclined to answer you. I've only this to say—if you want fellows to have a good opinion of you, you're not going the right way to work. That's all."

"Don't go yet. I've not finished."

"But I am, and I refuse to bandy words with you any longer. My friends are waiting for me."

"Very well," said Levison, stepping aside. "Go and join them, and tell them I told you you're a liar and a backbiter!"

Harry Wharton's blood boiled at the words, but he kept his clenched hands down at his sides. He had made up his mind that he would not quarrel with this fellow.

"Very well," he said quietly. "That's enough!"

He passed Levison. His quietness, the scorn in his tones, stung the other to the quick. As Wharton passed, he raised his hand and struck. The blow fell on Harry's cheek, and he staggered.

He turned upon Levison like a tiger. The red mark of the blow burned on his suddenly white cheek. His eyes were flaming, and Levison, half-repentant, retreated a little.

But Harry Wharton did not touch him. It was only for a moment that Levison was in danger. Then Harry turned away and strode from the study.

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(Continued from page 21.)

exultantly. "You caned me four times, sir—two on each hand."

"That is true," said Mr. Linton.

"Ask me any other question you like—you, sir," said Tom, turning to Mr. Railton. "You gave me an impot last Saturday week. Ask me what it was and how many lines? I'll answer! And ask this fellow!"

"I will ask this fellow first," said Mr. Railton. "Clavering—I firmly believe you to be Clavering now—what was that imposition? How many lines were imposed?"

Clavering tried to speak, but he could not. The imposition might have been Cæsar or Virgil. The lines might have been anything from fifty to two hundred. He was fairly caught. Tom Merry had proved his case.

"I—I forget!" he stuttered, white to the lips.

Tom Merry laughed contemptuously. "I don't forget," he said. "You gave me fifty lines from Virgil, sir, from the Second Book of Æneid."

"That is correct," said Mr. Railton, with a nod.

"That's proved!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Besides, we know, sir! We ought to have thought of it before! We ought to have known that Tom Merry wouldn't have acted as this scoundrel has done! We ought to have known him better!"

"Yaas, wathah! I beg your pardon, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"What ho!" chirruped Wally. "Why, I ought to have guessed when the rotter lammed me on the napper with a cricket stump that he wasn't the genuine article. I'm blessed if I knew where my brains were!"

"A rotten funk, too!" howled Blake. "We all knew that Tom Merry wasn't a funk, and yet we never guessed! Asses!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally ought to have tumbled. I am weally quite surprised at myself."

"Clavering!" The Head's voice rang out. "You confess that you are not Tom Merry—that you have deliberately imposed yourself upon this school as Tom Merry for the wicked purpose of disgracing and ruining him?"

The wretch was silent. What could he say?

"He is guilty!" said the Head. "Secure him! What he has done is a crime against the law, and I shall see that he has no opportunity of repeating his infamous conduct. He goes from here to the police."

Clavering gave an inarticulate cry as the fellows closed round him. They were only too willing to seize him. With a sudden spring he broke through the circle of juniors and darted towards

the door. The attempted flight was a full confession of guilt, but he knew that denials would not serve him now, and he was thinking only of escape. But there was no escape for him.

The crowd closed on him like a tide. Fifty hands clutched at him and seized him. He was dragged back, torn, breathless, almost sobbing with terror, to the Head.

"Do not hurt him," said Dr. Holmes. "Only secure him. Mr. Railton, will you oblige me by telephoning to the police station in Rylcombe? Ask them to send a constable here at once. Clavering, why have you done this? The least you can do is to explain why you have sought to injure a lad who never harmed you."

"Let me go! Let me go! I will tell you everything!" panted Clavering. "I will confess. It was Goring put me up to it. I'll tell you all! Only let me go!"

Clavering broke into a torrent of pleading, and then it all came out. The whole story of the iniquitous plot—of the will made by Mr. Brandreth—of the condition in it concerning Tom Merry—of the fortune that would come to Gerald Goring if Tom Merry was expelled and driven from St. Jim's in disgrace. In the wild hope of obtaining mercy, the wretched, terrified impostor confessed all.

"Wretch!" exclaimed the Head indignantly, when the broken, terrified voice had died away at last. "You dare to ask for pardon after what you have done! I have no doubt you were a tool in the hands of a greater scoundrel, but that is little excuse for you. Kildare, will you see that he is kept securely until the police come?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Kildare, with emphasis.

And he led the cowering, trembling rascal away.

Dr. Holmes held out his hand to Tom Merry.

"I am sorry, Merry," he said simply, as he shook hands with the captain of the Shell. "I am sorry, but I cannot blame myself, for I, as well as all the school, believed that that wretched impostor was yourself. What he did merited expulsion, and more, though I was far from knowing the true extent of his wickedness. Such a thing could never happen again. That wretched boy will be in the hands of the law for many years to come, as he fully deserves. Boys, Tom Merry has returned among you, and I need not say that there is not a single stain upon his honour. Every wretched action for which he has been condemned by the school was performed by that unscrupulous scoundrel, for that is what I must call him. Tom Merry is innocent. I am only too happy that the truth has been proved before it was too late!"

And the Head retired. There was a roar of cheering as the juniors surrounded Tom Merry.

"Jolly glad to see you back again, Tommy!" exclaimed Figgins, thumping

the Shell fellow enthusiastically on the back. "Oh, it's simply ripping!"

"And we'll have a gorgeous feed to celebrate this," said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah! I've got a fivah!"

"Then you can go and pay the taxi-man at the gate," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I had a taxi from Luxford, and there's pounds to pay—double fare for bucking up. Go and pay him, Gussy, and I'll settle with you later."

Arthur Augustus hurried away to satisfy the taxi-man, who was growing decidedly impatient by that time.

While the juniors of both Houses, in a happy and excited crowd, were celebrating the triumphant return of Tom Merry, Reggie Clavering was taken away from the school by Police-constable Crump, of Rylcombe; and he spent that night in a cell.

Crooke was quivering with inward terror of what Clavering might say. But the juniors gave no thought now to Clavering or to Crooke, either. They were rejoicing with Tom Merry, and Tom Merry was rejoicing with them.

The affair caused much excitement while it lasted. The police searched for the accomplices of Reginald Clavering, and found them. Gates, the ruffian who had acted as Tom Merry's gaoler in the lonely house, was found as Tom had left him. Goring had not even paused to see the man, or ascertain what had happened to him, before he fled. Goring, realising that all was up, had fled at once from Luxford; but he fled in vain. He was arrested at Dover while seeking to escape across the Channel.

After the trial, which followed in due course, Gerald Goring went to penal servitude for three years, and Gates for two; while Clavering, whose youth saved him from the same fate, was placed in a reformatory, there to remain for a lengthy time. Tom Merry's enemies had paid dearly for their plot.

At St. Jim's, Tom Merry, restored to his old friends, soon forgot about the terrible experience he had been through.

Tom Merry was the hero of St. Jim's once more, and Crooke, for his share in the matter, escaped with no punishment but the contempt of his schoolfellows. Clavering had told all he could, but there was no proof, and Crooke's denials saved him. But many of the fellows suspected that Reggie Clavering had told the truth in that matter, at least. But the cad of the Shell was safe from punishment—excepting for the scorn of his House—and that, perhaps, was punishment enough. And the plotters, at least, had been brought to book!

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