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"HEIR TO MILLIONS!" GRAND ST. JIM'S YARN OF SPORT, FUN AND ADVENTURE INSIDE.

The GEM 2d

GOING—GOING—GONE!

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THE HEIR OF A MILLIONAIRE HAD TO AUCTION ALL HIS POSSESSIONS TO "RAISE THE WIND"!

HEIR *to* MILLIONS!

As Tom Merry appeared on the School House steps, Blake & Co. lined up before him and, raising their caps, bowed almost to the ground. "Hail!" they pronounced with one voice. "You silly chumps!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What are you hailing me for?"

CHAPTER 1.
Honouring the Heir!

TOM MERRY paused—in astonishment.

Morning lessons were over at St. Jim's, and Tom Merry had gone up to his study to fetch his bat, to put in a little practice at the wickets before dinner. He came out of the School House with the bat under his arm, and his cap at the back of his curly head, and a sunny smile on his face.

Then he paused on the steps of the School House in astonishment.

Four juniors were waiting near the bottom of the steps—evidently waiting for Tom Merry. They were Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. As Tom Merry appeared, the four juniors lined up before him, in a solemn row, and bowed almost to the ground, raising their caps at the same time with the utmost respect. Or, to speak more correctly, Blake, Herries, and Digby raised their caps, and D'Arcy raised a shining silk topper.

And as they performed that respectful salutation, they pronounced with one voice the word:

"Hail!"

Tom Merry stared at them. The School House juniors had made much of him since his recent absence from St. Jim's. But it was surprising to see

Blake & Co. saluting him as if he were an emperor or a grand-duke, at least. So Tom Merry's reply to that handsome salute was terse and pointed:

"Silly asses! What are you playing the giddy ox for now?"

The chums of the Fourth looked at him more in sorrow than in anger.

"Hail!" repeated Blake deliberately.

"Hail!" said Digby.

"Hail!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Hail, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and again his silk topper gleamed in the sun as it was swept off.

"You silly chumps!" exclaimed Tom Merry, beginning to get exasperated. "What's the matter with you? What are you hailing me for?"

Blake made a sign to his chums, and the row of juniors again bowed to the ground. But this time the ceremony was interrupted. Tom Merry charged down the steps, right into the bowing row, and upset them completely.

"Yarooh!" roared Blake, as he sat down in the quadrangle. "Oh crumbs!"

"Gweat Scott! My toppah!"

Crunch!

There was a wail of anguish from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as Herries sat on his topper, which he had involuntarily dropped as Tom Merry charged him over.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Hail to you! Ha, ha, ha!"

And he walked away towards the cricket ground, leaving the chums of the Fourth to pick themselves up and sort themselves out. That it was a "rag" of some sort Tom Merry guessed, but he fancied that he had had the best of the rag, as it had turned out. But before he had taken a dozen steps towards the cricket ground, Manners and Lowther of the Shell stopped in his path, exchanging a grin.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What the deuce——"

Manners and Lowther dragged off their cricket caps simultaneously, bowed low before the captain of the Shell, and ejaculated together:

"Hail!"

"You silly duffers——" began Tom, in perplexity. "What's the little game?"

"Hail!"

Then Manners and Lowther jumped aside in a great hurry as Tom Merry charged. They had seen the fate that had overtaken Blake & Co., and they just avoided it in time.

Tom Merry, more perplexed than ever, pursued his way to the cricket ground, leaving the two Shell fellows chuckling behind him. There was evidently something "on," though Tom had not the faintest idea what it was.

But it was not over yet. There were a good many juniors on the cricket ground, and, at sight of Tom Merry, half a dozen of them rushed towards him. Kangaroo of the Shell, and

A GREAT YARN OF SPORT, FUN AND ADVENTURE AT ST. JIM'S, STARRING TOM MERRY IN THE TITLE ROLE.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

Clifton Dane, and Glyn and Talbot, and two or three more, took off their caps and bowed low, grinning, and pronounced together the word of greeting with which he was becoming familiar.

"Hail!"

And then Figgins & Co. of the New House came tearing up to join in the bowing crowd, and they yelled in chorus:

"Hail!"

"Ave Cæsar!" added Kerr, who was nothing if not classical.

Quite an army of juniors surrounded the captain of the Shell, all bowing and all hailing. They were all grinning, too. Tom Merry's eyes wandered round the circle from one grinning face to the other in utter astonishment.

"I suppose this is a rag?" he said at last. "But I'm blessed if I can see where the joke comes in."

"Rag!" said Monty Lowther, hurrying up with Manners, with Blake & Co. at their heels. "Far from it! Hail!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hail!"

"Look here, you silly chumps!" roared Tom Merry. "If you're asking for a set of prize thick ears——"

"Wathah not, dear boy. We're payin' our wespects to wealth," explained Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Wealth!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you've come to the wrong shop. My wealth at present amounts to ninepence halfpenny," said Tom. "I haven't had a remittance, if that's what you mean."

"Hail to the heir to millions!" chortled Blake.

"Hail! Hail!"

"Haven't you heard the news?" Monty Lowther demanded.

"What news?"

Lowther took a folded paper from his pocket and began to read aloud from a marked paragraph. All the juniors stood round Tom Merry, cap in hand, while Lowther was reading, with an air of exaggerated respect and deference.

"Mr. Brandreth, the well-known South African millionaire, has arrived in London. This is Mr. Brandreth's first visit to the Old Country for more than twenty years. Mr. Brandreth's health, which has caused his friends some anxiety of late, is now quite restored."

"There you are!" said Monty Lowther. "Mr. Brandreth—millionaire. And don't we all know that his will is made in your favour, leaving you heaps of diamond mines, and gold mines, and whole crowds of Kaffirs and things? Hail!"

"Hail!" repeated all the juniors in chorus.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh. He understood now. His father's old friend, whom he knew only by name, had certainly made a will in his favour; a fact which had been brought to the knowledge of the St. Jim's fellows by a curious chance. And now the South African millionaire had arrived in the Old Country.

"Isn't that good news?" demanded Blake. "Of course, the old johnny has come home to see his dear Tommy! He will come here, of course—hung with diamonds and gold nuggets."

"We'll all back you up in giving him a stunning good time, Tommy," said Manners heartily. "We don't have millionaires here every day."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry laughed again.

"You're on the wrong track," he remarked. "Of course, I know you're only rotting—but you're on the wrong track all the same. I shall never have any of Mr. Brandreth's millions."

"Why not?"

"Because I won't!" said Tom, with a glint in his eyes, and the smile fading from his face. "You fellows know about this will owing to what's happened here lately. I am to inherit his giddy wealth, on condition that I don't do anything disgraceful—that's the opinion he has of his old chum's son! It's not good enough. It may interest you to know that I have had a letter from him——"

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

"He said he was coming down to see me——"

"Oh, good!"

"And I've replied telling him that I don't want to see him."

"What!"

It was a general gasp from the juniors.

They stared at Tom Merry blankly. Kangaroo tapped his forehead in a significant way.

"You—you told him that?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Yes."

Put to the test to see if he is worthy of inheriting a South African millionaire's money, Tom Merry proves he's made of the right stuff!

"And he's a giddy millionaire!" roared Blake.

"I don't care."

"But—but you are his heir."

"I don't want to be his heir, not on the condition he put in his will," said Tom Merry quietly. "I dare say he meant well in his way, but I take it as an insult. And I don't want to have anything to do with him, and I've told him so."

"Well, my only hat!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, slapping Tom Merry on the shoulder with great enthusiasm. "Tom Mewwy, I wegard that as wippin'. I quite appwove of placin' one's personal dig before such wotten considewations as money. You are quite wight, deah boy. I appwove entirely."

"Oh, good!" said Tom, laughing. "If you approve, Gussy, there's nothing more to be said on the subject, so let us get to the cricket, if you fellows have done playing the giddy ox. We haven't much time before dinner."

"Tommy," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "you must allow me to tell you that you are a champion ass!"

"Thanks!"

"A regular blithering, frabjous duffer!" said Manners.

"Good! Now let's get down to cricket," said Tom Merry imperturbably.

And they got to the cricket.

CHAPTER 2.
A Friend in Need!

MONTY LOWTHER heaved a deep sigh, and Manners echoed it.

They were looking into the cupboard in the study in the Shell passage. It was considerably past tea-time. The Terrible Three had stayed on the cricket pitch ever since lessons till dusk, and, needless to say, they had healthy appetites when they came in.

It was too late for tea in Hall, not that the chums of the Shell thought of having tea there. They always had tea in their study—when they were in funds. When funds were low, commons were short, unless a timely invitation came along from another study.

Indeed, in hard times, the juniors had sometimes been glad of an invitation to tea from a master. There was often a large amount of uncertainty about the commissariat in junior studies.

The cupboard in Tom Merry's study was very bare just now. The jam-jar showed just sufficient traces of jam to indicate that it had been used once to contain that sticky and agreeable comestible. There was half a loaf, which the proverb declares to be better than no bread. But as it had been there for a week or two, and was not at all improved by age—rather the reverse—it was not much better. No wonder Lowther and Manners sighed deeply. Their sighs, however, were so exaggerated that Tom Merry looked at them suspiciously.

"What are you chaps grousing about?" he inquired.

"I was thinking what an awful infliction it is to have a lunatic in the family," said Lowther sadly.

"Rougher on your family than on you, I should think," Tom Merry remarked.

"Ass! I was referring to this study as the family, and you as the lunatic," growled Lowther. "We're too late for tea in Hall. All the other chaps have finished, and there's nothing but an empty jam-jar and a stale crust. And you've got a millionaire anxious and ready to tip you quids, and you turn up your nose at him!"

"Might have had the old johnny here to-day!" groaned Manners. "I only wish a tame millionaire would drop on me out of South Africa."

"I'd greet him like a long-lost son," said Lowther. "I'd stroke him down, and butter him up, and make him stand a tremendous feed."

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, you wouldn't," he said. "You'd do just the same as I've done. Blow him and his blessed millions! I've had a high old time lately, because he put me in his will and left another chap out. Do ring off that subject! Are you stony?"

"I've got a postage stamp," said Lowther.

"Well, one of the chaps will give you a penny for it," said Tom briskly.

"No good. It's on a letter from my uncle."

"You ass!" roared Tom. "Then you're stony. How are you fixed, Manners?"

"I'm like the seed in the parable," said Manners disconsolately. "It fell upon stony places, you know. So have I."

"You've got ninepence, Tom," said

Lowther. "Now, what can we get for ninepence?"

"But I haven't," said Tom. "That was this afternoon. I've had a ginger-beer since then, and lent Skimpole a tanner."

"Oh, you frabjous ass!" said Lowther, in deep disgust. "To expend the last available funds in riotous living like a giddy prodigal! I don't mind the ginger-beer, but to waste a tanner on Skimpole—— Then you've only got a humble brown?"

"That's all; and it's a French 'un," said Tom Merry.

The chums of the Shell looked at one another tragically. They were famished, and they felt all the more famished as every prospect of a feed receded from their view. And the funds of the study were reduced to one French penny, which was not legal tender at the school shop.

"And to think that there's a tame millionaire——" began Lowther.

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry. "Ring off, you ass! Let's go along the passage and see what we can borrow."

"Hallo!" said Manners, as the study door opened, and Frayne of the Third Form looked in. "What do you want, young shaver? Can you lend us a fiver?"

Frayne grinned.

"I've got a message for Master Tom," he said. "I've been here before for you, you know, and you weren't in. Lefevre is waiting tea for you."

The Terrible Three jumped. Lefevre was the captain of the Fifth, a senior, and quite a great man in the School House. It was a very unusual thing for the Fifth Form captain to have juniors to tea at all. To wait tea for them was utterly unheard of. No wonder the Shell fellows concluded that the fag was "pulling their leg." Monty Lowther slipped between Frayne and the doorway, picking up a cricket stump as he did so. The fag backed away.

"Here, hold on!" he exclaimed, in alarm. "Lefevre sent me to tell you——"

"I'm sorry to see you departing from the lines laid down by the late lamented George Washington," said Lowther solemnly. "This isn't the time for your little jokes. We're stumped. Now you're going to be stumped—cricket stumped! Where will you have it?"

"Honour bright!" ejaculated Frayne, dodging round the table.

"Hold on, Monty!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's all right. It's astonishing, but true. Honour bright, kid?"

"Yes," said Frayne. "And I jolly well won't bring any more messages here, if that's the way you show your gratitude! Rats!"

"But—but then it's a giddy dream!" gasped Lowther, pitching the stump into the corner. "What is Lefevre asking us to tea for?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Frayne. "Can't be because he likes your company, unless he's got an extraordinary taste." And Frayne departed from the study, whistling.

The Terrible Three exchanged looks of amazement. An invitation to tea at that moment came like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years. It was welcome—very welcome—but they could not understand it.

"Lefevre has heard that we're stony, and is playing up like a man and a brother," said Tom Merry at last. "It's jolly decent of him!"

"Yes, if that's it," agreed Lowther dubiously.

"Well, whatever his reason is, it's an invitation to tea, and I'm hungry enough to eat Lefevre himself," said Manners. "Let's go!"

"Yes, rather—let's!" said Tom.

They left the study, and hurried off in the direction of the Fifth Form passage. Jack Blake met them on the stairs, and called to them.

"Hold on, you chaps! About the cricket match to-morrow, you know. I——"

"Sorry, can't stop!"

"What's the blessed hurry?" demanded Blake, in surprise.

"Going to have tea in the Fifth," said Manners loftily.

"Rats!"

"Can't stop to speak to mere Fourth Formers now," said Monty Lowther.

And the Terrible Three hurried on before Blake could think of a suitable reply.

They arrived at the door of Lefevre's study and knocked gently. There was a sound of voices in the study. The captain of the Fifth was evidently not alone. The surprise and mystification of the Shell fellows intensified. Had the Fifth Form captain, who was generally too lofty and dignified to notice the existence of the juniors, asked a party to meet the Terrible Three? It seemed like it.

"Come in!" called out Lefevre's voice.

Tom Merry opened the door. There were three of the Fifth in the study—Lefevre himself, Gerald Cutts, and Gilmore. With Cutts of the Fifth, the Terrible Three were on the worst of terms; but, of course, they did not give any sign of hostility on meeting him in another fellow's study. And Cutts was looking most agreeable now. He bestowed a smile and a nod on the juniors, as Lefevre greeted them with great heartiness.

"Walk right in, you fellows!" said Lefevre, and the juniors could not help remarking that he called them fellows instead of kids. "That's what I say, walk right in!"

"Ahem!" said Tom, a little doubtfully. "We—we had a message by young Frayne——"

"That's right; trot in!"

"We've been waiting tea for you," said Cutts. "But never mind—it's all right so long as you're here!"

"Certainly!" said Gilmore. "We don't mind a bit."

"Not the least little bit," said Lefevre, in the same hearty way. "That's what I say—not the least bit! Squat down, you chaps!"

"I—I say, this is awfully good of you!" stammered Tom Merry, so surprised by this cordial reception that he hardly knew what to say

"Not at all," said Lefevre. "When Cutts suggested asking you to tea, I thought it was a jolly good idea!"

The Terrible Three could not help exchanging a glance. So it was Cutts who had suggested it—Gerald Cutts, the black sheep of the Fifth. Cutts had an axe to grind somehow; there was no doubt about that. What it was the juniors could not guess. What was more to the point was the fact that a handsome spread was ready on the table, and that they had first-class appetites.

"Well," said Manners, "I must say that I agree that it was a jolly good idea."

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "As it happens, we're stony, and we were just wondering where tea was coming from."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Lefevre. "That's good! You stony! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry had not intended his remark as a joke; but as Lefevre seemed to take it as one and as Tom was an accommodating fellow, he was quite content to let it pass as one, so he politely laughed, too.

The Terrible Three sat down, and Cutts lifted up a dish of hot, buttered toast from the fender. Gilmore made the tea.

The chums of the Shell, very much astonished, but more hungry than astonished, attacked the excellent spread Lefevre had provided, content to make hay while the sun shone, so to speak, and to leave the clearing-up of the mystery till afterwards.

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CHAPTER 3.

Under False Pretences!

"TRY the kidneys, Merry, old chap!"

"Thanks, I will!"

"Pass Merry the toast, Cutts!"

"Here you are, Merry!"

"Another cup of tea, Merry?" asked Gilmore.

"Thanks!"

The Terrible Three were "doing" themselves very well. The three Fifth Formers looked after Tom Merry with amazing solicitude. Manners and Lowther were not the recipients of so much kind attention as their leader, and they were left chiefly to look after themselves. But they were equal to the task.

The first keen edge worn off their appetite, their surprise and curiosity increased. They had more time now to indulge in speculations as to what that unwonted hospitality might possibly mean. Lefevre might be off his chump—that seemed to be the most reasonable explanation—but Cutts certainly wasn't off his chump.

Cutts was too cool and calculating to do anything without an adequate motive. What was Cutts' little game, then, in inducing Lefevre to entertain the three juniors—between whom and Cutts there was almost an undying feud? What was his reason for assuming his blandest manners? And Cutts could be very agreeable when he liked.

He certainly liked now; and, deeply as the Shell fellows distrusted him, they could not help being won over to a certain extent by his spontaneous heartiness. But they would have given a good deal to know what it all meant.

Cutts sometimes had juniors to tea in his study—juniors who were blessed with plenty of money—and played nap with them afterwards, thus kindly relieving them of their superfluous cash. But that could not be the little game now. Lefevre would never have countenanced anything of the kind in his study.

The captain of the Fifth was a little bit of a swanker, and a good bit of a duffer; but he was not a blackguard of the Cutts' variety. It was possible that Cutts was merely using Lefevre as a means of getting on terms of good fellowship with the Terrible Three. But the mystery remained—what was he doing it for, especially at a time when, as Tom Merry had frankly remarked, they were all stony?

"I must say you chaps are doing us jolly well!" Tom Merry remarked

presently. "I hope you will drop into our study one of these evenings, Lefevre."

"Certainly!" said Lefevre. "I'll be glad to. My idea is that the Fifth has really been too standoffish towards the Shell. Don't you think so?"

"I—I haven't thought about it," said Tom, in surprise.

"Of course, as the Shell's the next Form down, it's hardly the thing to treat these Shell chaps as fags," Lefevre went on, with great condescension. "Don't you think so, Cutts?"

"My idea exactly!" said Cutts.

"I've always thought so," Gilmore remarked. "Besides, Tom Merry being such a first-class bat—ahem——"

"Exactly!" said Lefevre. "What would you say to playing for the Fifth sometimes, Merry?"

Tom nearly dropped his teacup. Any junior would have been glad, of course, to be asked to play in a senior team, but the unexpectedness of such an honour was simply flabbergasting.

Was all this trouble being taken simply to secure the services of the best junior bat for the Fifth Form cricket team? It was not likely. A mere request would have been quite sufficient without this handsome feed, and all this "buttering-up" with which it was accompanied. That offer of batting for the Fifth was simply part of the "buttering-up" process. But why? Tom Merry began to wonder whether he was dreaming.

"I—I'd bat for you with pleasure, Lefevre!" stammered Tom. "Of course, not when my own team wanted me. I wouldn't give them the go-by. But what would the rest of the Fifth say to your playing a junior?"

Lefevre sniffed.

"Blow the rest of the Fifth!" he said. "That's what I say—blow 'em!"

"Lefevre's captain of the Form," said Cutts, in his silky voice. "Besides, I should back him up all along the line in securing the best bat in the Lower School!"

"Oh, I don't know about that!" said Tom honestly. "Figgins of the Fourth is as good as I am—and Talbot, too!"

"You're the chap we want," said Lefevre. "Besides, it's up to all of us to look after you a bit—after what you've been through!"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"Like a blessed novel, wasn't it?" said Lefevre. "You were kidnapped because a giddy millionaire had put you down in his will. That was it, wasn't it?"

"That was it," said Tom.

"And that other chap—what was his name?—Snoring, or something——"

"Goring," said Tom, laughing.

"Yes, that's it. He was a rotter, a regular bad egg," said Lefevre, shaking his head solemnly. "Chokey is the right place for him."

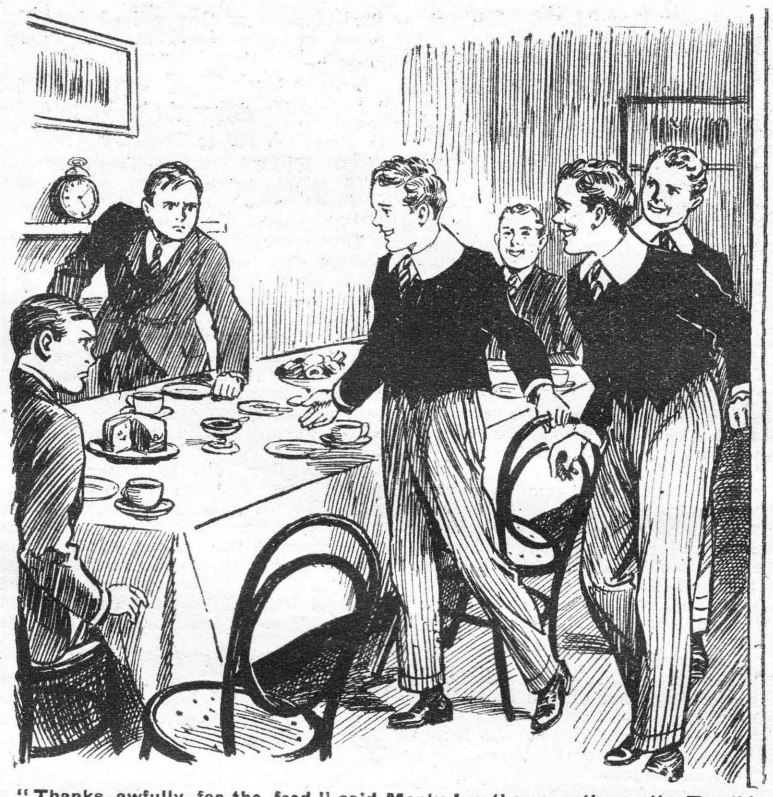
"Tell us about it, Merry," said Cutts.

"There isn't much to tell," said Tom. "I though all the fellows knew the story by this time. Old Brandreth made a will, leaving his money to Goring, his dead partner's son. Goring disgraced himself, and was sacked from college, and the old man cut him off."

"And then made a will in your favour?" said Cutts carelessly.

Tom Merry frowned a little. It was a sore point with him.

"Well, yes; I never knew anything about it. I had never even heard of Mr. Brandreth, except hearing his name mentioned as an old friend of my pater's when he was alive. I don't like the man, from what I've heard—he seems to be a suspicious and distrustful beast!"



"Thanks awfully for the feed," said Monty Lowther sweetly, as the Terrible Three moved towards the door. "I hope you'll return our visit." "Clear off!" roared Lefevre, jumping up. "I'll wring your cheeky necks if you don't get out of my study!" "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry & Co.

"He made some condition in his will?"

"Yes," said Tom, his eyes flashing. "He was afraid he might be taken in by another chap as rotten as Goring; so he made it a condition that if I should act like a rotter, and get into disgrace, I wasn't to inherit his money; it would go to Goring, after all. That led that rascal to get up a scheme for disgracing me—which has ended in his going to prison. Mr. Brandreth's lawyer was a confederate in it; that was how he knew about the will. It all came out after he was arrested."

"Well, some kids do have all the luck," said Lefevre. "I hear that Brandreth is in England now?"

"Yes; he's been in London some days, I think."

"Of course, you've heard from him?"

"Yes," said Tom.

Monty Lowther gave a sudden giggle. The Fifth Formers looked at him—and so did Tom Merry and Manners—in surprise. Lowther tried to control his merriment, but he could not. His giggle expanded into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What's the little joke?" demanded Lefevre.

Lowther gasped.

"Excuse me, you chaps," he said. "I—I'm sorry! Something struck me as funny. Go on, Lefevre; you were saying——"

But Tom Merry and Manners had guessed now the cause of Lowther's sudden mirth, and they were grinning. Tom Merry remembered the ridiculous scene of the morning, when all the juniors had hailed him as the heir of millions. The juniors had been "rotting," of course; but it came into Tom Merry's mind now that he knew the reason at last of this marvellous good-fellowship on the part of the Fifth Form chaps.

It was not Tom Merry they were making much of—it was Tom Merry, the heir of the South African millionaire. He was asked to tea in Lefevre's study. Cutts and Gilmore were outdoing one another in buttering him up. He was to bat for the Fifth Form team, because they knew that he was to inherit the wealth of the South African diamond magnate.

Considering the terms he really stood upon with Mr. Brandreth, Tom Merry felt inclined to echo Lowther's roar of laughter, but he restrained his mirth, and made a fresh attack on the jam tarts, instead. He did not intend to disguise the real facts from his kind hosts, and he had a suspicion that the Fifth Form hospitality would fade away like a beautiful dream.

"Yes, I was saying——" said Lefevre, evidently somewhat disconcerted by Lowther's untimely merriment. "Lemme see. I suppose the giddy millionaire will be coming down here, Merry?"

"I don't think so."

"Oh, he's sure to!" said Lefevre. "And if we can fix it up for a half-holiday, you shall be playing in the Fifth Form team when he comes. That's bound to please him. Of course, as your pater's old pal, it's up to you to please him."

"I don't see that," said Tom grimly. "I think the terms of his will are an insult to me, and I don't want his money."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Lefevre. "That's a good one! That's what I say—a jolly good one! You don't want his millions! Ha, ha, ha!"

But Gerald Cutts was looking very

curiously at Tom Merry. He was a good deal keener than Lefevre.

"But I'm not joking," said Tom. "I don't want his money. And, besides, after the publicity of what's happened, I dare say he would alter his will, anyway. I'm jolly sure he'll alter it after reading my letter!"

"Your letter?" said Cutts. "Why, what have you said to him?"

"Only that I think his will was an insult, and that he ought to have a better opinion of me, if he was really a friend of my pater's," said Tom. "And I put it that I didn't want his money, and that he could leave it to Goring, or to anybody he likes. And that I didn't want to see him. I'd have made it plainer if he hadn't been my pater's friend a long time ago."

"My hat!" gasped Cutts. "That was plain enough. Why, after that, you haven't the slightest chance of ever getting a penny from him."

"I know that."

"And—and he won't come to see you?"

"I don't suppose he will, after my letter," chuckled Tom Merry. "I don't want to be bothered by a suspicious and distrustful old johnny, who'd be bound to think all the time that I wanted his beastly money if I was civil to him. I'd rather not have anything to do with him."

"You young idiot!"

"Thanks!" said Tom cheerfully. "It's awfully kind of you to be interested in my prospects, Cutts!"

"Then—then you're not the heir at all!" stuttered Lefevre

"Not in the least."

"You—you spoofing young jackass!"

"I haven't spoofed anybody. I didn't know you were asking me here as Mr. Brandreth's heir!" grinned Tom. "You should have told Frayne to mention that along with the rest of the message."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Lowther.

Lefevre's face expressed a deep disgust and annoyance. Cutts was scowling. Gilmore, who seemed to have a glimpse of the humorous side of the matter, grinned faintly.

The Terrible Three rose to their feet. They had made an excellent tea.

"Thanks awfully for the feed!" said Monty Lowther sweetly. "I hope you'll return our visit, Lefevre. Jolly glad to see you in our study, you know."

"Jolly long time before you see me coming to tea with fags!" snorted Lefevre. "That's what I say. Get out!"

"When shall I begin batting for the Fifth, Lefevre?" asked Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"Clear off!" roared Lefevre, turning crimson. "Do you think I'm going to put a beastly inky fag in the Fifth Form team? If you do, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"But you said——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind what I said. What I say now is that I'll wring your cheeky necks if you don't clear out of my study!" roared Lefevre, jumping up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three cleared out promptly. They yelled with laughter as they retreated down the Fifth Form passage. In Lefevre's study, the three seniors looked at one another in utter disgust.

A handsome spread and a long and careful process of buttering-up had been wasted—a sheer waste! And all the reward the millionaire-hunters received was the loud laughter of the Shell fellows as they retired from the scene of that excellent and timely spread.

CHAPTER 4.

A Pal in Trouble!

"LETTER for you, Tommy!" said Monty Lowther, when the Shell came out after lessons the next morning

Tom Merry brightened up. Letters were always welcome, especially at a time when funds were low. If the letter was from Miss Fawcett, his old governess, there was probably a postal order in it—as well as a great deal of valuable advice about taking care of his health. If it was from his uncle in America, it was pretty certain to contain a remittance. And the Terrible Three were in terrible need of a remittance.

As Lowther remarked, they couldn't go on living on Tom Merry's expectations for ever, especially since Tom had been duffer enough to knock his own expectations on the head. The chums of the Shell were in a dreadful state of stoniness, though they were not without hope of another invitation to tea from some millionaire-hunter like Lefevre.

"Chuck it over!" said Tom Merry.

Lowther tossed him the letter. Tom Merry made a grimace.

It was not in Miss Fawcett's hand—neither did it have the American postmark. It was not a remittance.

"Oh rats!" said Tom.

"No good?" asked Manners and Lowther dolefully.

"No; it's only from Mr. Brandreth. It's his fist."

"Only!" snorted Lowther. "Only from a millionaire—and we're stony!"

"Oh blow! Besides, he isn't really a millionaire," said Tom Merry. "The newspapers call everybody a millionaire. I think he's very rich, that's all."

"And at the present moment our resources amount to one French penny!" said Manners.

"If there's a remittance in it, I'm going to send it back," said Tom, as he opened the letter.

"What for?"

"Because I won't take anything from him, I tell you!" said Tom.

"Prize ass!"

"Thanks; but I mean it."

There was no remittance, however, in the letter—and the letter itself was short, if not sweet:

"I am in receipt of your letter. I am coming down to the school to-day to see you.

"GEORGE BRANDRETH."

That was all.

"Well, that's a chap who doesn't believe in wasting ink," said Monty Lowther admiringly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens is he coming for?" growled Tom Merry. "I told him quite plainly in my letter that I didn't want to see him."

"Like your cheek!" commented Manners. "You ought to have thought of the study."

"Rats!"

"It's a half-holiday to-day, luckily," Lowther remarked. "We'll devote it to looking after your kind friend, Tommy."

"We won't!" growled Tom. "We've got a match on with the New House, and I'm jolly well not going to stand out of a House match for him. If he's determined to come, he can watch us play cricket if he likes."

"Now, look here, Tom," said Lowther, seriously for once, "let me give you some fatherly advice. I think you're quite right, of course, not to suck up to a man for his money. That would be rotten, I know. Also, it's only natural you should get your back up about what's come out concerning his queer will. But you can carry independence too far. You're not rolling in money. Your pater left you pretty well provided for, but your guardian lost the money. The poor old lady was swindled out of it, and you were left on the rocks. If it hadn't been for your uncle in America, where would you have been now?"

"Still on the rocks, Monty."

"Exactly! Your uncle stood by you like a giddy Trojan. But what are you going to do later on? You're dependent on your uncle now. He's a jolly good sort, and he will see that you're looked after, I know. But uncles are mighty uncertain things in this world. I've got an uncle myself, who looks after me, and I know," said Lowther. "Now, this old chap Brandreth was your father's pal, and he seems anxious to be longing for a chance to leave you a pot of money. As a man of the world, I advise you to go easy with him."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, thanks for your advice," he said. "When I grow up I'm going to earn my living. I've got lots of ideas about that already. I don't know that I should care to be a slacker, hanging about doing nothing, anyway. In any case, I'm not going to bother my head about this old johnny from Africa. I don't want his money, and I won't put up with his beastly suspicions and distrust. If he was my father's pal, he ought to know that my father's son couldn't possibly be a rotter like that fellow Goring. If he can't take that for granted, he can't have anything to do with me. I've made up my mind about that. Now, don't jaw about it any more, but let's get down to the nets for half an hour before dinner."

"Well, I've given you some jolly good advice," said Lowther. "If you won't take it, that's your bisney. We'll drop the subject now, if you like. And if you want to speak to young Brooke about the cricket, now's your chance; he's clearing off."

Brooke of the Fourth nodded to the Shell fellows as he passed out of the School House. Brooke was a day-boy, and on half-holidays he generally went home immediately after morning lessons. Tom Merry darted after him, and overtook him in the quad.

"Hallo, you're looking rather off colour," Tom Merry remarked, scanning the junior's face, which was unusually pale and clouded. "Anything wrong, kid?"

Brooke coloured a little. Brooke's circumstances at St. Jim's were a little peculiar. His people had been very well-to-do at one time, but his father had been a "rolling stone," and had not only gathered no moss, but had shed most of his patrimony. John Brooke, who had once been a man of some position in the locality, had fallen from his high estate, and all that remained of his once extensive property was a rambling old house on Wayland Moor, where the Brookes lived now.

The family income had been reduced to vanishing point, and Dick Brooke had to earn his living, and by sheer grit and determination he did so, finding the money to pay those fees as a day-boy at St. Jim's.

His circumstances were no secret, and some of the fellows, like Levison, Mellish, and Crooke, related with great gusto in the Common-room that they had seen "old Brooke" reeling out of the Green Man, squiffy, as they called it.

The father was a hopeless wastrel, but his recklessness and folly had never been able to alienate the respect and affection of his son.

Tom Merry did not wait for a reply to his question, as he saw the colour flush into Brooke's face. He guessed that the junior's father had been in trouble again, and that it was weighing on Brooke's mind. So he went on hurriedly:

"About the cricket, you know. You're not going to give the cricket the go-by this season, old chap. Will you play this afternoon?"

"The team's made up, isn't it?" said Brooke uneasily.

"That's all right; Herries is standing out," said Tom Merry. "You can have his place if you like. Come, old son, you'd better play. You stick indoors too much, you know, and what you want is a good game."

"I know I do," said Brooke, with a faint smile; "but if you'll excuse me, I'd rather get home. I—I don't feel quite up to it, anyway. I——" He paused. "I won't bother you with my worries, Merry, but I'd rather get home."

Tom Merry looked at him. He could see that there was some real trouble on the day-boy's mind, apart from his work.

"I'll trot part of the way with you, then," he said. "You chaps get down to the nets!" he called back to Manners and Lowther.

"Aren't you coming?" asked Lowther.

"No; I'm going with Brooke."

"Oh, all right!"

Manners and Lowther strolled away to the cricket ground, and Tom Merry walked with Brooke out of the gates of St. Jim's. Tom Merry was the fellow who was most in Dick Brooke's confidence. The fact that Tom was no longer a rich fellow made it easier for Brooke to talk freely to him.

"I can see you've got it bad," said Tom, as he went down the lane. "Don't tell me anything you don't want to, of course; but if it would ease your mind to jaw it over with a pal, why, pile in. You know I don't blubber."

Brooke nodded.

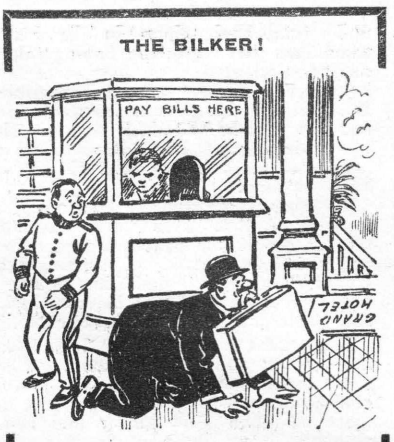
"I know," he said. "You're awfully good, Merry. I—I am in trouble, there's no doubt about that. Of course, nobody can help me, but—but it is rather a relief to talk to a chap who understands."

"Perhaps I can give you some advice," said Tom cheerily. "I've just been getting a lot of advice myself from Lowther."

"It's my pater," said Brooke in a low voice. "The poor old chap has done it this time. I don't think you'll be able to advise me out of the fix we're in now; still, you can tell me what you think. You understand, of course, I'm not finding fault with the pater in any way. He has a right to do as he likes with his own property, and it isn't a chap's bisney to set up in judgment on his father, whatever he does, I know that. It's simply a question of what's to be done. You know that the house we live in is all that's left of what my pater used to own. The bookmakers have had most of the rest. Well, that's going now."

Tom Merry started.

"So bad as that, old chap?"



"Carry your bag, Mr. Winterbottom?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Coutts, 143, James Street, St. Catharine's, Ontario, Canada.

"He signed a bill for another man," said Brooke hopelessly. "It was that kind of thing that ruined him. He would always do anything he was asked to do. The old place isn't worth much. It's half in ruins, as you know. If it's sold up it will just about pay what he's liable for now—a thousand pounds. It's worth a good bit more than that, but it won't fetch any more at a forced sale. And—and it's all the home we have now."

"A thousand pounds!" said Tom.

"Yes, the other man has done him in and he's got to meet the bill. There was a time when he could have met ten times as much quite easily, but that's a long time ago. Now it's the finish. We have nothing but the house, and the mater's hundred a year, and now the house will go unless a thousand quid drops out of the sky before next week."

"A thousand quid! Poor old chap!" said Tom. "I suppose you haven't the remotest chance of raising it?"

Brooke smiled faintly.

"I've got twenty quid or so in the Post Office Savings Bank," he said. "That's about the full extent of what I can raise towards it."

"And—and you can't get time on it?"

"That's the worst of it," said Brooke miserably. "In time the place will be worth a lot more money, now Wayland is growing and they're building there. But the bill's got into the hands of a moneylender chap in Wayland, and he knows, of course, that the place is going up in value, and he won't give us an hour beyond the legal time. He wants to get his claws on the place, of course. Next week he's going to close down on us, and we shall have to move into lodgings in Wayland, I suppose. It comes rather hard. The poor old pater is awfully cut up about it—for our sakes, you know. He didn't think it would come to that, of course. The poor old chap is rather too simple for this world He looks so rotten about it that it makes me wretched to see him. We shall keep our heads above water, but it's a wrench to part with the old place where we've always lived and to go into lodgings in some back street in the town. It can't be helped, of course. No good crying over spilt milk."

"Who's got the bill?" asked Tom.

"Sampson, the land agent in Wayland."

"A jolly hard customer, so they say," said Tom Merry.

"Hard as nails," said Brooke ruefully.

Tom Merry was silent, his thoughts busy. A thousand pounds! Of course, Brooke had not the slightest chance of getting that sum, or a tenth part of it, from any source whatever. Tom Merry thought of old Brandreth and his superfluous money. Here was a use to which that money might be put—if Tom Merry had had it. Brooke would never have accepted money from him, of course; but the matter might have been arranged somehow. And Mr. Brandreth was coming down to the school that afternoon—coming down to see Tom Merry, whom he wished to make his heir. Money, after all, was not to be despised.

"Suppose the quids were raised from somewhere, Brooke?" Tom Merry said, after a long pause. "Then——"

"Oh, we could settle it in time!" said Brooke. "The land we have left isn't worth much now, but in a few years' time it will sell at a good figure, and we could perhaps settle up the thousand pounds and still keep the house."

"Then what you want is a loan on the place, a mortgage, or something like that, to be paid off in, say, five years?" suggested Tom Merry.

Brooke laughed.

"Yes, that's what we want, but that's what we shan't get," he said. "We can't get a loan on the place when it's got to be sold next week."

"But if some relation, say, lent you the cash, then it could be fixed, and his money would be quite safe?"

"Yes; but we haven't any relation with a thousand quid to lend for five years," said Brooke. "It would be a safe investment, but only a friend would take it on; and friends like that are jolly scarce. If Sampson would hold the bill over for a few years he could have four or five per cent on the money, safe as houses. But he wants the property now. You know these sharks. It's no go!"

"I'm awfully sorry it has come to this," said Tom. "I hope some way out of it will turn up."

"I hope so," said Brooke. But he did not speak hopefully. "Anyway, it's a relief to jaw it over with a pal. Thanks for coming with me."

They parted at the stile, and Brooke went on towards the house on the moor.

Tom's face was very thoughtful as he walked back to the school. There was only one way in which Brooke's home might be saved—if a thousand pounds were forthcoming. And it would be a safe investment, with nothing in it to offend Brooke's pride. And that afternoon the South African millionaire was coming down to St. Jim's to see Tom Merry!

CHAPTER 5.

The Man From South Africa!

"PENNY for 'em!" said Monty Lowther.

"Eh?"

"Only I shall have to owe you the penny," said Lowther reflectively.

Tom Merry laughed. The chums of the Shell were sunning themselves on the steps of the School House after dinner, and for some time Tom Merry had been plunged in deep thought. Manners and Lowther had watched him with subdued grins for several minutes, and Lowther had finally interrupted the reverie with a munificent offer of a penny for his thoughts.

"Well, I've been thinking——" said Tom.

"Yes, I've noticed that," agreed Lowther. "You've been scowling at the elms for five or six minutes on end. What have the elms done?"

"I was thinking, ass. Mr. Brandreth is coming down here this afternoon."

"He is—he are!" said Lowther. "Are you thinking that millionaires are worth cultivating, after all? I quite agree with you. If you like, I'll captain the House team this afternoon, while you do the agreeable to the giddy millionaire. Butter him up, and stroke him down, and let him make a ripping will, leaving you a heap of diamond-mines—and ask him for half-a-quid on account."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tom, colouring. "The fact is, I—I've been thinking about old Brandreth—and—and perhaps I was a little previous with jumping on him."

"I could have told you that, if you'd asked me," said Lowther, looking a little surprised, all the same. "Millionaires don't grow on every bush; and even if they're a little bit queer, that's excusable in a millionaire. Even if they hurt your noble dignity, they can afford to pay for the damage to a good tune. I should never discourage any millionaire who wanted to make me his heir. I should say, 'Let 'em all come'!"

"I haven't changed my opinion about that," said Tom, his colour deepening. "Only—only Mr. Brandreth could do something for me, if he liked—that—that——"

"Quite so! A fiver, at least!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom. "Perhaps I was a bit too previous, but—— Let's get down to the cricket. I'm not going to suck up to anybody, for my own sake, or anybody else's. Brandreth can watch us play, if he comes, that's all."

And Tom Merry, with his brow wrinkled in a frown, went into the House to change into his flannels. Manners and Lowther exchanged a glance of surprise. They did not understand their chum in the least. That Tom was regretting having taken an independent line, on account of Mr. Brandreth's money, seemed impossible. But certainly he did not seem so satisfied now that he had acted rightly. He was thinking of Dick Brooke, as a matter of fact; but of that his chums knew nothing.

However, there was the House match to think of now. Tom Merry was captain of the junior School House team, and he had no intention of standing out. If Mr. Brandreth found him occupied when he came, that was his own look-out. Tom had not asked him to come.

Figgins & Co. came on the field, looking very fit and very confident. Figgins' team had won the last junior House match, with wickets to spare, at the time when Tom Merry had been absent They intended to win this match, too, though it would not be so easy with the captain of the Shell in his old place.

"Standing out, Tommy?" Kangaroo asked, as Tom came on the field with Manners and Lowther.

Tom did not look as if he were standing out, as he was in his flannels, and had his bat under his arm. But as Noble was vice-captain, he felt that he ought to give him a chance.

"No," said Tom.

"But I hear that your tame millionaire is coming."

"That's so."

"You're not going to meet him at the station?"

"No."

"I say, deah boy, there's such a thing as being too standoffish, you know," Arthur Augustus remarked, with a sage shake of the head. "Aftah all, the chap was your patah's pal. I should be quite willin' to skippah the team for you——"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Hallo, Figgy! Ready?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins cheerily. "You're playing, then?"

"Of course I'm playing!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in an exasperated tone.

"But I heard that your millionaire is coming."

"Blow the millionaire!"

"I say, he'll feel a bit neglected, you know," said Kerr.

"Let him!"

"He'll expect to be made much of," remarked Fatty Wynn. "You ought to stand him a feed, at least, after his journey."

"Such a thing as politeness, especially towards a millionaire," grinned Redfern.

"Bosh! Are you going to toss up, Figgy, or is this a conversazione, and not a cricket match?" Tom Merry demanded crossly.

Figgins grinned, and the coin was tossed.

Tom Merry won, and he elected to bat.

Figgins & Co. went into the field. Fatty Wynn took the ball for the first over; and Kangaroo and Monty Lowther went to the wickets.

Tom Merry looked on with wrinkled brow. He felt that he was carrying the independent line a little too far in his conduct towards the millionaire. But what he knew about Mr. Brandreth did not make him want to waste civility upon him. A suspicious, distrustful man, possessed with the belief that everyone was after his money; that was all Tom knew about the man, and it did not dispose him to like Mr. Brandreth.

Fatty Wynn was in great form. In the first over he took Lowther's wicket for no runs; and when Digby took Lowther's place, his sticks went down with the last ball of the over. The New House team grinned joyously. Two wickets for nil was a good beginning. Digby came back to the pavilion looking rather blue, and Tom Merry picked up his bat; he was next man in.

"Hallo!" said Manners, as Tom was drawing on his gloves "Here comes somebody! Bet you that's your millionaire, Tommy!"

Tom Merry glanced away in the direction of the gates. A man was crossing towards the School House—a stranger at St. Jim's. He was a slightly built man with a dark beard tinged with grey and grey eyebrows, under which gleamed a pair of keen, dark eyes; his complexion was almost as brown as a berry. He paused and looked towards the cricket ground as Tom glanced towards him, holding the brim of his broad, soft hat to shade his eyes from the sun.

Tom Merry frowned irritably. It was undoubtedly Mr Brandreth, and Tom was just going in to bat: the field was waiting. Tom Merry hesitated.

"Better go and meet him," whispered Manners. "I'll go in first."

Tom's jaws set squarely.

"I'm going in!" he said. "You can go and speak to him if you like. Tell him I'm batting."

"But, I say——"

Tom Merry did not pause to listen; he went to the wicket Digby had vacated. Manners shook his head and left the pavilion, hurrying towards the stranger in the quadrangle. Tom Merry gave him no further thought; he had to receive the bowling from Redfern and he needed to give it all his attention if he was to save his wicket.

Tom Merry knocked up 6 runs for the over, and by that time he had quite forgotten the new arrival. The field crossed over, and Kangaroo received the bowling from Fatty Wynn. The Cornstalk cut away the first ball to the boundary, and there was a pause while the ball was sent in. In that pause Tom Merry glanced towards the pavilion and saw Manners return there, accompanied by the bearded stranger.

The latter, with his broad, soft hat pulled over his brows to shade his eyes, looked on at the cricket. Manners pointed out Tom Merry to him; but just then the bowling recommenced and Kangaroo knocked the ball away and Tom Merry had to run It was a single, and it brought Tom to the pavilion end, and there h knew that the stranger's eyes were fixed intently on him. He coloured a little and raised his cap to the stranger as he caught his glance, and then gave all his attention to the bowling. Fatty Wynn was delivering it, and he had to keep his eyes open.

It worried Tom's nerves a little to feel himself under the critical inspection of the man from South Africa. The man's face was hard and lined—he had noted that—and his eyes keen and piercing. His face showed the signs of age, but a hard and grim age; there was no sign of softness in the features or in the expression.

But there was an ironical look about the hard, sunburnt face that puzzled and somewhat annoyed Tom as he saw it. More than once, in spite of himself, his eyes turned towards the man from South Africa, till he resolutely pulled himself together and glanced at him no more. He had nearly been caught napping once by the New House bowler, and he did not mean to give Fatty Wynn another chance.

From that moment he played steadily, as if the stranger had not been there. It was a splendid innings, and elicited loud cheers from the School House juniors round the cricket ground. Tom Merry had been fourth in on the list, and he was not out at the finish of the innings.

The batsmen came and went, the wickets going down pretty fast to the New House bowling, especially when Fatty Wynn had the ball; but Tom Merry's wicket was impregnable. He had knocked up 50 runs when the last wicket fell, and he was not out, the total School House score being 1 over the 100.

"Bwavo, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus most magnanimously, for he had scored only a duck's egg himself, having been caught out by Redfern just as he was preparing to do great things for his side. "Bwavo, deah boy! A wippin' innin's!"

And Tom Merry's chums clapped him on the back as he came off the field, with his bat under his arm, and his face very ruddy.

"Here's Mr. Brandreth, Tom," murmured Lowther. "He's been watching you for close on an hour, and I fancy he's a bit impatient."

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not my fault" he said.

"Well, speak to him civilly, anyway."

Tom Merry, feeling decidedly awkward and with colour deepening his ruddy cheeks, walked towards the gentleman from South Africa, who was seated outside the pavilion, waiting for him.

CHAPTER 6.
Cricket First!

MR. BRANDRETH rose to his feet as Tom Merry came up. The expression hardly changed on his grim, hard face—which from its hardness, might really have been moulded in bronze itself.

Only the ironical look that had already irritated Tom Merry seemed to intensify a little.

The hard, keen eyes scanned the handsome, flushed face of the junior. Tom Merry slid his bat into his left hand and raised his cap.

"Mr. Brandreth?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I am Tom Merry."

"I knew you at once," said Mr. Brandreth quietly.

"Yes?" said Tom in surprise. "But you have never seen me before, sir."

"No; I was in Africa before you were born," said the diamond magnate, with a nod. "I knew you by your likeness to your father."

"I don't remember my father," said Tom, his face clouding a little. "I was sent home from India when I was a little nipper, and dad was killed by the Afghans. But, of course, you knew about that."

"I know about it, Tom. I was your father's best friend during his life, and we were schoolboys together. I remember him best when he was your age; he was a keen cricketer at school. Looking at you just now, I feel as if I had gone back thirty years." For one moment the hard face relaxed, but it was only for a moment; then it was bronze-like again. "You do not seem very glad to see your father's old friend."

"I explained in my letter——"

"I understand perfectly. But I suppose you have no time to talk to me now—you are wanted in the match?"

"Figgins & Co. will be batting in ten minutes, and I have to go into the field, of course," said Tom. "I'm captain of the junior team in my House."

"Yes; your friend—Manners, I think his name is—has explained to me, and it seems you are playing a very important match this afternoon, and could not possibly be spared from the team."

Tom realised that Manners had been making the best of matters for him. But that curious ironical look on Mr. Brandreth's face irritated him more than ever. It seemed as if the man were mocking him somehow.

"Well, I could have been spared, but the team would have missed me; that's how it is," said Tom. "I don't say they wouldn't win without me, but the fellows wanted me to play."

"Even on the afternoon when your father's friend was coming?"

"Yes," said Tom bluntly. "I thought I had made it clear in my letter to you, sir. I don't want to be uncivil, and I know my duty towards any friend of my father's. But I think my pater would have approved of what I wrote to you. After what has happened—after what came out lately, I mean, through the scoundrel Goring kidnapping me—I think it's better to be quite plain. You put me into your will in a way that was simply an insult to me, and your solicitor betrayed it to the man Goring, and through him everybody knows about it. The whole school knows that you left me your money on condition that I didn't turn out to be a rascal—a pretty condition for the son of the man you say was your best friend. And so I wrote to you that I regarded it as an insult, and so I do!"

"I have my reasons."

"I know you have; but you had no right to make mention of me, in your will or anything else, in such a manner."

"No right?" said the millionaire, frowning.

Tom Merry's eyes met his fearlessly.

"No right!" he repeated. "At least, you ought to have asked me whether I wanted to be made your heir on such humiliating conditions."

"And if I had, what would your reply have been?"

"No!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"Really?"

"Yes, really. If you cannot take my word——" Tom Merry broke out angrily.

"Keep your temper, my boy! In my day youngsters were taught not to quarrel with their elders."

Tom bit his lip.

"I beg your pardon!" he said. "But—but excuse me now, sir, will you? I'm wanted."

"You may do as you choose."

"Thank you!"

Tom Merry walked away to join the cricketers, who had fallen back politely to avoid hearing what passed between him and the South African magnate.

"Ready?" asked Tom.

"Well, if you want to talk a bit to your friend——" began Figgins.

"I don't!" said Tom shortly.

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry led his men into the field. Mr. Brandreth did not move from his seat on the bench before the pavilion. During the New House innings he watched the game with a calm and expressionless face.

The New House innings lasted an hour, and 60 runs were knocked up. That was well behind the School House score.

Then the School House batted again, Tom Merry going in first this time. It was a little upon his conscience that he was neglecting his visitor, unwelcome as that visitor was, and he put himself first on the list, with the intention of looking after Mr. Brandreth when his wicket went down. But again he made a record innings. Wickets went down one after another, but Tom Merry's remained intact, while his comrades came and went.

Mr. Brandreth rose after about three-quarters of an hour, and walked away to the School House. Manners and Lowther, who were out, had spoken to him and tried to engage him in conversation; but the South African's replies had been of the shortest and driest, and they had been effectually discouraged. They exchanged glances as he walked away from the cricket ground.

"He's ratty, and no mistake!" Lowther murmured.

Manners nodded.

"Blessed if I blame Tom, though!" he said. "He looks a hard old nut, and there's a sort of sneer on his chivvy I don't like!"

"Well, he can't think that Tommy wants his blessed money after this!" said Lowther, with a grin. "That's clear, at least, I think."

"I should say so."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "All the same, I weally think Tom Mewwy is a little in ewwah. The old chap has come a long way to see him, you know. I shall point that out to Tom Mewwy when he finishes battin'—if he evah does! It looks as if he's goin' to be not out again, bai Jove!"

"Saved you, sir! You almost sat on a tin-tack!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Martin, 337, Camden Road, Holloway, London, N.7.

"There goes the giddy wicket!" said Lowther. "You're not a prophet, Gussy!"

Tom Merry's wicket had fallen to Fatty Wynn at last. He came off the field, and Reilly took his place—last man in. Tom Merry glanced round, and then joined his chums.

"He's gone," said Lowther.

"Yes; I see he has. I dare say he wants to see the Head," Tom Merry remarked. "Most likely he'll have tea in the Head's house."

"Won't you ask him to tea in the study, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass reproachfully on the captain of the Shell.

"My dear chap, I can't ask him to the kind of tea we could raise for a French penny!" said Tom, laughing.

"Oh, wats! I will gladly lend you a half-quid, if that's all, Tom Mewwy. I weally think you ought to be civil. Wemembah, he is an old man, and he has been ill."

"Well, yes, said Tom uneasily. "He looks jolly tough, though. Still, there's such a thing as respect for age. I—I suppose it's up to me to be a bit attentive. But—but I know he'll misunderstand it. He looks like that."

"A chap should do what is wight, deah boy, and wisk bein' misundahstood."

"Quite right—as you always are, Gussy!" said Lowther cheerily.

"Yaas, I weally think you can wely upon my opinion," said D'Arcy innocently. "In a case of doubt you can't do bettah than take the advice of a fellow of tact and judgment, you know."

"There goes the last wicket!" said Tom. "Eighty for the second innings. Figgy will have all his work cut out to beat that."

The field came off, and Figgins joined the Terrible Three.

"If you'd like to play a substitute in the field, Tommy, you're welcome," he remarked. "Dash it all, old chap, Mr. Brandreth will be going to catch the train soon, and you can't let him go without speaking to him."

Tom Merry was silent.

"I know it's none of my business," said Figgins, a little uncomfortably, "but I'm quite willing for you to put a substitute in the field if you want to stay out the last act. Suit yourself, of course!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Take Figgy's offer, you duffer!" urged Monty Lowther.

"Oh, all right!" said Tom resignedly. "Call young Hammond, and let him field for me. I dare say you're right—anyway, I see that you mean to have your own way. I'll buzz off and be dutiful."

"And don't lose your tempah, deah boy. I saw you lookin' quite watty when you were speakin' to him."

"I felt ratty!" growled Tom.

"Yaas; but it's up to a chap to wespect age, you know. And you had bettah let me lend you that ten bob, old fellow"

"Right!"

Tom Merry slipped the loan into his pocket and left the cricket ground. Hammond of the Fourth went into the field in his place Figgins & Co. started their second innings, and Tom turned his back on the field with great regret; but there was no help for it.

Leaving the cricketers busy, the captain of the Shell entered the School House

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Loses His Temper!

KILDARE of the Sixth met Tom Merry as he came in. He gave the Shell fellow a somewhat quizzical look.

"Looking for your visitor?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom, colouring awkwardly. "Have you seen him?"

"He's had tea in the Head's house," said Kildare, smiling. "If the Head hadn't happened to see him, I fancy he wouldn't have got any tea. Is this what you call hospitality?"

"Well, I—I was booked for the match, you know, and—and I didn't know he was coming until just before dinner," said Tom. "I didn't ask him to come."

"Isn't he the Mr. Brandreth whose will there is so much talk about, through that fellow Goring kidnapping you?"

"Yes, he's the man."

"Well, I must say you've got a peculiar way of looking after the man who was a friend of your father's," said Kildare dryly. "He's in your study now, waiting for you. I pointed it out to him He's only just come from tea with the Head, so he hasn't been waiting long. No fault of yours, I suppose?"

"Well, I'm playing a substitute now."

"You might have done that before," said Kildare. "No business of mine, I suppose; but even the fags are supposed to have some manners in St. Jim's, you know."

Tom's flush deepened as he left the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare evidently regarded him as having failed in civility to his visitor, and he could not explain to him. His feeling of irritation against Mr. Brandreth was becoming keener and keener. What did the man want to persist in coming to see him for, against his will?

Mr. Brandreth was seated in the armchair in the junior's study, looking out of the open window, from which a portion of the cricket ground could be seen. He turned his head from the window as Tom came in.

"You have finished playing?" he asked.

"I've put in a substitute to field," said Tom.

"That was very considerate of you." Mr. Brandreth looked at his watch. "I leave St. Jim's in half an hour to catch my train back to London."

"I—I—well, I'm sorry," said Tom, feeling guilty. "I—I'm very sorry if you think I've been wanting in—in courtesy, sir!"

"I do not think you have—I know you have," said Mr. Brandreth grimly. "And I fancy I can penetrate your motives, young man."

"I don't think my motives need much penetrating, sir. I don't want to be disrespectful, but I told you in my letter how I felt towards you," said Tom bluntly. "I thought it better not to meet you, as I can't forget that you suspected and distrusted me, and insulted me, into the bargain. That's all!"

"Why should I not suspect and distrust someone whom I had never even seen, especially after I had been basely deceived by someone I did trust?" said Mr Brandreth coldly

"If you were my father's friend you might have had a better opinion of his son; that's all, sir."

"I was the friend of Gerald Goring's father, and I had a good opinion of the son, which was quite undeserved, as it turned out," said the millionaire. "Goring is in prison now—where he deserves to be. Listen to me, my boy! I have lived a hard life, and I have learned to know the world only too well. I have learned to distrust appearances, to take no man at his own valuation, and to look for the real motives behind the outward professions. It is not all pleasure to be extremely wealthy. It makes it impossible for a man to place faith in his own kind."

"Then I'd rather be poor," said Tom. "Certainly I'd never suspect and distrust people on principle simply because I had money."

Mr Brandreth smiled slightly.

"When you are my age you may think differently," he said. "When I lay sick almost to death in South Africa, there was not one who cared—who cared for anything but what I might leave. Even my old partner's son was only scheming to benefit under my will by a crime. I have experienced every kind of cunning attempt to get into my favour, because I have a large fortune to leave and cannot live long—from bowing and scraping civility to the pretence of rugged independence, which was still easier for me to see through and despise."

Tom Merry started.

He thought he understood now the ironical expression of the millionaire's face. His conduct towards the South African magnate had been set down under that head—a pretence of rugged independence, as a means of influencing the millionaire in his favour. The blood rushed into his face.

"But such a device may be carried too far," the millionaire added dryly. "It might wear out my patience entirely."

Tom Merry checked the hot words that rose to his lips. Of what use was it to speak to this man, who could never understand?

"You—you believe that is my motive, sir?" he said at last, quietly.

"I believe nothing," he said. "I do not know you. I have never seen you before. I came here to make your acquaintance, and I may say that you have made a very disagreeable impression upon me."

"I'm sorry for that, but perhaps it's all the better," said Tom. "Every word you have spoken to me is a fresh insult. All I ask from you is that you leave my name out of your will."

"Sincerely?"

"Certainly!"

"If I believed that, I should make you my sole heir," said the millionaire calmly. "But it is a little difficult to believe."

"Well," said Tom, half-laughing, "I can only give you my word. If you don't believe me, there's nothing more to be said."

"You are one of the extraordinary persons, then, who have no use for money?" the millionaire said ironically.

Tom Merry paused.

Back into his mind came the remembrance of Dick Brooke, and the bitter need that he had of money to save him and his family from the results of his father's folly.

The millionaire was watching his face closely.

"Well," said Tom, "I could do a lot of good with the money if I had it. If you had—had been different I should have asked you a favour I can't ask it now If you had been what I should have expected from my father's best friend, it would have been possible."

"What would you have asked?"

Tom hesitated.

"You can tell me that, at least," said

Mr. Brandreth. "What is it you want?"

"I want nothing. But—but to help a chap—a friend of mine—out of a fix," said Tom, flushing again. "I'd give a great deal to be able to help old Brooke. It wouldn't be necessary to give any money—he wouldn't take it—but a thousand pounds would have to lie idle for some years—at a low interest——" He broke off. A bitter sneer had gathered upon the hard, bronze face.

"A thousand pounds!" said Mr. Brandreth.

Tom stood dumb. He could have bitten out his tongue for his folly in speaking. For the moment, in his friendly concern for Brooke, he had forgotten. But the expression on Mr. Brandreth's face recalled him to himself.

"A thousand pounds—for a friend, of course," said the millionaire ironically. "Tom, you are not moderate. So that is the outcome of it all. You do not want the possibly distant advantage of being mentioned in my will, but——"

Tom clenched his hands hard.

"I was a fool to speak," he said; "an utter fool! I might have known you'd misunderstand."

"I don't think I've misunderstood."

"Very well," said Tom, his face white now with anger. "You think I've been humbugging you, and that I've come for what I really wanted—money. Well, you can think so if you choose—I shan't try to explain. Keep your money, for it wasn't for myself I was going to ask you. But, of course, you won't believe that."

"Tell me all the circumstances——"

"I shall tell you nothing. I wish you good-afternoon," said Tom.

And he strode out of the study, so enraged that he could not trust himself to say anything further.

"Tom!"

He heard Mr. Brandreth's voice, much softer in tone now, but he did not turn back. He strode on savagely, and whether the millionaire spoke again or not, he did not know.

Ten minutes later, Mr. Brandreth was seen crossing towards the gates, and he went alone. Some of the fellows looked at him, but his face told them nothing—it was inscrutable.

CHAPTER 8.
Startling News!

TOM MERRY did not return to the cricket ground. He was feeling angry and disturbed, and he did not want to be asked questions.

The match was still going on; and Tom Merry walked to and fro, frowning, under the elms, till Mr. Brandreth was gone, and then he went to his study. By that time his brow was clearing, and at last his face broke into a smile. He laughed.

"What an ass I was to lose my temper!" he murmured. "I suppose the old johnny's built that way and he can't help it. He must have had crowds of cads after his rotten money, and he's put me down as one of them. Blessed if I know what the pater ever saw in him to chum up with him! He must have been a lot different when he was a kid, I should think."

His anger having evaporated, he set about preparing tea in the study, ready for Manners and Lowther when they came in after the match. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's loan came in very useful, but not for the purpose of entertaining Mr. Brandreth.

The fire was burning brightly in the study, the table was laid, and there was a fragrant odour of fresh toast, when Manners and Lowther came in at last. The kettle was singing on the fire, and the two Shell fellows, hungry enough after the match, looked round the study with keen appreciation.

"Well, this is all right," said Lowther. "Old johnny gone?"

"Yes; long ago."

"What size tip?"

"None."

"My hat! And he's a millionaire!"

"We didn't part on good terms," said Tom. "Don't talk about it. I'm fed-up on that subject—right up to the chin."

"Oh, Tommy!" sighed Lowther. "You'll never be a success in the world, Tommy, my son. When you're a little older you'll understand the value of a millionaire."

"Rats!"

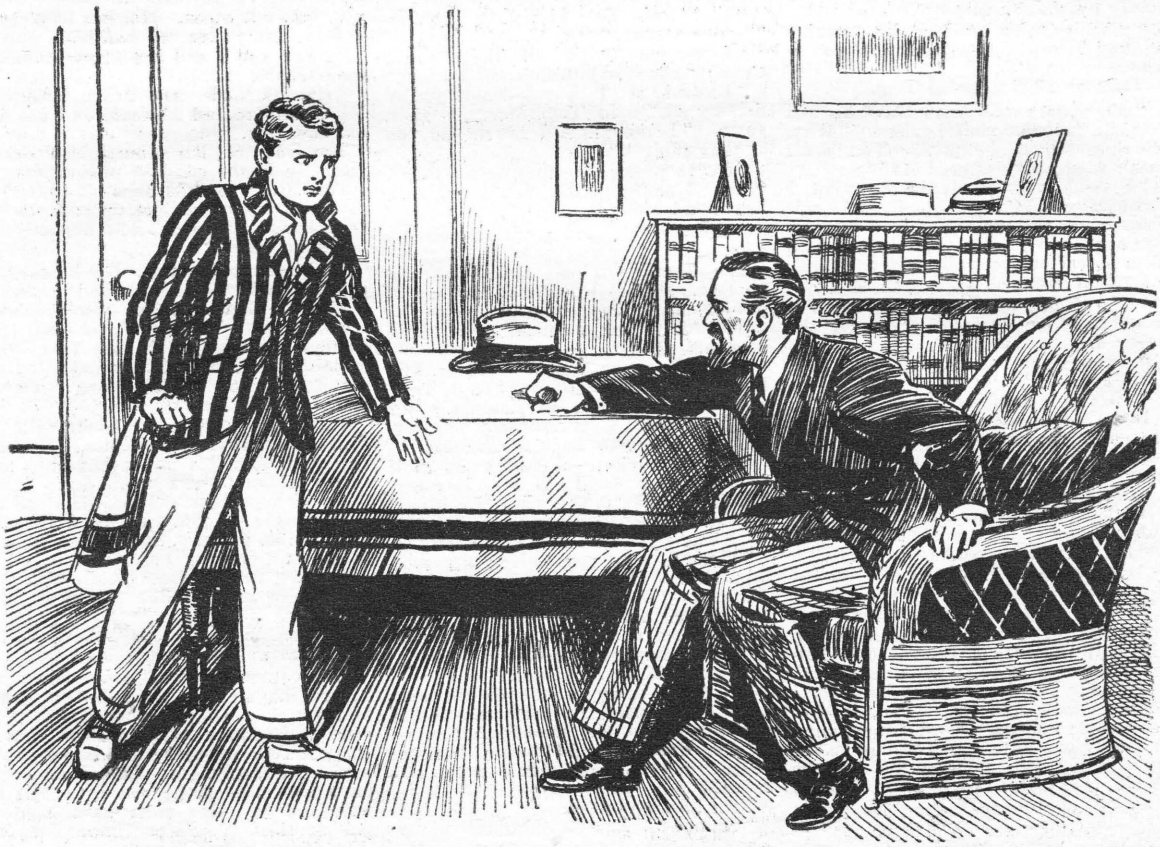
"You haven't been rowing with him, surely?" said Manners.

"Not exactly; but—but—well, it's all over, anyway. He won't come here to see me again," said Tom. "I don't suppose I shall ever hear from him again, and I'm sure I don't want to. It's ended."

"Tommy, you are an ass!"

"And a frabjous one," said Lowther.

"Admitted, if you like," said Tom. "Now let's have tea, and for goodness' sake let's hear no more of him and his beastly money. How did the match go?"



"Very well," said Tom Merry, his face white with anger as he faced the South African millionaire. "You think I've been humbugging you, and that I want your money. Keep your money! I wish you good-afternoon!"

"Beat them, of course," said Lowther. "They didn't get within twenty runs of our total."

"Oh, good!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked into the study.

"Hallo! Your fwiend gone, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes; but thanks for your loan, all the same, Gussy!" said Tom, laughing. "It's come in jolly useful."

"You are vewy welcome, deah boy. I twust you have tweated Mr. Bwandweth with pwopah wespect," said D'Arcy anxiously.

"Rats!"

"I was goin' to give you some good advice——"

"Keep it for another time, old man. I'll mention it when I want it," said Tom. "Come in and have tea."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I'm goin' to have tea in Study No. 6," he said. "I just looked in to see if there was anythin' I could do to help in entahtainin' your fwiend. I am sowwy he is gone."

And Arthur Augustus departed, with a serious shake of the head. He was evidently suffering from an inward fear that Tom Merry had failed in upholding the reputation of the School House for hospitality.

Tom Merry was more than tired of the subject of Mr. Brandreth and his money, but he was not allowed to hear the end of it so soon. Quite a number of fellows wanted to know how the interview with the South African millionaire had "gone," and Tom's answers grew shorter and shorter to every inquiry. Later in the evening, Levison of the Fourth tackled him on the subject, and found him extremely crusty by that time.

"When's your millionaire coming again, Merry?" Levison wanted to know.

"Not at all!" growled Tom.

"Oh, come, we all know about his will in your favour," said Levison. "Why, it's been in the papers. You don't mean to say he's altered it?"

"I think very likely he has, but I don't know anything about it, and don't want to know anything about it, and don't want to jaw on the subject," said Tom Merry categorically.

Levison laughed.

"You didn't seem to be paying him much attention while he was here," he pursued.

"I didn't pay him any."

"Why not?"

"That's my business."

But Levison was not to be rebuffed. He was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery, if it could be done by asking questions.

"Oh, don't get ratty!" he urged. "I wish I had a chance of cultivating a giddy millionaire, that's all. I wouldn't let him slide."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," agreed Tom, with a sniff.

"Well, you wouldn't, for that matter," said Levison reflectively. "Nobody would. If you haven't buttered him up there must be a reason, and I jolly well know the reason. These blessed South African millionaires are here to-day and gone to-morrow—rolling in money one day, and stony broke the next. I suppose you found out that he hasn't really got very much money, after all. Is that it?"

Lowther burst into a chuckle. It was really the only reasonable reason that Levison was likely to discover for Tom Merry's line of conduct.

"You can take it as that if you like," said Tom Merry wearily. "Go and eat coke!"

"I suppose that's it," said Levison, satisfied with his solution of the problem. "But how did you find out that he wasn't rich, after all?"

"Fathead!"

"But you must have found out somehow," said Levison. "You are a lot deeper than fellows have supposed, Tom Merry. It was jolly keen of you to find out that the old johnny wasn't worth buttering up, though how you did it——"

"Will you shut up?" asked Tom Merry, and he looked so exasperated that Levison walked away; but he confided his solution of the mystery to everybody who would listen to him, and he found many believers.

But everything comes to an end, and the next day the subject of Mr. Brandreth and his millions was dropped, much to Tom Merry's relief. He hoped sincerely that he had heard the end of it. But the subject was destined to be revived before the week was out.

On Saturday afternoon the St. Jim's junior team were visiting Rylcombe Grammar School to play Gordon Gay & Co., and Tom Merry and his chums were waiting for the motor-coach which was to convey them over, when Cutts stopped to speak to them. There was an unpleasant sneer on Cutts' hard face.

The cad of the Fifth had not forgotten the happening in Lefevre's study. Cutts had a paper in his hand, in which he had probably been consulting the racing columns. But he had seen some other news as well.

"So you knew all along, did you?" he said.

"Eh?" said Tom Merry, in surprise. "Is this a conundrum, Cutts?"

"I say you knew all along," said Cutts; "about old Brandreth, I mean."

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at," said Tom Merry, with a yawn. "I thought I'd heard the end of that subject."

"I was puzzled at first," said Cutts. "Now I understand. You must have known all along."

And he walked away, with a sneering grin.

The Terrible Three looked at one another. What Cutts' remarks might possibly mean they could not guess.

"Off his rocker, I should think," said Manners at last.

"Can there be anything about Mr. Brandreth in the paper?" said Tom, wrinkling his brows in thought. "I don't see that it concerns me, anyway. Perhaps he's gone back to Africa."

"Here's Levison—and he looks as if he has news," said Monty Lowther. "Well, what is it this time, Levison?"

Levison laughed disagreeably.

"I was right, you see," he remarked.

"Hallo! Are you setting up as a conundrum merchant, too?" asked Manners. "Will you explain what you are driving at?"

"I've seen it in Cutts' paper."

"What have you seen?"

"Hasn't Merry told you?"

"I don't know what's in the silly paper!" growled Tom Merry. "Is it anything about Mr. Brandreth?"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Levison. "Don't tell me you didn't know he's ruined?"

Tom Merry started.

"Ruined! Mr. Brandreth?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. And it's come out that his affairs have been shaky for a long time. He had a heap of money invested in a mine that petered out," said Levison. "He'll be able to pay twenty shillings in the pound, but he'll be left a beggar. After swanking as a millionaire, he's got nothing—nothing at all.

"He must have known it a long time ago himself. Things like that don't come suddenly. And now we shall all know why you didn't suck up to him, Tom Merry. You knew he was a spoofer. You must have known jolly well that he hadn't a quid to his name. That's why you were so jolly independent towards him. But what beats me is, how did you know? How did you find out how he was fixed?"

And Levison looked intensely curious.

Tom Merry hardly heard him.

Ruined! The millionaire! The great wealth which had warped the man's nature, which had made it impossible for him to trust or like his fellow-men, which had led him to read duplicity everywhere, to doubt the frankest honesty—that wealth which he had bought so dearly was gone, vanished like a dream, and the man was left a beggar in his old age!

The blow must have been as terrible as it was sudden, if it was true! And it must be true.

"The poor old chap!" said Tom Merry. "This is rotten! But there may be something left. He could hardly lose all the money, and have nothing!"

"Of course, you didn't know it was coming!" said Levison.

"Of course I didn't!" said Tom savagely. "I hadn't the faintest idea of it, you miserable cad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Levison yelled with laughter. "That's too rich! You really expect anybody to believe that you didn't know it. Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry clenched his fists.

"I tell you I did not know it, Levison. That's enough!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Do draw it mild! Yaroooh!" roared Levison, as Tom hit out savagely.

The cad of the Fourth sat down violently in the quad.

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs.

"Now, you rotter, get up and put up your hands. I don't allow anybody to doubt my word."

Levison scrambled up. But he did not put up his hands. He backed away.

"You'll find that the whole school doubts your giddy word, if you tell them a thundering lie like that!" he exclaimed, and then he darted away as the Shell fellow made an angry movement towards him.

Tom Merry turned back with a flushed face towards his chums. It was borne in upon his mind that only too many of the fellows would take Levison's view of the matter. His disregard of the millionaire, his contempt for the man's money, had been regarded as curious enough, only a few days before the news became public that the millionaire was no millionaire at all, but a pauper.

"I suppose you chaps believe me?" said Tom awkwardly.

"Of course we do," said Lowther. "Don't be an ass! But—but it does look queer. Only two or three days after he was here this comes out. Levison was right in saying that things don't happen suddenly. Mr Brandreth must have known when he was here that it was coming. He must have been a pauper then, if he's one now. But, of course, you didn't know."

"We know you didn't know, Tom," said Manners. "We know you well enough to be sure that if you'd known

the poor old chap was really on the rocks, you'd have been kinder to him."

"I jolly well would!" said Tom Merry feelingly. "He didn't drop a single word to hint about his real position. Of course, I didn't know anything about his position. I simply took it for granted that he was wealthy. So did everybody. If he'd told me that, it would have made a difference, of course. I—I feel that I acted rottenly, now. It was his beastly money, and I was a bit too sensitive about that rot he put in his will. I dare say he meant well all the time. I wish I'd been a bit more decent to him."

"He's not likely to come here again, or you could tell him that," said Manners thoughtfully. "Well, it can't be helped. It would have been a bit more straightforward of him to have told you. I can't help thinking that. Well, what do you want, Mellish?"

There was an eager expression on Mellish's face as he came up. He was evidently devoured with curiosity.

"You've heard the news, I see," he remarked. "I say, Merry, do you mind telling us how you knew that Brandreth was going on the rocks?"

"I didn't know!"

"But the way you treated him. That shows that you knew, doesn't it?" said Mellish, with a stare.

"Extraordinary as it may seem to you, Mellish, it doesn't. If I'd known he was a ruined man I should have done my best to be decent to him."

"Well, you can tell that to the Marines!" said Mellish, with a sniff. "Why, of course you knew. Here, keep your paws off!" And Mellish retreated hastily.

"Here's the coach," said Lowther. And the chums of the Shell walked out into the road.

Gore tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as he was about to get into the coach.

"I say, Merry, how did you know about old Brandreth's position before the reporters got hold of it?" he asked. "The paper says it came as a sudden surprise to everybody on Friday. You knew on Wednesday. How——"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Well, you might tell a fellow how you knew!"

"I didn't know!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Gore, in disgust.

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose. He climbed into the coach without another word. The coach was about to start when Thompson of the Shell, a New House fellow, came running up, evidently for information. The story of Mr. Brandreth's ruin was all over the school now, and the fellows were greatly excited about it.

"I say, Tom Merry," panted Thompson, "how did you know——"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Tom Merry.

"But, I say, you knew—— Well, a fellow might answer a civil question," said Thompson in an injured tone, as Tom Merry turned his back on him and the coach started.

CHAPTER 9.
Called Away!

TOM MERRY hardly spoke a word as the coach rolled away down the lane towards Rylcombe.

His face was clouded. He was feeling disturbed and troubled.

The news had come as a great shock to him. Even if he had not known Mr. Brandreth he would have felt sorry to hear of a man who had been wealthy being reduced to poverty at so advanced a time of life that it was impossible for him to think of making his way upward again. But he did know him, and the man had been his father's chum, his school-fellow and lifelong friend, and Tom had been anything but kind to him on the only occasion he had met him.

It weighed upon the junior's conscience now. He felt that he ought to have remembered that it was his father's friend he was dealing with, and ought to have had more patience with his foibles, even with his exasperating distrust and suspicion. He felt that he had been wanting in the respect due to age, if nothing else.

And the man had really been in the wretched position all the time, a pauper whose poverty had not been revealed, instead of the millionaire he had been considered. Would Brandreth himself believe that Tom had had an inkling of the truth from some source or other, and that thence came his independence? It was only too probable that he would think so.

At all events, it was certain that a great many of the St. Jim's fellows would think so. They would think that Tom Merry had treated him with disdain because he knew that he had nothing to expect from him.

Tom's cheeks burned at the thought.

Had he known, had he only suspected, how differently he would have acted on that Wednesday afternoon!

But he had not known, he had not suspected, and it was too late to think of it now. The sympathy and kindness from the son of his old chum might have comforted the unhappy man to some extent in his ruin. But it was too late now. If only the man had told him the truth! But he had not dropped a single hint.

The hard, bronze face with its iron, sceptical expression rose before Tom

(*Continued on the next page.*)

Merry's mind. He wondered how the hard old man was looking now that he was known as a ruined man, probably besieged by creditors, overwhelmed by the wreck of his fortune.

He would now know the true from the false friends, if he had never known before. There was no doubt about that. Such a test as this would not fail to distinguish them. Tom Merry felt miserably that he wished the opportunity would come again, that he would have a chance of showing some sort of friendship to his father's old friend.

The motor-coach arrived at the Grammar School, and Gordon Gay greeted the St. Jim's team. Tom Merry was not feeling in much of a humour for the game. Somehow or other the thought of George Brandreth persisted in obtruding itself upon his mind. He could not help thinking of the lonely old man, face to face with his ruin, probably abandoned in his misfortune by those whom his wealth had attracted to him.

It had been impossible for Tom to avoid feeling "rusty" with the South African magnate. That provision in his will, to which so much publicity had been given, Tom could not help regarding simply as an insult.

He had not asked to be the old man's heir; he had hardly known of his existence. And that ridiculous provision had led to Gerald Goring's plot—to his unscrupulous attempt, which had very nearly succeeded, to get Tom disgraced and expelled from St. Jim's. And the exposure of that plot had made the whole affair widely public, and Tom's humiliation had been very keen.

He had felt that he could not forgive or forget it. But now that the old man was overwhelmed with misfortune he both forgave and forgot it—which was very much like Tom Merry.

But he tried to drive the matter from his mind now and devote himself to the Grammar School match.

Gordon Gay & Co. were in great form, and the St. Jim's team had to do their best. Tom Merry's eleven was in great form, too—a fine team, selected from the best junior players in both Houses. But Tom was not at his best now. His kind heart was heavy with the news he had so lately received.

St. Jim's batted first, and Tom sent in Talbot and Kangaroo to open the innings. The two bats made a good stand against the Grammarian bowling. A good number of St. Jim's fellows were arriving, on bikes or on foot, to see the match, and they mingled with the crowd of Grammarians round the field. There were loud cheers for Talbot's hard hitting, which gave Gordon Gay and his men plenty of leather-hunting.

Tom Merry stood outside the pavilion with the rest of the side. It was a quarter of an hour before Kangaroo was caught out, and then Figgins went in in his place.

Figgins was facing the bowling from Wootton major of the Grammar School, and making hay of it, when a cyclist jumped down in the gateway, and wheeled his bike in. It was Brooke, the day-boy at St. Jim's. He left his machine—or, rather, Tom Merry's machine which he had borrowed—near the gates, and came quickly towards the cricket ground.

"Hallo, Brooke!" said Tom, giving him a smile of welcome. "I'm glad to see you here. So you've found time to come and see the match?"

Dick Brooke shook his head. He was feeling in his pocket.

"No; I haven't come to see the match," he replied. "I stayed on at St. Jim's for my extra lesson with Mr. Lathom, and, just as I was coming out, a telegram came for you, so I thought I'd buzz over with it before I went home, as it might be important. I borrowed your bike. You don't mind?"

Tom laughed.

"I am much obliged," he said.

"I'll get back home from here," said Brooke. "One of you fellows won't mind riding the bike back?"

"That's all right," said Tom, taking the telegram Brooke handed to him. "Leave it there, old chap. Can't you stay to see the match?"

"Well, I'll watch for a bit, anyway," said Brooke. "How jolly well Figgy is batting!"

"Yes; isn't he?" said Redfern enthusiastically. "Regular corker, old Figgy! I say, Merry, don't say there's any bad news in that blessed telegram! You're jolly well not going to miss your innings, you know!"

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "That would be too wotten. Howevah, I should twy to make up for it in my innings."

"You might try," snorted Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Hallo!" said Monty, turning quickly towards Tom Merry. "Anything wrong?"

Tom Merry's face was very grave.

He handed Lowther the telegram without a word. Lowther, looking rather worried, read it.

He guessed that something was wrong, and that Tom would be called away—just when he was wanted most specially to bat against the Grammarians.

The telegram was from George Brandreth. Lowther glanced at his name at the end first. He had guessed it, somehow. And the telegram read:

"Doubtless you have heard the news that I am a ruined man. I wish to see you before leaving England. Shall reach Rylcombe Station at three. —BRANDRETH."

"At three!" said Monty Lowther, looking at his watch. "And it's twenty to three now. Came jolly near missing you, anyway. We might have been playing away, too far off for this wire to be brought to you."

"I'm glad I got it," said Tom.

"But, I—I say, you can't go!" said Manners uneasily. "It means missing the match, Tom, and you know how much you're wanted."

Tom Merry looked troubled.

"I know, Manners, old man. But I must go. If he wants to see me, I can't disappoint him, in the circumstances."

"Well, I suppose you can't," admitted Manners. "If he doesn't stay long, you might get back in time to bat. You could be the last man in."

"Put me down as last man, anyway, and I'll try," said Tom. "If I don't get back, play young Hammond in my place. He's a good bat."

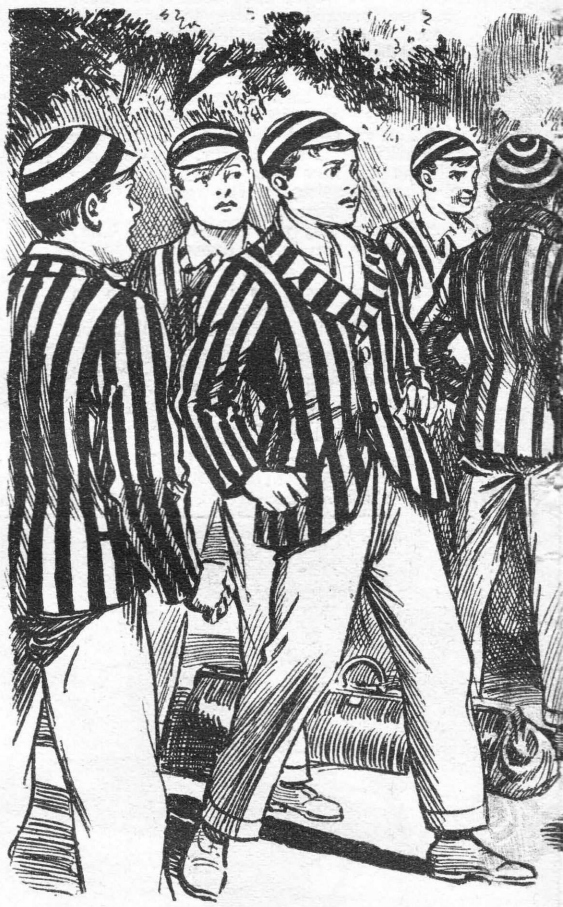
"It may mean getting licked, all the same," groaned Lowther.

"Can't be helped, old chap. You wouldn't have me disappoint him, would you, after what's happened to him?"

"Well, no."

"Bad news?" asked Brooke, turning round from watching the game.

"Yes; in a way," said Tom. "I've got to cut the match. But I'm jolly glad you brought the telegram over, Brooke. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Glad the bike's here, too.



"Don't tell me you didn't know Mr. Brandreth was ru Brandreth!" he exclaimed. "Yes," went on the cad of t up to him,

Can't be helped, you chaps. Hammond will do very well if I don't get back in time to bat. I'll change, and clear off on the bike."

And Tom Merry ran into the pavilion.

He reappeared in five or six minutes, and hurried away to the gates. He wheeled the bicycle out, and disappeared.

The St. Jim's cricketers looked glum enough. The Grammarian match was one of the hardest they had to play, and they wanted their skipper. But, as Tom had said, it could not be helped. He could not act to-day as he had acted on Wednesday, after what had happened to the millionaire. Then he had been dealing with a man whom he believed to be rolling in

money; now he was dealing with a man overwhelmed with misfortune, and plunged into poverty, and that made all the difference to Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell scorched away on his bike, giving no further thought to the cricket match. He was only anxious now to get to the station before Mr. Brandreth's train arrived. He did not want George Brandreth to arrive first, and find that he was not there. He scorched along the lane and rode hard up the village street; but as he came in sight of the station he heard the train there, and knew that Mr. Brandreth must have arrived.

He jumped off the machine, threw it against the station wall, and ran in breathlessly.

)," said Levison. Tom Merry started. "Ruined! Mr. chool House, "and now we all know why you didn't suck n Merry!"

Mr. Brandreth was standing in the station vestibule; he had just come off the platform. He was looking about him, evidently to ascertain whether anyone was waiting for him.

"I am here, sir!" Tom Merry panted.

Mr. Brandreth turned quickly towards him. A curious expression came over his bronze face as he saw the breathless junior.

"You had my telegram?"

"Yes."

"And you have come—a little late, eh?"

"We were playing away," said Tom. "A chap brought your telegram over to the Grammar School only twenty minutes ago, and I had to change."

"You were playing?"

"I hadn't gone in to bat, as it happened."

Mr. Brandreth looked very grave.

"Is it an important match, my boy?"

"Well, it's rather important to us, sir—one of our toughest fixtures. But that doesn't matter now."

"You have given it up to come here?"

"Yes."

"That is somewhat of a change—after last Wednesday," Mr. Brandreth remarked.

Tom flushed.

"It's different now," he said.

"In what way?"

"I—I mean, I—I've heard the news," said Tom. "It's in the papers, and some of the fellows have seen it. Your telegram would have told me, anyway. Of course, I came, in the circumstances."

"I don't see why 'of course,'" said Mr. Brandreth. "Since the news of my failure has been made public, I have not found people anxious to go out of their way to oblige me."

"Well, anyway, that's how I look at it," said Tom. "Never mind the cricket match. I can give that a miss all right. I'm jolly glad that I had your wire! It might not have come on to me at the Grammar School, only Brooke's such a jolly decent chap he brought it over. Then you'd have thought that I wouldn't come, I suppose?"

"I should have gone on to St. Jim's to ascertain if you had not been here," said Mr. Brandreth.

"Good! Then you'd have found that we were playing away. Still, I'm glad Brooke brought it over—and I got here in time!" said Tom. "You say you are leaving England, sir?"

"Yes. I——" Mr. Brandreth paused and glanced round. The place was deserted, save for themselves; but the South African lowered his voice. "I—I have something to say to you about that. I am in trouble."

"Yes, I know what's happened, sir, and I'm awfully sorry!"

"You do not know all, my boy. Come, let us get somewhere where we can talk—if you are sure you would not wish to return to your game."

"Never mind that," said Tom. "Come to the bunshop, sir, and have some tea after your journey. It's just down the street."

Mr. Brandreth smiled.

"Thank you! I won't come to the bunshop," he said. "Let us walk out of the village, Tom."

"Very well, sir. I'll put my bike into Murphy's as I go by—it can stay there."

Mr. Brandreth nodded, and they left the station, Tom walking beside the South African and wheeling his machine. The bicycle was pushed into Mrs. Murphy's shop to be called for, and then the two walked out of the village.

Mr. Brandreth seemed to be plunged into deep thought, and Tom Merry was thinking, too. He could not help wondering what the old man had to say to him. They stopped at the stile in the lane, and Mr. Brandreth leaned on it, and slowly and methodically lit a cigar.

Tom Merry stood waiting. There was a silence for some minutes.

Mr. Brandreth broke it suddenly.

"You have heard that I am a ruined man, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom. "I can't say how sorry I am! And—and I want to apologise for the way I acted last Wednesday, sir, when you came down to the school. I suppose I was rather a cad, but I was ratty about—about the way you look at things. But I see now I was wrong, and I am sorry!"

Mr. Brandreth looked at him keenly.

"And—and I hope you don't think I knew anything about your affair," Tom Merry went on awkwardly. "I hadn't the faintest idea things were turning out like this."

"I know that, Tom."

"You believe that I didn't know, sir?"

"I know you could not have known."

Tom drew a deep breath of relief.

"I'm glad of that, sir, at least. A lot of the fellows think I knew. They were surprised that I didn't make a great fuss about you, you being a millionaire, sir—as we all thought then—and they were surprised at my being rusty with you. Now this has come out they've jumped at the conclusion that I knew all along—I mean, some of them think so, not my own pals, of course; they know me better."

"I am sorry. It places you in a bad light, then, with some of your schoolfellows?"

"Oh, they can go and eat coke!" said Tom carelessly. "My own pals know me better, and that's all I care about!"

"I did not think about that," said Mr. Brandreth musingly.

Tom smiled.

"Well, you couldn't help it, sir. I suppose you wouldn't have lost your money if you could have helped it."

Mr. Brandreth did not reply to that remark. There was another long silence. It was Tom Merry who broke it this time.

"You had something to say to me, Mr. Brandreth—something important?"

"Yes, Tom." The millionaire started from a deep reverie. "Tom, you know I was your father's old friend, and you know that my intentions towards you were kind, though my method of expressing them seems to have irritated you. I am not surprised at that. I should have known Captain Merry's son better, though I had never seen him. But what if I have come here to ask something of you, Tom?"

"Of me, sir?" said Tom, in surprise.

"Yes—to ask you to help me."

"My hat!"

"What would your answer be, Tom?"

"That I'd do anything I could, of course, sir," said Tom, in wonder. "I hope you haven't any doubt about that."

"Yet last Wednesday, only a few days ago, you seemed to dislike me?"

"It's different now, sir," said Tom uneasily. "Now you can't imagine that I want anything from you—now your money's gone."

"Quite so. But supposing I asked a great deal of you, would you remember that I am your father's old friend, and help me?"

"Certainly. What can I do, sir?"

"Suppose I tell you"—Mr. Brandreth's voice was very low—"that I have not only lost my fortune, but that I am in danger of losing my liberty——"

"Your liberty!" stammered Tom, utterly taken aback.

"That my creditors are looking for me, and that, unless I escape them and get out of England quietly, I shall be arrested——"

"Great Scott!"

"Because I cannot meet my liabilities——" said Mr Brandreth.

"Oh, sir!"

"And that I want you to help me—to find me some place where I can remain unknown for a couple of days, until all is ready for me to escape."

There was a long silence again.

CHAPTER 10.

Fatty Wynn Saves the Game!

MR. BRANDRETH'S eyes were fixed upon the junior's face with a penetrating look.

Tom's face expressed the thoughts that were in his mind—amazement, alarm, compassion. He had never suspected that it could come to this. Then the one-time millionaire was not only a beggar but a fugitive. Tom Merry's heart melted with pity at the thought.

"Well, what do you say, Tom?" asked Mr. Brandreth, at last.

"You don't mean to say—the police?" asked Tom, in a hushed voice. "You—you haven't done anything!"

The dark, bronzed face broke into a smile.

"No; it's not that, Tom. You need not be afraid that you have to deal with a thief or a swindler. It is simply a case of debt—the failure of a company which had every prospect of success—a misfortune that might happen to anyone. But I am responsible, as it happens, and my creditors will show me no mercy. If I can lie low for a couple of days, I can leave the country secretly. And, once more in South Africa, I can make terms—I shall be safe there. Will you help me?"

"Yes, I will," said Tom. "Excuse me for having asked that, sir. I know you're all right, and it's only bad luck. Are you hard up, sir?"

"Have you not heard that I am a beggar?"

"My hat! I—I didn't think you were quite stony, sir!" said Tom, in commiseration. "It must be an awful change. Of course, a kid in the Shell doesn't have very much money, as a rule." Tom added, rather ruefully. "All the same, on an occasion like this, I'll try every blessed wheeze to raise some tin. I'll borrow all I can from the fellows—and I've got a lot of things I can sell, too. You can depend on me, sir, to raise every penny I can. I'm jolly glad to do it for my pater's pal, too. But the first thing is somewhere for you to stay, where you won't be spotted. Isn't that it?"

"That's it," said Mr. Brandreth, with a smile. His iron face had grown strangely softer as he watched the eager junior.

Tom Merry wrinkled his boyish brows in thought.

"You can't rough it, of course," he said. "No good your thinking of sticking in a hut in the wood. That's a safe place, but you couldn't stand that. You will have to take a room in some cottage about here. I must think of some lonely place—one of the cottages on the Wayland Moor, perhaps. My hat! There's Brooke's place."

GETTING HIS MAN!

The Rugby player catches the last post!

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Carpenter, 31, Brampton Avenue, Belvedere, Kent.

"Who is Brooke?"

"He's a day-boy at St. Jim's," Tom Merry explained. "A ripping good sort. He's the chap who brought your telegram over to me. They used to be rich, but his pater had had bad luck, and they've only got the old house left—a rambling, half-ruined old place on the moor. Why, a giddy regiment could hide there. Brooke would do it for me if I asked him. He could put you in one of the rooms in the ruined wing without a soul being the wiser, and get your meals to you there. Brooke really runs the show there, you know. He works for his living—he's a splendid chap. And—and it will be safe enough till next week. Poor old Brooke!"

"Why till next week?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Well, next week I'm afraid it will be all up with Brooke's place—he's had bad luck. He told me in confidence, so I can't tell you about it. Only Brooke's the chap I wanted to help when I spoke to you about that thousand quid, sir. Brooke will put you up for a couple of days, if I ask him, sir."

"But his people——"

"There's his parents and his sister," said Tom thoughtfully. "They're ripping people! But, in the circs, it wouldn't do to speak to them. Brooke can simply let you into the unused part of the house. It's a rambling old place, with many rooms half in ruins that are never used. You'd be a bit lonely, but it would be quite safe."

"And Brooke would do this—for you?"

"I think so, sir. He's a good sort, and we're great pals. I'll ask him. He's at the Grammar School now, watching the match, and he'll come this way home. And he won't be long, either, as he's got to get back to work. Do you like the idea, sir?"

"I place myself in your hands, Tom."

"Then I'll speak to Brooke about it."

Tom Merry looked down the lane towards the turning that led to the Grammar School.

It was only a few minutes before Dick Brooke came in sight, striding quickly along the lane.

"I'll go and meet him, and explain it to him, sir," said Tom.

"Very good."

Tom hurried away up the lane, the millionaire looking after him with a very strange expression on his face.

"Hallo!" said Brooke cheerily, as Tom Merry met him in the lane. "Seen your friend?"

"Yes," said Tom; "and I want to ask a big favour of you, Brooke." He hurriedly explained the situation, Brooke listening in wonder. "You see, the poor old chap's right down on his luck, and he's got to lie low for a couple of days before he can clear off. Of course, he's done nothing wrong—you understand that. It's just bad luck!"

"I understand," said Brooke.

"If you could shove him into some corner of the old house for a couple of days," said Tom anxiously. "Do you think you could do it?"

Brooke nodded.

"I'd do more than that for you, Tom—you've been a good pal to me. It will be quite easy. Nobody ever goes into the ruined wing, and he can put up there quite easily. I'll shove a few things in. Of course, he'll have to rough it."

"Oh, yes; that's understood. Come and tell him so," said Tom.

"Right-ho!"

They joined Mr. Brandreth in the lane. Five minutes later, Brooke and the South African magnate were gone, and Tom Merry was hastening back towards the Grammar School. He was not wanted for the present; and there was no reason why he should not finish the cricket match—if there was yet time. Brooke would do all that could be done for Mr. Brandreth.

Tom Merry ran all the way to the Grammar School, and arrived breathless on the cricket ground. Jack Blake and Hammond were at the wicket; the St. Jim's innings was not finished yet, but it was just on the finish."

"Last man's in," said Monty Lowther dolefully. "Hammond's been at the wicket only five minutes, Tommy."

"Yaas, wathah—and you're too late, old chap," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"Well, it can't be helped. How's the score?"

"Eighty—and there goes Hammond's wicket."

St. Jim's were all down for eighty. It was a single innings match. The hopes of winning on the part of the St. Jim's fellows sank down to zero.

"Never mind," said Figgins, "we'll beat 'em in the bowling. Fatty, old man, you're to give us the hat-trick, do you hear? If you do, we'll feed you up to the chin with jam tarts when we get back to St. Jim's."

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"What-ho!" he said emphatically.

St. Jim's went on to field, and the Grammarian innings opened with twelve runs for Gordon Gay in the first over. The second over brought the score up to twenty. The Saints looked decidedly blue, and the Grammarians were grinning cheerfully. They wanted only eighty-one to win, and they fully expected to get them with a half a dozen wickets to spare.

But they had reckoned without Fatty Wynn. The fat Fourth Former received beseeching looks from the field as he went on to bowl the third over. Fatty Wynn was a wonderful bowler when he was at his best, and he soon showed that he was at his best now. He had found his length. Gordon Gay received the ball, and met with a surprise. There was a crash of a falling wicket.

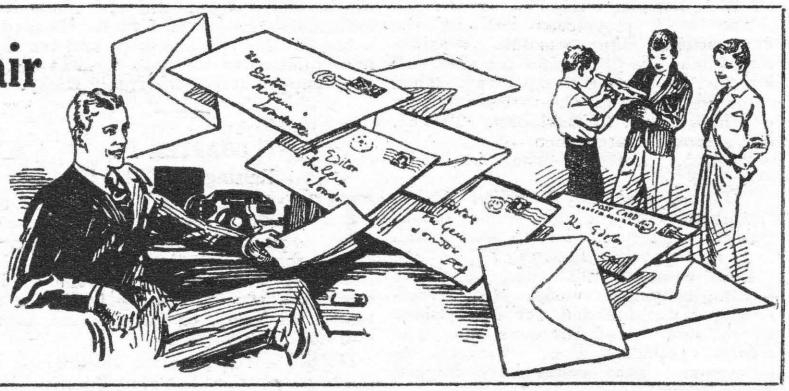
"How's that?" roared Figgins, in huge delight.

"Bai Jove! Out!"

(*Continued on page* 18.)

The Editor's Chair

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



HALLO, chums! I didn't have the opportunity of wishing you a happy Whitsun, as I couldn't get in a word in the Coronation number, but I hope you all had a jolly good time.

The office-boy decided to go hiking for the first time on Whit Monday, and on Tuesday he didn't put in an appearance at the office. This morning, however, he turned up walking rather lame. I asked what was the matter.

"Blisters!" he replied laconically.

Apparently he had overdone the mileage on the outward journey, and owing to his blistered feet had to take a train home. The office-boy's one consolation was that he had a copy of the GEM with him. He said he thoroughly enjoyed the final story of the "Tom Merry's double" series, in spite of suffering from sore feet

I gave him a current number of the GEM, and told him to go home and rest his feet. He skipped out of the office fast enough then!

But office-boys and sore feet apart, I have just been preparing the next number of the old paper, and I'm sure all of you are going to like the programme immensely. First we have:

"THE MYSTERY OF LEVISON!"

As readers know, Ernest Levison has shown signs of improvement in his behaviour, and the chums of St. Jim's have looked on him in a more favourable manner. But in next Wednesday's story mysterious things connected with Levison start to happen. Someone very much like him is spotted by Kildare leaving the Green Man. Kildare is convinced that it's Levison, yet the latter produces a convincing alibi. He declares that he must have a double, like Tom Merry. It seems impossible that such a thing could happen twice near St. Jim's. But when the matter is sifted to the bottom, Tom Merry & Co. are compelled to admit that it must be so.

Can it be true that Levison has a double, or is it another of his deep schemes? Martin Clifford supplies the answer to this problem in his gripping yarn, which he has written in his usual clever and convincing style.

"THE PERIL OF BLACK PIKE!"

As readers have read in this number, Bulstrode & Co. have set out to climb to the top of the mountain, Black Pike. It is a dangerous place to be caught when it rains, owing to the thick mist which comes with the rain. The Greyfriars juniors, after an exhausting climb, are well over half-way when rain does come—a terrific downpour, followed by a mist which "blankets" everything outside a foot radius. So it is that the Removites are stranded on the dreaded Black Pike, which is split by deep gullies and rifts, and a dangerous mountain to descend in a thick mist!

They are in a perilous position—and I will leave Frank Richards to tell you, in his most thrilling style, what happens to the adventurous Bulstrode & Co.

Make doubly sure, chums, that you don't miss this grand number. Take my word for it, you'll enjoy yourselves next Wednesday.

Now for my usual

REPLIES TO READERS.

My mail is larger than ever now, but I don't mind. I'm very pleased at the enthusiasm and appreciation Gemites show for the old paper. No Editor, I think, could have a more loyal and keen band of readers.

Miss J. Bird (London, E.C.1).—Thanks for your letter. Miss Fawcett will be appearing again soon. I'm sorry, but I cannot accede to your suggestion for a competition. Martin Clifford is too modest to permit me to publish his photo.

T. Wentwood (Hindhead).—No, Frank Richards doesn't live in Guildford. It was just a coincidence that the names you spotted corresponded with those in his stories. Glad you like the GEM immensely. I will try to publish that list later.

Miss Cobley (Birmingham).—Thanks for your congratulations. The six best boxers on points in the Fourth are: Jack Blake, George Figgins, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, Richard Redfern, and Clifton Dane. The characters you mention will be featured in due course.

R. Crook (Bristol, 5).—Glad to hear that you think the GEM and "Magnet" are joint holders of first place among boys' papers. Thanks for sending your list of the best 1936 stories. I will endeavour to drag Monty Lowther out of his "retirement."

R. Davies (Downham, Kent).—The oldest fellow in the Shell is Talbot, who is sixteen years one month.

P. Gardner (Iver, Bucks).—No doubt you have already seen my reply to your other letter. Glad to know you and your pals prefer the GEM to the other papers. Thanks for your selection of the best 1936 yarns. You can obtain old issues of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" from our Back Number Dept.

T. Coles (Swindon).—Darrell is seventeen years six months, and Knox is seventeen years five months. Your joke just missed the mark.

PEN PALS COUPON
22-5-37

K. Davies (Darwen, Lancs).—I will put your request to Martin Clifford. Knox's age is given in the previous reply. Mellish is fifteen years two months, and Pigott is fourteen.

J. Dow (Millport, Buteshire).—Harry Wharton joined Greyfriars a short while before Bob Cherry.

C. White (Windsor, Berks).—Glad to hear that you have become a reader of the GEM again. Tom Merry's age is sixteen. The master of the Second Form is Mr. Carrington, while Mr. Selby takes the Third. I will bear in mind your suggestions.

K. Miles (Barry Dock, Glam).—I was pleased to hear that you have become a GEM and "Magnet" reader, and that you consider them the best papers you've ever read. My thanks to your father for recommending the companion papers to you. The adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. appear about every other month in the "Schoolboys' Own Library." Arthur Augustus came to St. Jim's in the fifth GEM yarn (new series). It was called "D'Arcy the Dude."

J. Self (Holborn, W.C.1).—Thanks for your letter containing your selection of the best stories published in 1936, and the ten most popular characters. I am sorry I cannot publish your lists, as I haven't the space now. You must remember that readers' tastes in stories vary considerably, and it's the Editor's job to please as many as he can and as often as he can. As you must admit, Jack Blake plays a prominent part in most stories.

Miss L. King (Victoria, Australia).—Very many thanks for your interesting letter and the newspaper cutting. The author of "A Pilgrimage to the Past" certainly speaks very highly of the GEM and "Magnet." I should like to publish the cutting, but lack of space prevents my doing so at present. Glad to hear that you find the GEM much more interesting than girls' papers.

Miss Fillshire (Walton-on-Thames).—Pleased to welcome you to the ranks of the GEM readers! Thanks for your good opinion of the old paper. I will do my best to find room for those lists.

Miss D. Brown (Wirral, Cheshire).—Thanks for your letter and lists of the best stories and characters. Yes, I tripped up in giving Cousin Ethel's age. She is fifteen. I have already pointed out that Wharton's age was a misprint. He is fifteen years four months. Talbot is sixteen years one month. Pleased to know you are such a keen reader. Lord Mauleverer doesn't arrive at Greyfriars for some considerable time yet. Yes, both Martin Clifford and myself are in good health. Thanks!

THE EDITOR.

"Well bowled, Fatty!"

The most dangerous bat on the Grammarian side was out. Wootton major took his place, and the next ball knocked his middle stump away. Then came in Frank Monk—to receive only one ball, which finished him. The St. Jim's crowd roared then.

"Bravo, Fatty! The hat-trick! Hurrah!"

"Bwavo, deah boy!" yelled Arthur Augustus, clapping his noble hands. "Bai Jove, I couldn't have done bettah than that myself! Huwway!"

Lane came in next, and faced the bowling a little nervously. His nervousness was well-founded, for Jack Blake caught him out off the next ball. The Saints yelled. Four wickets in succession. They could have hugged Fatty Wynn!

After that, the Grammarians dealt most carefully with Fatty Wynn, happy only if they could save their "sticks" without scoring off his bowling. The runs piled up slowly, and at seventy the Grammarians were eight down.

"We shall do it, aftah all, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "Bai Jove, pewwaps I had bettah go on to bowl now! I have wathah a feelin' that I should perform the hat-twick, you know, if there were enough wickets left."

But Arthur Augustus was quite alone in his opinion that he had bettah go on to bowl. The bowling was left to Fatty Wynn and Talbot in turns. Last man came in when the score was seventy-eight; and the Grammarians wanted three runs to win, with one more wicket to fall. And last man promptly captured one.

"One more to tie, two more to win," said Gordon Gay. "We shall do it!"

But Fatty Wynn was bowling again, and he did not mean to let them do it. The fat Fourth Former of St. Jim's gripped the ball hard, and took a little run, and then the ball came down like a shell, and——

Clatter!

Last man out! St. Jim's had won!

"Hurrah!"

And the Saints rushed on the field in a crowd, and hugged Fatty Wynn. Figgins and Kerr took the fat junior's arms and marched him off in triumph.

"Ripping!" said Figgins ecstatically. "You can always depend on the New House to pull a game out of the fire."

"I say, Figgy——"

"It was ripping, Fatty!"

"Yes, but——"

"Gorgeous, old son," said Figgins, slapping him violently on the back. "Simply topping."

"Yes, I know; but——"

"There are no buts in the case," said Figgins. "It was top-hole!"

"But—but I mean, don't forget——"

"I don't forget that you've bowled great, Fatty!" chortled Figgins. "We shan't forget that, Fatty!"

"I don't mean that!" roared Fatty. "I mean don't forget about the jam tarts!"

"The what?"

"The jam tarts!" said Fatty warmly. "Didn't I do the hat-trick?"

Figgins burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! I'd forgotten, but it's all right! My dear old porpoise, you shall have all the jam tarts you can devour, if we have to carry you home afterwards. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally think Fatty has earned them."

And when the eleven returned to St. Jim's, Fatty Wynn did not allow his enthusiastic friends to forget. He made a bee-line for the tuckshop, and for the next quarter of an hour he was very, very happy, and considerably sticky.

CHAPTER 11.
Raising the Wind!

TOM MERRY had a problem to solve.

It was an old, old problem—raising the wind.

But it was not a question, as it sometimes was, of raising funds for a tea in the study, or for a picnic, or a half-holiday excursion.

He did not require ten shillings or a quid, or even a five-pound note. He wanted all he could raise. He had promised to do his best for Mr. Brandreth, and he intended to keep his word.

Manners and Lowther observed the thoughtful frown on his face as the cricketers came home from the Grammar School. The Terrible Three did not join the revellers in the tuckshop. Tom Merry went directly to his study, and Manners and Lowther accompanied him. They saw that something was "up" and they wanted to know what it was.

"Has Mr. Brandreth gone back to London?" Lowther asked, as they entered the study.

"No."

"How did you get away from him, then?"

"I'm going to tell you chaps about it," said Tom. "You're bound to know, because I want you to back me up. But it's not to go any further."

"Hallo! A giddy secret?" said Monty Lowther. "Wait till I put the kettle on. Then it will get boiling while you unbosom yourself."

"This is serious, Monty."

"So am I," said Monty Lowther imperturbably. "I suppose we want tea, even if Mr. Brandreth has been telling you deadly secrets. What has he confided to you—that he made his fortune with illicit diamond buying—I.D.B., they call it in South African novels, I think? If that's it——"

"Stop being funny and listen," said Tom, closing the door of the study carefully. "It's serious. The old chap has not only lost his money, but he is in debt, and his creditors are looking for him."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Manners.

And Lowther gave a whistle.

"That's how the matter stands," said Tom. "He's stony—right up a tree!"

"You don't mean to say that he's liable to be—to be arrested?" gasped Lowther.

"It's not so bad as that yet. There's no warrant out for him," said Tom. "But he thinks there may be; and, anyway, he wants his whereabouts kept dark till he can clear out of England. When he gets home to Cape Town again he'll be able to make terms with them."

"I don't quite see that."

"Well, I don't, either; but that's what he said, and I suppose he knows. I didn't ask for details. It was enough for me to know that my pater's old chum was in trouble, and I could help him," said Tom. "I asked Brooke to put him up in the ruined wing in their old house, and Brooke's taken him home."

"Good old Brooke!"

"And now I've got to raise some money," said Tom. "You see, he's right on the rocks, and he hasn't enough to take him back to Cape Town."

"Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen!" sighed Monty Lowther; and he ran on in a Shakespearean strain:

"'But yesterday the word of Cæsar might
Have stood against the world. Now lies he here,
And none so poor to do him reverence.'"

"Will you cheese it?" roared Tom Merry. "I tell you this is a serious matter, you ass!"

"Well, Shakespeare's serious enough," protested Monty Lowther. "But I'll be mum. The question before the meeting, then, is to raise the wind. Luckily, I had a postal order from my uncle this morning, and if it isn't necessary to pay Gussy his half-quid, I'll contribute ten bob exactly."

"And you can put me down for all I've got," said Manners, "and that's half-a-crown. I shall have to do without my new films till next week."

"Blow your new films!" said Tom Merry. "The trouble is that there isn't much time for raising money; no time to write home. The only thing I can think of is to hold a sale of goods."

"Oh!" said Lowther.

"I've got some photographs we could put up in a sale," said Manners thoughtfully. "They're jolly good ones. I don't suppose anyone would give any money for them, though."

"That's rather a drawback in a sale, isn't it?" said Lowther solemnly. "There's my last term's topper, though."

Tom Merry was not listening to Lowther's funny remarks. He had taken a pencil and a sheet of paper, and was making a list, wrinkling his brows over it. Lowther looked over his shoulder, and whistled as he read out:

"'Bike, writing-desk, football, cricket bat, set of foils——' Great Scott! You're not going to break up the happy home in that way, Tommy?"

"I am," said Tom.

"How are you going to play cricket without a bat?" asked Lowther. "Have you invented a new system of doing it with a stump or a pen-holder?"

"I can borrow a bat, I suppose. I gave a guinea for that bat, and it's a good one; my bike has seen service, but it's in good condition, and the tyres are nearly new," said Tom thoughtfully. "And the foils——"

"I say, I use those foils, you know."

"You can go and eat coke! I ought to be able to raise a good bit on that list," said Tom. "I shall think of other things to put down, too. My watch is worth something. If any fellow wants a watch, it's worth a couple of quid to him."

Manners and Lowther stared at their chum. Considering the way Tom Merry had acted on Mr. Brandreth's first visit, the change was startling. But Tom Merry was in earnest. He was making a complete list of all the things he could do without, and a good many things it would be difficult to do without. Not the slightest thought of himself seemed to trouble his mind. Tom Merry was not the kind of fellow to do things by halves.

"I say," Lowther remarked, becoming serious at last, "this is a bit rotten for you, Tom. You won't be able to get those things back. Your allowance won't cover anything of that sort."

"My allowance is going to be mortgaged," said Tom cheerily. "I'm going to ask Mr. Railton to make me an advance on it. He'll do that, I know, when I tell him I want the money for

a special purpose. I shall have to do without an allowance for the rest of the term."

"My hat!"

"Well, I get tips, you know, so I shan't be stony all the time. It's no good doing things by halves. This man was my pater's chum at school, and I'm going to stand by him the best I know now."

"We're going to help, then," said Lowther. "Hang it all, we always share and share alike! If you're going to sell your things, you can sell mine, too."

"And mine," said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That wouldn't be fair on you chaps," he said. "Mr. Brandreth is nothing to you. It's up to me, but it's not up to you."

"Rats!"

"We're standing by you, Tom," said Manners decidedly. "Put my camera on the list."

"Not the presentation one?"

"Yes; the old one isn't worth much."

"Can't, Manners, old man; it's too thick. You got that blessed camera for risking your giddy life."

"It's going in the list, if your bike goes," said Manners firmly. "Levison's had his eye on it for a long time. He takes photographs. If I can raise the money later he'll let me have it back at double the price. So it won't be gone for good. Put the camera in, I tell you."

"And my bat," said Lowther. "If you can borrow a bat, I can borrow one, too, or I'll borrow the same one, for that matter. And my writing-case, and my fountain-pen."

"Oh, I say, Monty——"

"Shove 'em down!"

Tom Merry hesitated, looking at his chums. But Manners and Lowther were in deadly earnest.

The Terrible Three always shared alike, and held funds in common. When one was in funds, all three were in funds. When one was stony, all were stony And when one was in a fix, all three were in a fix. If Tom Merry was to be sold up, Manners and Lowther were to be sold up, too, and there wasn't the slightest hesitation on their part.

"It's awfully decent of you chaps," said Tom at last. "It comes jolly hard on you, though, especially about your camera, Manners."

"Bosh!" said Manners.

"It will save him a lot of films if he doesn't have a camera," said Lowther. "There's a silver lining to every cloud, you know. And if I part with my fountain-pen, it will save the ink I used to spill in filling it. Shove 'em all in. Why, we shall be able to raise twenty quid, I shouldn't wonder."

Tom Merry finished the list. It was a long one by the time he had jotted down all the articles that could be raised for the sale.

"When's the sale coming off?" asked Lowther.

"Immediately after tea," said Tom. "We'll get the things into the Common-room while the fellows are finishing tea, and start as soon as they're finished."

"What about our tea?"

"Oh, you can have a snack! No time to waste feeding. I'll write out a couple of sale notices—one for each House. We want the New House fellows at the sale. Take that kettle off. It's boiling. No time for tea. Just a snack! Now, buck up!"

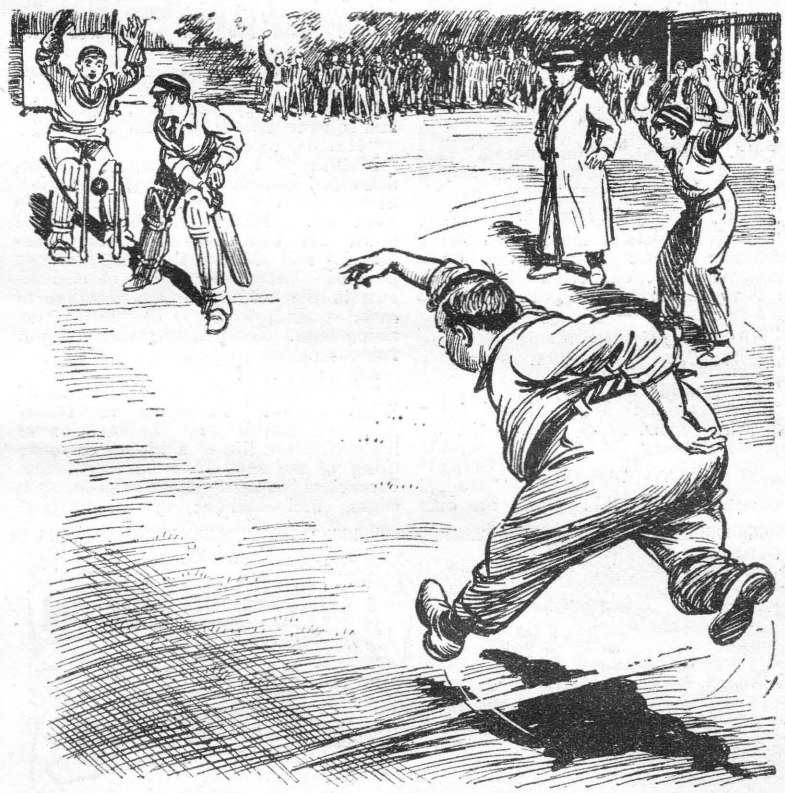
And the Terrible Three bucked up, making preparations for the sale, and while the other fellows were in their studies at tea, Tom Merry posted up the notices, and then the goods were transported to the Common-room.

CHAPTER 12.
Sale Now On!

"BAI Jove! Look there, deah boys——"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first to spot the notice on the board, in Tom Merry's hand. He turned his eyeglass upon it in great astonishment, and as word passed round, a crowd of juniors gathered to read.

The notice surprised them. Fellows came from far and near to read it. In the New House a similar crowd had gathered round a similar notice.



Fatty Wynn gripped the ball hard, took his run, and then sent the leather down like a shell! Clatter! The wicket was down! Last man was out, and St. Jim's had won!

"NOTICE!

"A sale will be held in the Junior Common-room, School House, commencing at seven o'clock precisely. No reserve. Must clear! Gentlemen in need of bicycles, bats, rackets, fountain-pens, desks, footers, foils, etc., are invited to roll up in their hundreds and take advantage of this grand opportunity.

"Terms strictly cash, right on the nail!

"(Signed) T. MERRY,
H. MANNERS,
M. LOWTHER."

"Selling up the happy home, it seems," remarked Jack Blake. "Why, it's close on seven now. May as well trot in."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Nearly all the Lower School trotted in. Figgins & Co. came over with a crowd of New House fellows. There was a buzz of surprise from the fellows as they crowded into the Junior Common-room.

The preparations for the sale had been made there.

In one corner of the Common-room were stacked the articles for sale, and a queer stack it was. A table had been placed in front of the stack, and Monty Lowther stood at a desk placed on the table, with a ruler in his hand. Lowther was evidently the official salesman. Tom Merry and Manners were seated at the table to assist. The Terrible Three were waiting for the crowd to arrive.

When the crowd arrived, a shower of excited inquiries poured upon the chums of the Shell. Everybody wanted to know what the little game was, and everybody wanted to know at the same time.

"Sure, and is it a joke intoirely?" demanded Reilly.

"What's the game, deah boys?"

"What are you selling the giddy home up for?"

"Cash!" said Monty Lowther. "Strictly cash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen" — Monty Lowther rapped on the desk with the ebony ruler—"gentlemen, the sale is now commencing!"

"But what's the little game?" roared Kangaroo.

"It isn't a little game; it's an auction. Owing to a dearth of the needful, we are selling up the happy home until more prosperous times No reserve. Everything is going for what it will fetch—in cash! Gentlemen who want

to buy on credit are requested to clear off at once and not worry."

"Bai Jove!"

"Gentlemen who are in funds, and who are eager for big bargains, are invited to roll up. Hallo! Glad to see you here, Cutts. Seniors are as welcome as juniors, or as the flowers in May."

Cutts had looked in with Gilmore and Lefevre. Several other seniors had come in, and there was an army of juniors of the Shell, the Fourth, and the Third. The Terrible Three surveyed the increasing crowd with satisfaction, and for once they were glad to see Cutts. The Fifth Former had plenty of money, and he had a keen eye to a bargain. Cutts was very likely to make purchases, if he could get anything for half its value.

Rap—rap—rap! came Lowther's ruler on the table.

"Gentlemen, the first item on the list is a handsome jigger. Tom Merry's governess gave ten quid for it. What offers for a handsome jigger costing ten quid?"

"A quid!" said Gore of the Shell.

"The tyres alone are worth more than a quid. A quid I am offered," said Lowther. "What advances on a quid for a handsome jigger?"

"Thirty bob," said Levison.

"Thirty boblets I am offered for a handsome jigger costing ten quid. Gentlemen, what offers? What advance on thirty miserable, disgusting boblets for a handsome——"

"Two quid!"

"Two-five!"

"Two-ten!"

"Three quid!"

"Three quidlets I am offered for a handsome jigger, which has had the distinction of being ridden by the captain of the Shell. Three quid! Going!" Lowther rapped the table. "Going! Gone—for three quid! Gore, the bike is yours. Kindly hand over three quid to Tom Merry and take your property."

Gore grinned and extracted three pounds. He was in funds that day, and never had he had an opportunity of better investing his funds. Tom Merry slipped the three pounds into a little bag on the table before him, and Gore wheeled the bike away. The auctioneer passed on to the next item.

"Gentlemen, a handsomely bound volume of 'Georgie, the Boy Who Told the Truth.' What offers for this splendid volume with gilt edges and no end of illustrations in colour? Slightly soiled by having been used as a footrest, but otherwise in perfect condition. What offers?"

"A ha'penny," said Mellish.

"Gentlemen, I am offered one halfpenny for 'Georgie.' Going—going—gone! 'Georgie goes to Mellish for one halfpenny! Pay up, Mellish!"

"Here, I say, I don't want the blessed thing!" said Mellish. "I was only joking!"

"Jokes are not allowed at auctions. Pay up!"

"Take him by the neck, somebody, and squeeze a halfpenny out of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish paid the halfpenny, and indemnified himself by kicking "Georgie" across the Common-room. The sale went on. Monty Lowther knocked down his own bike for one-pound-fifteen, and Manners' bike for two pounds. There was plenty of enthusiasm in the bidding, but a shortage of cash, which prevented the bids from rising high. The property was going at ruinous prices.

Rap, rap, rap!

"A handsome presentation camera! What offers? Presented to Henry Manners, Esquire, on the occasion of his saving the life of a kidlet, or something of the sort, in a burning house. First-class camera—check action, gilt edges, and ball-bearings, complete," said the enterprising auctioneer. "What offers for a presentation camera, with heroic associations thrown in without extra charge?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! It's weally too bad to part with that camewah, Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus. "It was pwesented to you for savin' the life of a little gal—or boy I forget which!"

"Whether boy or girl not guaranteed," pursued the salesman cheerfully. "Presented to Henry Manners for saving the life of a kidlet—first-class camera, with ball-bearings, cane handle, gold nib, and piano accompaniment complete."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's weally too wotten——"

"Nothing rotten about this camera, presented to Henry Manners for emulating the boy who stood on the burning deck, whence all but he had bunked!"

"Cheese it!" growled Manners.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy held a hurried, whispered consultation with his chums. For what reason the Terrible Three wanted to raise money they did not know, but they knew that the reason must be serious to make Manners part with his presentation camera.

D'Arcy hurriedly suggested buying it with a common fund, to be re-presented to Manners afterwards, and his comrades jumped at the idea.

"Ten bob!" Levison was saying.

"Fifteen bob!"

"One pound, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, acting as spokesman for the hastily formed syndicate of juniors who were to purchase the camera with that laudable intention of giving it back to Manners.

"Twenty-five bob!" said Levison.

"Thirty shillings!"

Levison scowled. He was at the end of his resources. He would have been very glad to buy that camera at a tenth part of its value, but it was not to be.

Cutts chimed in now:

"Two pounds!"

"Two guineas!" said D'Arcy.

"Two-ten!" said Cutts.

"Thwee pounds!"

"Three-pounds-ten!"

"Four pounds!"

There was a buzz of keen interest now. Cutts was looking annoyed. He meant to have that camera. He had heard D'Arcy's excited whispering to his chums, and had the amiable intention of defeating his little project if he could—and he knew that the camera was worth ten pounds at least.

"Four quid I am offered!" said Lowther, rapping the table. "Any advance on four quid?"

"Five!" said Cutts.

"Six!" said D'Arcy.

"Hurrah! Go it!" said the auctioneer. "Six I am offered!"

"Guineas!" said Cutts.

"Six guineas I am offered for a presentation camera, with heroic associations complete. Going at six guineas!"

"Seven!"

"Going at seven guineas! Going—going! Did you say eight, Cutts?" inquired the auctioneer politely.

"No, I didn't!" growled Cutts savagely.

"Gone at seven guineas to Arthur Adolphus Aubrey Plantagenet D'Arcy, who will kindly step up to the table and hand out the filthy lucre!"

"Just a minute, deah boy! I haven't waised it all yet, but I'll settle before the sale is ovah!"

"Right! Gentlemen, a gold fountain-pen! What offers?"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy to his chums. "We've got to waise seven guineas, deah boys. Scout wound and waise the tin. Lucky I had a fivah this mornin' fwom my patah, isn't it? We want two pounds seven as well."

Two pounds seven shillings were collected and added to the fiver, and presented to Tom Merry at the table. Arthur Augustus took the camera.

The Terrible Three were brightening up now. Quite a little sum was being raised, after all. But the next articles went at low figures; money seemed to be running short among the bidders. Shillings came in, but ten shillings were very scarce, and pounds seemed non-existent.

"A handsome guinea bat, going for two bob! Gentlemen, you will not let a handsome guinea-pig—I mean, a guinea bat—go for two bob! Gentlemen, I appeal to you as sportsmen! Going—going—gone for two bob!"

And Levison secured Tom Merry's bat, with the certainty of re-selling it later for five or six times as much.

"A splendid match footer, in good condition, going for one-and-six—two shillings! Any advance on two shillings? Gone at two shillings to Master Reilly!"

And so on with the rest. Monty Lowther was certainly an energetic salesman, and if the juniors had been overflowing with money the bidding would probably have been brisker

The last item was a set of photographs taken by Manners. The bidders did not seem in a hurry to start.

"Gentlemen, a superb set of photographs, giving views of St. Jim's from all points of the compass, with photographs of the Head and other interesting individuals; portrait of the Head as seen from the south——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you say ten shillings, Kangaroo?"

"No fear!"

"What offers, gentlemen? Don't let me finish this sale with articles left on my hands, gentlemen. Superb set of photographs, with views of the Head from every point of the compass."

"Twopence!"

"Twopence-halfpenny!"

"Going at twopence-halfpenny, a superb set of photographs! Going to Glyn for twopence-halfpenny—gone!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Glyn, handing out two pennies and a halfpenny "Manners, old man, I make you a present of a superb set of photographs, giving views of St. Jim's from all aspects!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners grinned, and slipped the photographs into his pocket. They were all, as Lowther remarked, that was saved from the wreck. The rest of the property of the Terrible Three had disappeared, and they proceeded to disappear themselves, to count up in the study the result of the sale.

CHAPTER 13.

A Startling Revelation!

"TWENTY quid!" said Tom Merry.

"Good egg!" said Manners and Lowther heartily. "It's a giddy fortune!"

Tom Merry nodded with satisfaction.

"Of course, the things were worth an awful lot more than that," he said. "But I'm jolly glad we've been able to raise twenty quidlets. I've had five pounds from Mr. Railton in advance on my allowance. I knew he'd turn up trumps. That makes a total of twenty-five pounds to hand over to Mr. Brandreth."

"A tidy little sum, though it won't seem much to him after what he's been used to," Monty Lowther remarked. "If it sees him through his difficulties, though, it will be all right. That's the main thing."

"When are you going to see him, Tom?"

"Well, we've arranged that I'm not to go over to-morrow, in case of attracting attention to the fact that he's at Brooke's place," Tom explained. "I don't know whether that's overdoing the caution, but that's what we've fixed. I'm to see him on Monday before he departs for good."

And Tom Merry locked the money up in safety.

The study wore a denuded aspect. A good many things the juniors were accustomed to were missing. Some of them had been purchased by their friends, and the fellows looked in that evening to explain that they could have them back at the same price if they wanted to later. But a good many of the articles had gone to bargain-hunters, or to fellows with whom the Terrible Three were not on particularly chummy terms, and those articles, of course, were gone for good.

"Blessed if I can understand my camera fetching such an awful lot!" Manners remarked, as they sat down to a frugal supper of roasted peanuts. "What on earth did Gussy want with it? He doesn't even know how to use a camera. Seven guineas was an awful lot of money, even for Gussy"

The explanation of that extravagant purchase was to come on the morrow. Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus and his friends were keeping their own counsel, and chuckling over the surprise they had in store for Manners

The next day was Sunday, a very quiet day at St. Jim's, and that day, at least, Tom Merry did not miss his cricket bat. After morning chapel, when the Terrible Three came into the School House, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy approached them with a mysterious expression upon his aristocratic face

"Goin' up to your study, Mannahs, deah boy?" he asked

"Eh?" said Manners, surprised by the question.

"There's a little surpwise waitin' there," said D'Arcy. "By the way, what were you fellows sellin' off all your pwoperty last night for?"

"Cash!"

"Wats! I mean, what was the weason? Are you feahfully hard-up?"

"We wanted to raise the wind," said Tom Merry.

"But what——" began Manners.

"Comin', Blake!" called out Arthur Augustus, and he hurried away before Manners could question him further.

"Blessed if I know what he's driving at!" said Manners, puzzled. "But we may as well go up to the study and see."

A parcel on the table greeted the eyes of the Terrible Three as they entered their study. It was addressed to Manners, in Blake's handwriting. Manners, considerably perplexed, opened it.

The presentation camera was inside.

"My camera!" Manners exclaimed in astonishment.

"There's a note with it," said Tom Merry.

"With kind regards from the Fourth Form."

The Terrible Three stared at one another. Lowther whistled and Tom Merry smiled. Manners looked perplexed.

"So that was what that champion duffer was bidding against Cutts for," said Tom Merry. "He's a good little ass!"

"But I can't take it," said Manners. "It's impossible. It's awfully good of Gussy; but I can't take it, all the same."

And Manners hurried away in search of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He did not succeed in finding him until the juniors were going in to dinner, and then he collared the swell of St. Jim's in the passage.

"Gussy, old man, I'm awfully obliged——" he began.

"That's all wight, deah boy."

Manners shook his head.

"I can't take it. The sale was business, you know. I can't let you give me the camera."

"It's a pwesentation, with the kind wegards of the Fourth Form," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy explained. "It's up to you to accept, deah boy."

"Well, I'll take it, on condition that when I'm in funds you let me return the money you gave for it," said Manners. "I can't take it, really, on any other condition, though I'm awfully grateful."

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"All serene!" said Blake. "We'll let it go at that. But we couldn't possibly let you lose the camera, Manners, old man, when you got it for saving the life of a kidlet."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Manners. "I shan't forget this."

And Manners' face was certainly much brighter after he knew that his camera was safe. That camera was the apple of his eye, and it had been a wrench to part with it.

On Monday morning Tom Merry looked out for Brooke when he arrived at the school. He wanted news of Mr. Brandreth.

"All serene at home?" Tom asked, as he met the day-boy in the Form-room passage.

Brooke nodded.

"Right as rain! Mr. Brandreth is fixed up quite comfy in the deserted wing I've told my people—they're quite agreeable."

(*Continued on page* 28.)

SEE-SAW!

"Lumme, Bill, we won't 'arf cop it if the boss sees us!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Yarworth, 66, St. Augustine Avenue, Grimsby.

BILLY BUNTER'S AT IT AGAIN! BUT HIS LATEST STUNT—THOUGHT-READING—GIVES HIM MUCH FOOD FOR THOUGHT!

BUNTER THE THOUGHT-READER!

By Frank Richards.

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

Billy Bunter's Latest!

THERE was silence in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars—silence broken only by the faint scratching of a couple of pens.

There were five juniors in the study, and each of them was busy in his own way.

Nugent and Hurree Singh were writing lines. Bob Cherry was mending a fishing-rod. Harry Wharton was sitting in the only easy-chair, his legs stretched out and his hands in his trousers pockets, with an expression of deep thought on his face. Billy Bunter was standing near the fireplace, with his eyes behind his big spectacles fixed on Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter's look was very peculiar. His expression was deeply earnest, his forehead corrugated with thoughtful lines, and his gaze was fixed unwaveringly on Wharton's face, as if he were trying to penetrate Harry's thoughts by sheer power of gazing.

The silence in the study had lasted some time. Harry Wharton, immersed in reflection, did not notice Bunter's peculiar occupation. Nugent and Hurree Singh were too busy with their lines to have any attention to bestow on the fat junior. It was Bob Cherry who first observed that something was "on."

He shut up his fishing-rod, and looked up with a yawn.

"That's finished," he remarked.

No one replied. Frank Nugent gave a faint grunt in acknowledgment of the fact that a remark had been made, but that was all. Bob Cherry looked round the study.

"Seem jolly busy—all of you," he remarked. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you up to, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter did not reply.

His spectacles remained fixed on Harry Wharton, and he apparently did not hear Bob Cherry's remark.

Bob stared at the fat junior in blank amazement.

He was accustomed to the vagaries of Billy Bunter, but this time it really did seem as if the Owl of the Remove were off his "rocker."

"Bunter, you ass! What's the matter?"

Bunter was still silent. Harry Wharton looked up and glanced round at Bob.

"Wherefore that thoughtful brow, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry. "Are you doing a sum in mental arithmetic, or have you just had a tailor's bill in?"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Neither."

"Do you know what's the matter with Bunter, then? He's suddenly become deaf as well as blind and silly."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Well, I spoke to you twice, and you didn't answer."

"You've spoiled it all!" exclaimed Bunter, in a tone of deep disgust. "You're always doing something fat-headed, Cherry."

Bob stared at him.

"Spoiled all what?"

"Well, not exactly spoiled, but interrupted. I was reading Wharton's thoughts."

"You were whatting Wharton's what?"

"Reading his thoughts. I've lately discovered that I've got a remarkable gift for thought-reading, and I've taken it up instead of hypnotism as a hobby. I was reading Wharton's thoughts when you interrupted me."

"You howling ass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"If you were reading Wharton's thoughts, spout them out. He's been sitting in that chair for about ten minutes as solemn as an Egyptian mummy, and his cogitations ought to be valuable. What was he thinking about?"

"I don't think Bunter can guess," Wharton remarked.

"It's not a case of guessing," explained Billy Bunter. "Thought-reading is a science. I've studied it on the methods of Monsieur Jong Bong, the famous thought-reader."

Billy Bunter would be a good thought-reader—if only the fellows he practised on would think the right thoughts!

"Blessed if I've ever heard of him. How do you spell his name?"

"J-e-a-n B-o-n-s," said Billy Bunter. "Owing to my knowledge of French, I give the name the exact Parisian pronunciation—Jong Bong. Monsieur Jong Bong is the most famous thought-reader of the present day."

"Who says so?"

"He says so himself in his book on the subject. I picked it up for twopence, second-hand, and it was a big bargain, for it first enlightened me to my wonderful powers as a thought-reader. I can tell you accurately what Wharton was thinking about, and I could have given you his thoughts, word for word, if you hadn't interrupted me."

"Well, go ahead, ass!"

"He was thinking about the little sum I owe Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter. "You remember that Quelch said it must be paid to-day, or else he would place the matter before my father. Wharton promised to see me out of the difficulty."

"I said I'd do my best," said Wharton.

"That amounts to the same thing," said Bunter. "I rely on you. Now, you were thinking of a way out of the difficulty, and——"

"But I wasn't."

"Oh, really, Wharton, it's not the thing to conceal the truth, just to throw discredit on my wonderful powers as a thought-reader."

"You utter ass!"

"I like a fellow to speak candidly," said Bunter. "If you weren't thinking of what I said, what were you thinking of?"

"That's my affair," said Harry dryly.

"There you are, you see! You refuse to acknowledge——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Bob Cherry. "You're off the track, Bunty. The fact is, you're a shrieking ass. Your thought-reading is on a par with your hypnotism, and your physical culture, and the rest of it. You're an ass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"The assfulness of the honourable Bunter is great," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, looking up from his work, "and the chatterfulness of the honourable idiot is terrific!"

"Really, Inky——"

Nugent looked up, too.

"Do you think you could guess my thoughts, Bunty?"

Bunter fixed him with his spectacles.

"Certainly, Nugent. The indications are infallible to one who has carefully studied the methods of Monsieur Jong Bong. You're thinking of—of tea—of having tea when you've finished your lines."

"Wrong!" said Nugent. "I was thinking that if you don't shut up and let me get my work finished, I shall bump you out of the study!"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Dry up!"

"If you would care for a further exhibition of my powers, Wharton——"

"No, thanks!" said Harry, laughing. "I'm quite satisfied."

"I'm willing to prove to you by any test that I've studied the methods of Monsieur Jong Bong, and can work them off as well as he can himself. I'll demonstrate to you——"

"Shut up!" roared Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

Nugent jumped up and seized a ruler, and Bunter dodged towards the door.

"I say, you fellows, keep him off! I say—ow! I'm going! Keep that ruler away, you beast!"

Billy Bunter jerked open the door of the study, and, running out, bolted right into a junior who was coming along the passage.

There was a terrific collision, followed by a wild yell.

Levison of the Remove rolled on the linoleum, and Billy Bunter staggered to and fro for a moment in an effort to keep his balance, and finally collapsed—on Levison's chest.

And Levison gave a fearful gasp as the fat junior sat on him.

Bunter's Little Difficulty!

"OW!"

"Oh, I believe I ran into somebody!" exclaimed the short-sighted Owl of the Remove, holding on his spectacles with one hand, and blinking through them dazedly. "Wh—what's this I'm sitting on?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Gerroff!"

"Dear me! I'm sitting on Levison!"

said Billy Bunter. "It was very fortunate I sat on you, Levison, as I might have hurt myself if I'd bumped on the floor."

"Gerroff my chest!"

"I'm going to. It's all Nugent's fault."

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet. Levison sat up, gasping. Harry Wharton stepped forward to lend him a hand to rise, but he disregarded it, and helped himself up by the wall.

He turned to the chums of the Remove with an angry sneer on his face.

"I suppose that's your idea of a joke?" he remarked.

"It was quite an accident," said Harry Wharton quietly.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I say, Levison, it was really an accident," said Bunter, blinking. "Nugent was chasing me with a ruler, and I bolted out. I'm sorry, but it was all Nugent's fault!"

"Rats!" said Nugent. "Why didn't you look where you were going?"

"Can't see that it matters much," said Bob Cherry, with a yawn. "Why shouldn't Levison be bumped over? It won't hurt him."

"I know it was done on purpose," said Levison.

"You know a lot, don't you? Didn't you hear Wharton say that it was an accident?" asked Bob Cherry.

Levison gave that irritating shrug again.

"Oh, yes, I heard him say so!"

"It's no good talking," said Harry Wharton. "You can think what you like, Levison! Let's get going, Bob, and Nugent can finish his lines."

Levison, with a sour scowl on his face, walked on, rubbing his shoulder, which had had a painful bump. Billy Bunter, after a moment's hesitation, followed him.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry went downstairs and out into the Close. Bob Cherry's face wore a slightly impatient look.

"Look here, Harry," he broke out abruptly, "what's the little game?"

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"Why are you putting up with that cad's insolence? For the past week or more Levison seems to have had nothing in mind but to insult you, and you've taken it all lying down!"

Harry Wharton laughed shortly.

"It's my own fault," he said. "I've set myself a task that I'm beginning to think was rather too big for me, that's all."

"About Levison, you mean?"

"Yes. I know the fellow has his good points, and he doesn't mean to be a cad, though he's done many caddish things. Every now and then he comes out with some decent action that shows he's the right stuff at heart."

"Possibly. But he's a suspicious, irritating beast, and I haven't any patience with him. What he wants is a licking."

"Well, I gave him one once, and a jolly good one!" said Wharton. "It didn't seem to do him much good, did it?"

"No, that's right."

"Then I made up my mind I'd give him a chance—as I had a chance given me once, when I badly needed it," said Wharton. "I admit that it's uphill work. He tries a fellow's patience."

"Look here!" said Bob Cherry abruptly. "I haven't mentioned it before, but—but I heard from Bunter—blessed if I know how he knew; he seems to get on to everything—I heard from Bunter that Levison——"

Bob Cherry paused.

"Well?" said Wharton quietly.

"That when he came to the study on Saturday, and we left you together—he struck you."

Bob Cherry blurted out the words. It was plain that he didn't want to believe them, but half believed them.

"It's true," said Wharton.

"And what did you do?"

"Nothing."

"What?"

"My dear chap, you don't think I was afraid, do you?" said Wharton, with a short, uneasy laugh. "He did strike me—and you know I could have licked him if I'd liked."

"And you didn't?"

"No, I didn't. I'd set myself a task, as I've told you. Levison is suspicious; he suspects everybody of trying to take a rise out of him. But there must be a way of changing his outlook."

Bob Cherry looked at his chum.

"Well, I must say you're an ass!" he remarked.

"Thank you!" said Harry, laughing.

"The fellow's not worth it!"

"Very likely!"

"And look here, if it gets about the school that you took a blow without returning it, you'll get chipped; the fellows will make jokes about it!"

"They had better not make jokes in my presence!" said Harry, with a gleam in his eyes. "I've made up my mind to stand Levison, for the reasons I've given you, but that doesn't mean that I've turned myself into a worm to be trodden on!"

"Well, that's some relief, anyway!" said Bob Cherry. "One never knows quite what you are going to do, or how you're going to take things. I dare say, if you punch a few heads over it, it will be all right."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, that's a simple way of making matters all right, and I'll do it if necessary."

"As for Levison, the sooner you throw him over the better!"

"I hope I shall succeed with him."

"Rats! Hallo, Vaseline! What's the news?"

Hazeldene of the Remove joined the chums in the Close. He looked as if he had something to say.

"It's about Bunter," he said. "I'm afraid he's booked for a regular row this time."

Harry Wharton looked puzzled.

"You know he owes Mrs. Mimble ten shillings?" went on Hazeldene. "He told Quelch about a postal order he expected, but we all know Bunter's postal orders—they never come. This evening is the end of the time allowed him to pay up, and if he doesn't settle, Quelch is going to write to his father by the evening post, and perhaps enclose Mrs. Mimble's little bill. Rough, isn't it?"

"Serve the young ass right!" grunted Bob Cherry. "He's always getting into a fix and bothering people to get him out again."

"Bunter doesn't seem to see it in that light," grinned Hazeldene. "He's going about trying to borrow ten bob of everybody he meets. He says that you promised to see him through."

"I said I would do my best," said Harry Wharton. "I was going to raise the tin to pay Mrs. Mimble."

"Well, why don't you, then?"

"Quelch has forbidden it. He guessed that Bunter would fix it on us somehow, and he has expressly forbidden us to advance the money. His idea is to give Bunter a lesson; and, as a matter of fact, he needs one."

"No doubt about that, but it makes

Billy Bunter jerked open the door of the study and rushed out, bolting right into a junior who was coming along the passage. There was a terrific collision, followed by a wild yell, and Levison bumped to the floor.

it awkward for you, after you said that you'd help him," said Hazeldene.

"I know it does."

"You might fix it by handing the money to somebody else and letting him lend it to Bunter," Hazeldene suggested.

Wharton coloured.

"I promised Quelch."

"That would be a way out of it," said Hazeldene, whose sense of honour in some matters was not quite so keen as it might have been.

Wharton shook his head.

"Then Bunter will get into a row at home," said Hazeldene. "It serves him right, of course, but I'm sorry for him."

"The worst of it is that he stood us a feed with the grub he got from Mrs. Mimble," said Harry. "Still, I may think of some way out of the fix yet. Where is Bunter?"

"He was going into Quelch's study to ask for time when I saw him," grinned Hazeldene. "He's got some hopes! Bunter has been trying to borrow the tin of Levison. Not much chance of that, eh?"

"Not much, I think."

Hazeldene strolled away. Bunter's trouble didn't seem to weigh on his mind very much, but Harry Wharton gave it a good deal of thought.

"I don't see what's to be done," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Something must be done," said Harry quietly. "Bunter's got to be helped out of his scrape. But I'm blessed if I see how!"

Levison Pays!

"AH, it is you, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter was trembling a little as he entered Mr. Quelch's study and found the cold grey eyes of the Remove master fixed on him. He blinked uneasily through his big spectacles.

"Y-y-yes, sir," he stammered.

"I'm glad to see you, Bunter. Have you come to tell me that you have paid Mrs. Mimble?"

"If you please, sir——"

"It was very wrong of you to take those goods from Mrs. Mimble without a certain prospect of being able to pay for them," said Mr. Quelch. "The fact that you thought you could extract the money from your studymates only makes matters worse. You have no right to do anything of the kind, and that is why I have forbidden them to find the money."

"But, sir——"

"You have a lesson to learn in these matters, Bunter. I hope it will do you good. I am very glad you have found a way of settling Mrs. Mimble's account."

"But, sir—I—I haven't settled it."

Mr. Quelch, who was taking up his pen, laid it down again.

"You haven't settled it, Bunter?" he rapped out.

"N-n-no, sir."

"In one hour," said Mr. Quelch, "my letters will go to the post. Among them will go one to your father, enclosing Mrs. Mimble's bill."

Bunter's jaw dropped.

"I—I say, sir, I wish you'd give me a little more time."

"I would do so, Bunter, if it were any use. But it is perfectly clear to me that you have run into debt without the slightest prospect of paying. Unless you have a severe lesson, you are likely to drift into actual dishonesty."

"Oh, sir!"

"Therefore, I cannot allow this matter to pass. Besides, Mrs. Mimble must be paid."

"I'm expecting a postal order——"

"Nonsense! You may go!"

"But, really, sir——"

"You may go, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, in a tone there was no arguing with.

And the Owl of the Remove disconsolately left the study.

He met Levison in the passage.

"What's the trouble?" said Levison.

Billy Bunter grunted.

"You know very well what it is."

"I suppose Qulelch won't give you more time?"

"No. He's going to write to my governor. Of course, I shall get into a row."

"It looks to me as if you're in a fix, Bunty."

"So I am. Somebody ought to give me a leg up."

"You want such a precious lot of legs up," said Levison.

"I'll tell you what, Levison. I'm expecting two postal orders, and I think they'll be for ten shillings each. If you like to stand me the ten shillings now, you can have both of them when they come."

"Thank you for nothing."

"It's a jolly big interest. It's a chance to make money, and you know you're fond of money. Everybody says you're mean——"

"Oh, do they?" said Levison, with a curious grin. "You have a nice way of trying to borrow money, Bunter, and no mistake. Now, look here, I don't want any nonsense about your postal orders that never come. I know jolly well that if I lend you ten bob I shall never see a penny of it again——"

"Oh, really, Levison——"

"So I'm not going to lend it to you. I'll give it you, if you like."

Bunter's mouth and eyes opened wide.

"You—you—you'll give it to me?" he stammered blankly.

"Yes; or rather, I'll come with you and pay Mrs. Mimble and get the receipt."

"I hope you could trust me with the money, Levison," said Bunter, with great dignity. "It's rather an aspersion on my character to——"

"Oh, don't jaw! Come along!"

"You'd better give me the ten bob——"

"Look here, Bunter, I'm going to pay Mrs. Mimble, or I'm going to do nothing! If she isn't paid at once I shall probably change my mind about it, and then——"

"We'd better cut along!" said Bunter hastily.

They cut along. Mrs. Mimble was in the school shop, and she frowned when she saw Bunter. But when she saw the ten-shilling note in Levison's hand, the frown cleared off her brow as if by magic.

"We've come to pay your little bill, Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter importantly.

"I'm paying it for Bunter," said Levison. "Give me the receipt!"

"It's very generous of you, Master Levison."

"Is it?" said Master Levison. "I shall sleep all the sounder to-night through being the happy possessor of your good opinion, Mrs. Mimble. Please make out a receipt."

The tuckshop dame did so. She did not quite understand Levison. She scratched out the receipt for the ten shillings and took the note.

"And now, Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter, in quite a grand manner, "I hope you'll trust me with a few shillings' worth of things."

"I can't trust you, Master Bunter."

"Not when I've just paid up ten shillings in a lump?"

Billy Bunter, staggering along under the weight of the lunch basket, was soon perspiring and grunting. "I say, you fellows," he gasped. "I'm fagged out! I'm afraid I shan't be able to keep on." "Go back, then!" said Bulstrode. "I think I ought to have a rest and a snack, now!" exclaimed Bunter.

"You haven't paid it. Master Levison paid it."

"He's lent me the money——"

"No, I haven't," said Levison unceremoniously. "I've given it to you to get you out of a fix, and Mrs. Mimble would be a fool if she trusted you with a penny."

"Oh, really, Levison——"

"And this is the first and last time I'm going to pay your debts, too!" said Levison. "Come along! Here's your receipt."

"I say, Levison, those jam tarts look awfully ripping!"

"Yes, don't they?"

"Don't you think we had better have a dozen between us?"

"Yes, if you can pay for them."

"Well, you know I can't. But you——"

"I'm off!"

Levison walked out of the tuckshop. Bunter looked disconsolately after him, then at the receipt in his hand, and then at the jam tarts. The receipt saved him a great deal of mental worry, but—he was hungry.

"I say, Mrs. Mimble, you ought to allow something for cash," he said. "Suppose you throw in a dozen tarts——"

"Good-night, Master Bunter!"

"Half a dozen cream puffs, then."

Mrs. Mimble went into her little parlour. Bunter leaned over the counter and called after her.

"I say, Mrs. Mimble, just one slice of cake, then."

There was no reply from Mrs. Mimble, and Bunter slowly and dismally quitted the tuckshop.

A Surprise!

"IF you please, sir——"

"Really, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, laying down his pen and frowning at the fat junior, "I cannot have you interrupting me again like this!"

"But if you please, sir, you told me to come when I had paid Mrs. Mimble."

Mr. Quelch started.

"You have paid her, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, that alters the case, of course!"

"I hope you haven't written to my father, sir."

"Not yet. Have you the receipt?"

"Here it is, sir."

Mr. Quelch, who evidently had his doubts, looked at the receipt. It was quite in order, and there was no further doubting that Mrs. Mimble had been paid. The Remove master was puzzled.

"I'm glad of this, Bunter," he said. "I am surprised also. You have not borrowed this money of your study-mates, I know, as I exacted a promise from Wharton on that point. But you have borrowed it elsewhere, I presume?"

"Some chaps have faith in me, sir," said Bunter, with dignity. "They know I'm not the kind of fellow to leave a debt unpaid."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"Then I hope they will not be disappointed in you, Bunter. The matter is ended now, as far as I'm concerned, but I warn you to be more careful in future!"

That caution made about as much impression on Bunter as the proverbial water on a duck's back. He left the master's study with a weight gone from his mind, but still feeling rather discontented at having nothing but a bit of paper to show for the expenditure of ten shillings.

Billy Bunter had a short memory. A feed once over was past and done with, and it seemed to him that he had paid away ten shillings for nothing. The fact that the ten shillings had belonged to somebody else made no difference to his way of looking at it.

The chums of Study No. 1 were in the Common-room. Harry Wharton caught sight of Bunter and came over to him.

"I'm sorry, Bunter!" he said quietly. "I can't think of a way out of the fix. If Quelch would let us find the money it would be all right. Without that, I can't see what's to be done."

"You needn't bother now," said Bunter in a stately way.

Wharton looked surprised.

"Do you mean that Quelch has let you off?"

"I mean that I've paid Mrs. Mimble."

"You've paid Mrs. Mimble?"

"I don't see that there's anything to be surprised at in that, Wharton. You really speak as if I were a fellow who never paid a debt in his life."

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Go hon! But I'm surprised. I thought you had no money"

"Well, I hadn't."

"My only hat!" exclaimed Nugent. "The postal order's come at last!"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"The hurrahfulness is terrific!"

"You're all wrong," said Bunter. "The postal order won't be here till the morning's post, I expect; perhaps later."

"Perhaps very much later!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Still, I've paid Mrs. Mimble, and that's all right."

"I suppose it's a great secret how you did it?" said Nugent. "Have you pawned somebody's watch, or found a banknote in somebody's pocket?"

"Really, Nugent——"

"Well, then, what's the giddy secret?"

"A chap lent me the money."

"Stranger to you, I suppose?"

"A stranger would hardly be likely to lend me money, Nugent."

"More likely than one who knew you, Bunter!"

"Oh, really——"

"Well, then, where did the cash come from? Have you come into a fortune, or discovered the abbot's treasure in the Greyfriars ruins, or what?"

"I tell you a chap lent me the money. It was Levison."

"Levison! He lent you ten bob?"

"Yes. You can ask him."

"I jolly well will," said Bob Cherry. "He's over there, and I think I'll get

some first-hand information on this point. It's our duty to look after you. You've got a way of borrowing things without mentioning the fact to the owners thereof; and if you've started borrowing money that way, you'll get into trouble in no time!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bob Cherry crossed over to Levison, who was reading under one of the lights. The new boy in the Remove looked up at him.

"Levison, did you lend Bunter ten bob?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No," said Levison. "I gave it to him."

"Oh, I see! You gave Bunter ten bob?"

"Yes—if you're so particular to know all about it!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bob Cherry. "It reminds me of an old proverb—something about a fool and his money! I dare say you know it. Still, I'm jolly glad the young ass has got out of this fix. He'll be in another one to-morrow, I suppose. What on earth are you blinking at Wharton like that for, Bunty?"

Billy Bunter did not reply. His gaze was concentrated on Harry Wharton, who was looking very thoughtful.

Bob Cherry gave the fat junior a dig in the ribs that made him gasp.

"What's the matter with you, Fatty—off your rocker?"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I wish you wouldn't interrupt me! I was just reading Wharton's thoughts on the methods prescribed by Monsieur Jong Bong——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By the facial indications and the clue given by the expression of the eyes, I can always read——"

"Rot!"

"Let the honourable ass tell us the correctful thoughts of the esteemed Wharton!" purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I can do that easily enough," said Billy Bunter.

"Then go ahead, ass!"

"Wharton was thinking that if Mr. Quelch had allowed him, he was going to stand me the ten bob to pay Mrs. Mimble, and, as he hasn't had to do that, he has the ten bob to spare. As it really belongs to me——"

"Belongs to you!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Of course! He would have given it to me if Mr. Quelch had allowed him to pay Mrs. Mimble. Well, as Mrs. Mimble is paid, there can be no objection whatever to his giving it to me now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see what there is to laugh at, Cherry! The thing is plain enough. It won't cost Wharton a penny more than if he had given me the money to pay Mrs. Mimble, as he wanted to."

"The businessfulness of the esteemed fat rotter is great!"

"You see, Inky agrees with me. What do you think, Nugent?"

"If you're a giddy thought-reader, you can guess what I think!" grinned Nugent.

"You think that Wharton is bound to hand over the cash?"

"Guess again!"

"You think I'm quite entitled to it?"

"Wrong again!"

"Really, Nugent——"

"What I think is that you're a cheeky, greedy young ass, and that you ought to have a jolly good hiding!" said Nugent.

"Oh, I say——"

"Did he read your thoughts correctly, Harry?" grinned Bob Cherry. "Were you thinking of wasting ten bob on the young cormorant?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No. I wasn't thinking of Bunter at all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come now, Wharton!" said Billy Bunter warmly. "Your eyes were fixed on me——"

"Were they? Absent-mindedness, I suppose."

"Can't see why anybody should fix his eyes on such an object for any other reason," Bob Cherry remarked.

"I don't think Wharton ought to tell fibs just to throw discredit on my powers as a thought-reader—— Ow!"

Wharton's finger and thumb fastened on Bunter's ear.

"You don't think what?"

"I don't think you would tell fibs in any circumstances whatever," gasped Billy Bunter. "That's what I meant to say."

"Quite sure?"

"Oh, yes, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton laughed as he released Bunter.

"Now, look here, Bunter. Your thought-reading is all humbug, like your hypnotism. I wasn't thinking about you, and I certainly haven't any intention of making you a present of ten shillings."

"You as good as promised——"

"Nothing of the sort. We should have raised the money among us if Quelch had allowed us to pay Mrs. Mimble."

"Well, I've no objection to your raising it that way," said Bunter eagerly. "I'm a reasonable chap. Look here, make it two bob each—that's letting you down lightly—and I'll stand you a feed——"

"Oh, cheese it, Bunter! You make me tired!"

"Well, I must say I think you're playing it low down on me, that's all," said Bunter, and he walked away with an extremely discontented look.

Harry Wharton glanced at Levison. He had taken up his book, but he was not reading. Wharton hesitated a moment before he spoke.

"It was decent of you to help Bunter out like this, Levison."

"Thank you!" said Levison.

"We should have done it among us if Quelch hadn't forbidden it."

"You were bound to obey orders, of course; you always do."

"It was a peculiar case. Quelch made me promise."

"A promise that was quite useful to you—eh?"

Wharton bit his lip.

"No good coming any humbug with me, you know," said Levison. "I'm not the chap to be fooled, you know."

"I think you're an utter cad sometimes, Levison," Wharton said quietly. "Only a cad wouldn't have helped Bunter out of his fix. I must say, though, that your manner is against you."

And Wharton walked away.

Bunter Carries the Basket!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and the Remove cricketers were busy at the nets on the junior ground. Billy Bunter came down to the ground with a worried look on his plump face, but it cleared a little as he caught sight of Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry looking on at the batting and talking.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Oh, take a little run!" said Bob Cherry. "We're talking cricket. Hazeldene won't make a first-class batsman, but he has a late cut that I rather like, and——"

"I say, Wharton, I've got something rather important to say. I've been disappointed about both my postal orders, and——"

"And now you're booked for another disappointment!" grunted Bob Cherry. "We're not lending anything this afternoon. You'd better come and get in some batting, Harry. Unless I'm mistaken, there's going to be some rain."

"I say, I've been disappointed about my postal orders."

"Well, can't you be disappointed quietly?"

"No, I can't, Bob Cherry. I'm hard up, and after Wharton leaving me in the lurch as he did on Monday, I think he ought to stump up."

Harry felt in his pockets.

"How much?" he asked.

"Well, there's the half-crown you owe me——"

"I owe you a half-crown!"

"Yes; the half-crown you were going to contribute to the ten bob, you know. If you're going to stump up something extra, I shan't say no. I want to get a book——"

"Another book on thought-reading?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"No; I'm thinking about giving up thought-reading. It doesn't seem to go down very well. Fellows are so obstinate, they keep on denying that I've read their thoughts correctly. I read them in the most unfailing way, and then the rotters pretend that they were thinking something else all the time."

"Perhaps they're right."

"Oh, no; that's impossible, as I go upon the exact methods of Monsieur Jong Bong, and I can't make a mistake. But there's no fun in reading their thoughts when they won't own up. But about that three-and-six, Wharton, I——"

"That what?"

"The half-crown you owe me, and the extra shilling."

"What extra shilling?"

"I thought something was said about something extra. I'm in want of tin, because Herr Ratz's book on ventriloquism costs one-and-six, and there's the postage. I'm hungry, too."

"Well, if Herr Ratz's book will keep you quiet for a time, it's worth the money," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "It happens that I had a tip from my uncle this morning, and you can have the half-crown."

"Thank you, Wharton. I always like a fellow to pay up his debts promptly. I always do myself. This ventriloquism book will be very useful to me, as I know that I've got wonderful powers in that direction, even more than in hypnotism and thought-reading. Would you like to hear me throw my voice?"

"No, thanks!"

"Well, perhaps I'd better leave it till I've had some practice. This is only a half-crown you've given me!"

"Did you think it was going to be a fiver?"

"What about the other shilling?"

"Oh, cut off!"

"I don't like a fellow to be mean. This will leave me only tenpence. I want a bit of a feed this afternoon, and I really depended on you. Levison and Bulstrode are going to picnic on the Pike this afternoon, and I could have gone with them."

"Well, there they are," said Bob Cherry, nodding towards two juniors who were crossing towards the gates. "It's not too late."

Billy Bunter blinked round.

Levison and Bulstrode each carried a stick. The Black Pike was a difficult mountain to climb, and very few of the boys of Greyfriars had ever been to the top. Some of the more adventurous spirits had performed the feat, including Harry Wharton and his friends.

Levison was carrying a large lunch-basket, which was evidently heavy. Billy Bunter's eyes glimmered at the sight of the lunch-basket. He started off to intercept the two adventurers.

There was a shade on Harry Wharton's brow.

"They are fools to go up there this afternoon," he said, in a low voice.

"Well, we did it on Saturday," said Bob Cherry carelessly.

"Yes; but we're good climbers, and Nugent was with us, and he had been up with Wingate last term. They'll probably lose their way."

"Tell them."

Wharton hesitated.

"You know how Levison receives anything I say to him. It's not only that, you know. There's rain coming on, and the Pike is dangerous when the mists come up from the valley—and the mists always follow rain."

"Well, I'll speak to the silly asses."

"It won't do much good, but you may as well. If I said anything that obstinate rotter Levison would only go all the more."

"I know that, Harry,"

Bob Cherry crossed to the two juniors, quickening his pace to intercept them. Bulstrode and Levison halted.

"This basket is jolly heavy," said Levison. "I think you might as well take the first turn at carrying it, Bulstrode."

"Not much," said Bulstrode.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I hear that you chaps are going up the Pike."

"What about it?" said Levison.

"Nothing; only as neither of you know the way, you won't get down again as easily as you get up, that's all."

"I dare say we shall be able to manage."

"And it's going to rain."

Levison looked at the blue sky and smiled sceptically. There was only a little cloud over the river, and the afternoon looked very fine.

"Setting up as a weather prophet?" he asked.

"No," grunted Bob Cherry. "But I know there will be rain before dark. And when it rains there are mists on the Pike."

"I've been in a mist before."

"Not a Black Pike mist, I expect. I warn you that it's dangerous, that's all."

"Oh, rats! You can't scare me with a cock-and-bull story like that. Come on, Bulstrode!"

And Levison walked on towards the gates. Bulstrode, after a moment's hesitation, followed him.

"Well, I've warned you!" called out Bob Cherry, and he returned to Wharton. "Come on, Harry, and let's get some batting practice in before it rains."

Billy Bunter followed Levison and Bulstrode to the gates. Levison glanced round and saw the junior.

"What do you want, Bunter?" he asked.

"I'd like to carry your basket for you, if you like, Levison," said Bunter. "You did me a good turn the other day, you know."

Levison laughed.

"You mean you'd like to sample the contents at the first resting-place," he said.

"Oh, really, Levison!"

"You can carry it, if you like, and have a feed when we stop. It's jolly heavy; but, mind, you won't have a bite till we take the first rest at the foot of the Pike!"

"That's a jolly long way."

"Well, I'm not asking you to carry the basket."

"Oh, I'm willing to do anything for you, Levison."

"Yes; if there's a feed at the end of it," grinned Levison. "Here you are!"

He handed over the basket, and Billy Bunter laboured along under its weight, while Bulstrode and Levison strolled on carelessly, swinging their sticks.

The Black Pike!

THE morning had been hot, but the afternoon, though fine, was much cooler, and there was a trace of dampness in the air. But that was welcome to the three juniors tramping along the dusty road. Bunter was hot enough, and he was glad when they turned from the road into the sheltered footpath under the trees.

"I suppose you'll be taking a bit of a rest before you go through the wood," he suggested.

"Then you suppose wrong," grinned Bulstrode. "Keep on."

"This basket is heavy."

"I didn't say it wasn't."

"I suppose there's no objection to my taking a snack now, to keep up my strength?"

"Wrong again—there is!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode!"

"Keep on, you greedy porpoise! You took this job on of your own accord, and now you've got to stick it out."

Bunter grunted, and shouldered the basket again. It seemed to be heavier with every step.

The path ran through the wood to the foot of the hill, and then the slope of the Pike began, gently at first, increasing in steepness higher up. The juniors pressed on, Bunter changing the lunch-basket from one shoulder to another, and grunting and gasping with exertion. It was a great relief to him when the first slope of the Pike appeared in view. He bumped the basket down on the turf.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed.

"No, we're not," grinned Bulstrode. "There's another half-mile yet."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode!"

"It's all right," said Levison. "I feel as if I could sit down myself. You can open the basket, Bunter."

"More fun to make the fat rotter go fagging up the hill," said Bulstrode.

"Not if I have to fag after him."

"Ha, ha! Something in that."

"Let's have something to drink. I'm as dry as a bone. It's jolly hot, and that fellow Cherry said there was going to be rain. Rot!"

"I expect it was rot. Stop guzzling that lemonade, Bunter, and hand it over here."

"I'm thirsty."

"So am I, and I come first. Hand it over."

Bunter unwillingly parted with the lemonade. The lunch-basket was well stocked. Bulstrode always had plenty of money, and Levison's credit was good at the tuckshop. The juniors rested and feasted in the grateful shade of the beeches.

"Just the day to climb the Pike," said Levison. "It's not nearly so hot as it has been."

"I feel jolly hot," grunted Bunter.

"You've been carrying the basket. Go easy with the cream-puffs. Sandwiches are good enough for you, as you want such a lot. We've got another feed to come yet, on top of the Pike," said Levison. "Is there anything in what Cherry said about the mists, Bulstrode?"

"I've heard so, when it rains."

"Well, it won't rain to-day. I'm going on, anyway. You know the road?"

"Everybody knows it half-way up. After that there are cuts on the trees to show the track. I expect it will be easy enough."

"Shove those things into the basket, Bunter."

"I haven't finished eating yet, Levison."

"Yes, you have!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "We're not standing a special picnic for you, you young cormorant! Fasten up the basket."

"But, really——"

"Fasten it up, I tell you!"

Bunter unwillingly obeyed. The lunch basket was fastened and Bunter shouldered it.

"Are you coming on farther?" asked Levison.

"Well, I want to oblige you, Levison, and——"

"And be in at the next feed!" said Bulstrode.

"Oh, really——"

"Well, you can come, if you like to carry the basket."

The juniors tramped on. The path still ran between trees and underwoods, but the ground was rougher, and there were thick weeds and nettles in the grass. The ascent grew steeper with every dozen yards covered.

Bunter was soon perspiring and grunting. About every hundred yards he suggested a rest, a suggestion which was peremptorily negatived by the others, who were walking very much at their ease, with sticks to assist their progress.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, shut up and get on!" said Bulstrode.

"I say, I'm fagged out. I'm afraid I shan't be able to keep on."

"Go back, then."

"But I'm hungry."

"Well, you'll be at Greyfriars in time for tea, if you hurry!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode! I think I ought to rest and have a snack now——"

"I think I shall wallop you with this stick if you open that basket!"

"Do you want me to drop down from exhaustion due to hunger?"

"I don't mind."

"Oh, really——"

Levison jerked the basket out of the perspiring junior's hands. He hoisted it on his own shoulder and strode on.

"You can cut back, Bunter," said Bulstrode.

"Oh, let him come!" said Levison.

"What's the good of him if he's not going to carry the basket?"

"What's the good of you, if you come to that?" said Levison, in his unpleasant way.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Levison——"

"Bosh! Let's get on."

They got on. Bunter, still thinking of the feast to come, tramped along patiently.

(Lost on the Black Pike! That's what happens to Bulstrode & Co. in "THE PERIL OF THE BLACK PIKE!"—next week's thrilling yarn.)

HEIR TO MILLIONS!

(*Continued from page 21.*)

"I've raised twenty-five quid. We've had a sale," said Tom.

"My hat! You must have had a pretty good clearance to get a sum of money like that," said Brooke, in astonishment.

"Sold up all the happy home—root and branch!" said Tom, laughing. "Did Mr. Brandreth give you any message for me?"

"Yes. He's going to see you to-day—after lessons."

"Good! You can take a note for me this morning when you go home to dinner with the money in it."

"Right-ho!"

When the day-boy left St. Jim's after morning lessons, he carried the note and the cash.

He found Tom Merry on the cricket ground when he came back for afternoon lessons. Tom Merry joined him at once.

"I told him just the facts," said Brooke. "It was a jolly decent thing for you to do, my son, whether you admit it or not. He's coming here about six."

"Coming here?" said Tom, in surprise. "But—but it would be safer if——"

"So I told him, but he said he'd come. If he wasn't a friend of yours, I should say it was all spoof about his having to keep dark," said Brooke.

"Oh, no! It's right as rain!" said Tom confidently. "Why should he tell me it was so, if it wasn't so?"

The Terrible Three were at tea in the study when the millionaire came. There was a knock at the study door, and Tom Merry jumped up to open it.

Mr. Brandreth walked in.

Monty Lowther politely placed a chair for the visitor, and then slipped out of the study with Manners. They guessed that Mr. Brandreth wanted to be alone with their chum.

"Is it all right now, sir?" Tom asked anxiously. "We did the best we could, and my chums helped me like Trojans."

Mr. Brandreth smiled.

"It is all right," he said. "Tom, I want to ask you to forgive me."

"Forgive you, sir?" said Tom, with a smile. "I don't quite catch on. If you mean about that rotten—ahem!—about that rotten condition in your will, that's all over and forgotten. I'm sorry I cut up rusty about it."

"Not only that, Tom; I've deceived you."

"Deceived me, sir?"

"Yes."

"I—I don't understand."

"I did it to test you, and I have been satisfied with the test. You have been tried, and have been true," said Mr. Brandreth, in a voice full of emotion. "You are what I have wished to find you—the true son of my old comrade. Forgive me for putting you to such a test, but I was harassed by doubts and suspicions. I have seen the seamy side of life too closely, my boy, to be able to retain much faith in my fellow-men. I shall make all my will again, Tom, and you will be heir without condition. And, meanwhile, you must let me act towards you as your father's old friend."

Tom Merry looked at him blankly.

"But I don't understand!" he gasped. "You—you are ruined! You are a fugitive——"

"I am nothing of the kind. I am a millionaire, Tom."

"But that report in the papers——"

"I spread that report myself—for my own reasons."

"It was not true?"

"Not a word of it!"

"You are not ruined?"

"No."

"You are not in hiding?"

"No."

Tom Merry's face set hard. The millionaire held out his hand, but the captain of the Shell did not take it. There was a long silence in the study.

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CHAPTER 14.
At Last!

"TOM!"

Mr. Brandreth broke the silence at last. His voice was strangely changed from the hard, incisive tones Tom had known before. It was soft, and almost pleading.

"Tom, can you forgive that little deception?"

Tom Merry drew back.

"No, I can't," he said. "It was rotten! Do you know what you've made a lot of the fellows think of me? That I was standoffish towards you because I knew in advance that you were ruined."

"They will know the truth now."

"I—I suppose so. But—but what did you do this for? What did you make a fool of me like this for?"

"It was to test you. I couldn't trust you, Tom. It has been my curse that I could trust no one!"

"I see. You expected that when I supposed you were poor I should turn my back on you—that I shouldn't think you worth the trouble of helping?"

"I did not expect it, but I feared it, Tom. That report of my ruin has shown me how little faith I could place in many whom I have called my friends. If Captain Merry's son had turned out to be base and mercenary, too, it would have greatly upset me. Thank Heaven, you stood the test, and saved me from losing all faith and hope in my fellow-creatures!"

Tom Merry felt his anger melting away.

"And—and you did all this to prove to your satisfaction whether I was a mercenary rascal or not?" Tom said slowly.

"I did. I hoped it would prove you honourable and true—as it has done. You did not turn your back on me," said Mr. Brandreth softly. "Believing me to be a ruined man, you forgot your causes of dislike against me—you helped me. And I know what you did on Saturday—I have heard it all from Brooke. You did all that, believing that I was in need, without a thought for yourself. Tom, I believe in you and trust you now. Cannot you forgive an old man?"

Tom Merry was not proof against that appeal. He grasped the outstretched hand of the millionaire.

"Friends now?" said Mr. Brandreth, with a smile.

"If you like," said Tom. "But there's one thing—I don't want your money, sir. That's got to be understood."

The millionaire smiled.

"You won't refuse to let your father's friend be a friend to you, Tom? In the first place, I know about Brooke's trouble. The old man told me. It was Brooke whom you wished to help?"

"Yes," said Tom eagerly.

"I know the facts now, and I have already taken up that bill. I saw to that to-day. Brooke's home is safe!"

"Oh, that's ripping!" Tom Merry exclaimed, his eyes dancing. "That's splendid of you, sir! Old Brooke will be jolly glad of that! And I'm jolly glad, too! It was a ripping thing to do."

"And you must let me replace all that you parted with on Saturday, Tom. I insist upon that. You cannot refuse me!"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Tom, my boy, I am an old man, and I have no children. You are all that is left in the world for me to care for. Don't disappoint me. Let me be your friend, as I was your father's friend!"

"I can't say 'No' to that," said Tom. "We'll let bygones be bygones, then, if you choose, sir!"

"That's all I ask, Tom!"

. . . . . .

When Manners and Lowther came back to the study, they found Tom Merry and Mr. Brandreth chatting in the most amicable way in the world. The millionaire stayed some time at St. Jim's that day, and there was a feast in Tom Merry's study to celebrate his visit.

The millionaire seemed as happy and light-hearted as any junior there, and after he had departed, the general verdict was that he was a jolly good fellow.

Tom Merry proved, after all, the favourite and the heir of the millionaire; and Levison of the Fourth asked him, with a great desire for knowledge, how he could possibly have known all the time that the report of the millionaire's ruin was unfounded. A question to which Tom Merry replied only with a laugh.

Levison knew the facts, but he did not believe them, priding himself on being too worldly-wise for that; but Tom Merry's chums knew that he had been right and true.

(Next Wednesday: "THE MYSTERY OF LEVISON!" School mystery, fun and adventure combine to make this a yarn not to be missed. Order your GEM early.)

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