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3
**TO PREVENT THE PLUNDERING OF ST. JIM'S THE TOFF FINDS HIMSELF FACED
 WITH THE DUTY OF EXPOSING AN OLD FRIEND!**

The TOFF'S



"Will you go?" asked Talbot, addressing the Professor. "No!" snarled the crackbrainer. "What's wanted?" curts Inspector Bland's voice over the phone. "I have information to give," replied Talbot. "The crackbrainer, John Brown, is now in Mycomb." A savage curse dropped from the Professor's lips.

CHAPTER I.

Figgins is Obstinate!

"**B**LOW the rain!" said Figgins.
 "Yes, but—"
 "Besides, who's afraid of getting wet?"
 "Nobody, but—"
 "If you School House chaps are afraid of getting your tooties, you can go in and wrap yourselves in cotton-wool!" snorted Figgins. "And you can call it a win for the New House!"
 To which Tom Merry & Co. retorted with a general snort.

Certainly the weather was not promising. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and a junior house match was fixed for that afternoon. The School House and New House teams were standing in the football pavilion, waiting to start. But the rain, which had been threatening all the morning, was coming down at last in earnest.

There was a steady drizzle in the old quad, and the leafless old elms were sleepily weeping. And the footer field was, as Mervyn Leyther remarked, in an excellent state for making mud-pies, but not much use for football.

Naturally, Tom Merry & Co. deemed it only advisable to postpone the match. But Figgins, the junior skipper of the New House, was intractable.
 Tom Cox Luskatt.—No. 1,548.

Figgins was not usually obstinate, but he could be very obstinate indeed when he liked. Apparently he liked now. Figgins wanted to play that match, weather or no weather. He had reason. In the last three matches the School House had beaten their old rivals, Figgins wanted to change all that. He had made his team practice hard till they were all the top notch of their form, and he anticipated victory. From the point of view of the New House team, all was calm and bright, so far as the prospects of that match were concerned.

The weather had taken a hand in the game, and the ground really wasn't fit for playing on. But, as Figgins declared warmly, it was as fit for one side as the other. If the match were postponed, it was doubtful when it could be played. Most of the dates were taken up with regular matches, and the

weather might play the same trick again any time.

"Figgins & Co. were keen to wipe out the galling record of those defeats, and they wanted to go ahead, and 'blow the rain!'"

Tom Merry, with the collar of his coat turned up, surveyed the ground upon which the rain was falling.

"It's all rot!" said Tom, with a shake of the head. "You're an ass, Figg!" Figgins grunted.

"Oh, chance it and play!" he said. "It wouldn't be loose—"

"Wobblin'!" said Arthur Juggerton B'Arry, the most elegant member of the School House team. "Barr! We should oughtly main our chobbin, Figg."

"It's rather thick, playing in this weather, Figg," croaked Talbot of the Shell.

Another grunt from Figgins. "Oh, don't be scared of a little wet!" he said. "Don't be soft."

"Soft!" roared the School House juniors in an indignant chorus, such increased as that indignation.

"Woolly, Figgins—"
 "Yes, soft!" snarled Figgins. "Look here, we don't agree to calling it off, and if you think it we shall count it as a win for our House."

"That settles it," said Tom Merry, frowning. "You're a silly, obstinate

Once again the shadow of the past darkens the life of Talbot at St. Jim's—forcing him to choose between loyalty to the school and his friendship for the girl whom he loved in his underworld days!

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DARK HOUR!



By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

us, Figg, but if you're going to call us soft we'll play, if it's raining cats and dogs. Come on, you shape!"

"But Jess, we shall be wet through, and scratched with mud, you know."

"Can't be helped."

"Oh, play up!" said Talbot, laughing. "It's as fair for one side as the other. And the rain may come."

"Doesn't look like it," said Blake of the Fourth, blinking up at the lowering sky. "But we'd play in a dozen thunderstorms at once rather than call it a win for the New House."

"Hear, hear!"

The two teams came out of the pavilion into the rain.

"Where's the giddy referee?" asked Marrow.

"But Jove, he hasn't come!"

Tom Merry looked round for the referee. Lefevre of the Fifth was to referee the match, but he was not to be seen.

Decision he concluded that his study was a more comfortable place in that kind of weather, and certainly his conclusion was a reasonable one.

"Cut off and call Lefevre, somebody," said Figgins.

Talbot sped off towards the School House. The juniors crowded back into shelter to wait for his return.

There was not a single soul near the field to see the match. Nobody was likely to come out into that downpour to be a spectator. The rain was simply appalling on the fester field. But Figgins' obstinate face showed no signs of relenting, and Figg's team backed him up loyally. Lefevre was overheard to whisper that Figgins was a champion, not, but he backed his leader up all the same.

Talbot was not long gone. He was seen speeding back from the distant School House. But he came alone.

"Well?" asked Tom Merry, as the Shell fellow came up, dripping and gasping. "Is Lefevre coming?"

Talbot grinned.

"No. He says he's not a duck, and this weather is only suitable for ducks to play football."

"And he's right, too!" growled Kargrave of the Shell. "You're an aw, Figg. Where are we going to dig up a referee, if Lefevre won't come? I suppose we're not going to play without a referee?"

"A junior will do if we can't get a senior," snapped Figgins. "You cut off, Kerr, and fetch one of the fellows."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr. "You shape agree!"

"Oh, anything for a quiet life!" said Tom Merry resignedly.

Kerr rushed off to the New House, and he did not come back alone. He brought Thompson of the Shell with

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Miss Thompson had put on an overcoat, and a waterproof over that, and a cap with flaps which he pulled down over his ears.

"Ready!" said Figgins.
"Well, you are a set of blessed doffers!" growled Thompson. "You'll all jolly well catch your death of cold."
"Well, you won't, with all that chabber on," said Figgins, sarcastically. "Now, if you School House kids aren't afraid of a little rain, we'll start."

"Oh, pile in!"
"And the teams went out into the field."

Figgins and Tom Merry tossed, and the kick-off fell to Figgins, against the wind and the rain. Thompson blew the whistle, and the ball rolled and the rainy match began, amid an unaccustomed silence. There was not a single spectator on the ground. The cheers and shouts that usually accompanied a footer match were conspicuous by their absence.

But as the game proceeded, and the fellows in the Hooses became aware that it was on, windows that gave a view of the ground were crisscrossed with faces to catch distant glimpses of the game through the falling rain. And the general opinion in both Hooses at St. Jim's was that twenty-two fellows were off their rockers.

CHAPTER 2.

An Unfinished Match!

"PLAY up!" gasped Tom Merry.
"Goal! On the beauty ball!"

"Splash, splash!"
"Hai Jove!"

The rain was coming down harder. It was coming down so hard, in fact, that even Figgins thought that perhaps he had been a little obstinate. But Figgie would not have admitted that for worlds.

In a drenching downpour the two teams did their best.

The ground was muddy and slippery. Nearly every kick led to falls and bumps. The two unshaggy goalkeepers rubbed the rain out of their eyes and peered at the field. The players kept themselves warm by activity, and they were soon steaming. But Fatty Wynn, in the New Hoose goal, and Herriot, in the School Hoose goal, hadn't so much exercise, and they were soon sneezing instead of steaming.

And the rain came down harder.

The juniors ploughed their way along, and in ten minutes they were so snowed-in in mud that it was difficult to recognize the colours of the opposing teams. It led to some mistakes, Arthur Augustus passing the ball to a New Hoose forward and Kerr sending it to a School Hoose man. But little mistakes like that occurred on both sides, so it was as good—or as bad—for one side as for the other.

Figgins & Co. made determined attacks. The New Hoose junior team was in unusually fine form, and in better weather they would have had a good chance of winning out the second of debates. But in that weather good play was at a discount. It was now a game of kick and rush and splash!

Tom Merry & Co. made a determined attack at last, and Talbot, heading the headlined backs, sent in a scorching shot for goal. If Fatty Wynn had been as alert as usual he would have saved that shot from the wing; but at that moment Fatty Wynn was nearly doubled up, with a Gargantuan sneeze.

"Atchoo-choo-choo!"

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The ball whizzed over his shoulder and lodged in the dripping net.

There was a gasp of triumph from the School Hoose side.

"Goal!"

"Havoo, Talbot!"

"Atchoo-choo-choo!" sneezed the last goalkeeper.

"Check out that ball, Fatty!"

growled Figgins.

"Atchoo-choo-choo!"

"Oh, my hat! Don't catch a silly cold in the middle of a game!" howled the exasperated Figgins.

Fatty Wynn pressed his handkerchief to his nose with one hand and grabbed at the ball with the other.

"I can't help judging gold in this rain, you faddled!" he gasped. "I've got a bright gold in my dose—"

"Oh, blow your nose!" growled Figgins crossly.

"That's what he's doing!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Atchoo-choo-choo!"

The teams lined up again. The last ball was getting to its end and only that one goal had been scored. But the School Hoose piled in again, with the wind and the rain behind them, when the whistle went.

They brought the ball down, and Talbot crossed to Tom Merry, and Tom slipped it in. Fatty could have stopped that goal, too, at any other time. But at the critical moment he was blowing his nose. The ball flashed over his head.

"Goal! Hurrah!"

"Back up, Fatty, you man!" shrieked Figgins. "Have you come out goal-collecting?"

"I can't back up with this gold in my head!" growled the unfortunate Fatty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Atchoo-choo-choo!"

"Oh, don't you begin sneezing, Blake!"

"Atchoo-choo-choo!"

"Keep sneezing!" gasped Leather.

"We shall all be laid up at this rate. It will serve Figgins right!"



"Never mind, Bill! You won't get cold if you see it on the pictures!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Keating, 185, Crescent Road, St. Gumpston, Manchester.

Figgins opened his mouth to retort, but the retort did not come forth. A tremendous sneeze came instead.

"Hallo! Now Figgie's got it! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What you gargling at!" growled Figgins. "Blay up!"

They played up. The New Hoose succeeded in getting through this time, and Figgins put the ball in, convicted. For Herriot was in the throes of sneezing.

"That's wud for us, anyway," said

Figgins, as they walked back to the centre of the field. "We'll head the beautiful yet."

"My only hat!" exclaimed a sharp voice. "You silly young men, what are you doing down here in this rain!"

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had just come in, muffled up and with an umbrella, and he had caught sight of the players in the distance, and hurried down at once to the football ground.

"You young rascals!" sneezed Kildare. "What are you up to?"

"Catching cold!" replied Mooty Leather humorously.

"Blay woodhead," said Figgins.

"What do you suppose we're doing?"

"Playing football! Playing the giddy on, you mean! Come off that field at once!"

"What?"

"Get indoors and rub yourselves dry instantly!" sneezed Kildare angrily.

"The whole lot of you will be laid up! Get a move on you! Do you hear?"

"Woudy, Kildare, we haven't finished the game!"

"Get in, I tell you!"

The juniors looked at one another. The word of the captain of the school was law. As a matter of fact, most of the players were not sorry that Kildare had clipped in. The moment they stood still they shivered, and it was pretty certain that most of them were looked for colds.

They marched off the field sheepishly. Figgins & Co. disappeared in the direction of the New Hoose, and Tom Merry & Co. followed Kildare, in a drugged crowd, to the School Hoose. As they came in, leaving ruts and pools of water as they trod, Mr. Bailton met them.

The Housemaster gave quite a jump at the sight of them.

"How my soul! What—what is this, Kildare?"

"The young doffers have been playing football, sir, and I fetched them in," said the Sixth Form.

"Playing football in this dreadful downpour! Go to your dormitories at once, and rub yourselves down and get to bed!"

"To bed, sir?" stammered the juniors in dismay.

"Yes, at once! I will have hot-water bottles sent to you."

"It-bet, we're all right, sir," said Blake. "We don't feel at all like patching gold, sir, and at all. Atchoo-choo-choo!"

"Blake?"

"Atchoo-choo-choo-oo-oo!" sneezed Blake. "We're quite all right, sir—"

"Go to bed at once, all of you!"

And the unfortunate footballers went to bed.

Robbed dry, and tucked in, with hot-water bottles at their feet, they had plenty of time to meditate on that disagreeable football match. Over in the New Hoose Figgins & Co. were suffering a similar fate, with the addition of a hundred lines each from Mr. Bailton, their Housemaster. And among all the horrors of that footer match, the principal observations were: "Atchoo-choo-choo!" and "Grossough!"

CHAPTER 3.

On the Sick List!

THE next day there were vacancies in the Form-rooms of the Fourth and the Sixth.

All the twenty-two, fortunately, were not "down." But a large proportion of them had paid severely

for Figg's recklessness. Virginia himself had a bad cold, which the other fellows agreed was only just. Kerr had a cold, too, and Fatty Wynn was in a pitiable state. Reardon, Owen, and Lawrence were all laid up.

In the School House, Blake, Harrin, Keogaroo, Giffon, Dano, Bernard Glyn, Manners, and Digby were sad sufferers. Of all the School House side, only Tom Merry, Lovelair, D'Arcy, and Talbot had escaped. Seven of the Board House and six of the New House made an extremely unlucky thirteenth. And that day the dreadful word "influenza" was whispered.

"Influenza?" gasped Tom Merry, when he heard Dr. Scott's report after visiting the unlucky janitors in the sanatorium. "Lucky for them it isn't pneumonia."

"Thirteen blessed individuals!" said Talbot, with a whistle. "Laid up for days! Poor old Figg! And if it's influenza, it may spread."

"Oh, don't be a hoarsey Jew!" said Tom Merry. "I've had influenza once. I don't want any more."

"Watch out," said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jong! What's the matter with you, young Frazier?"

"Achoo!" said young Frazier. "Got a cold!"

Frazier of the Third blinked at them with watery eyes. "I've caught something," he said. "I've got it from Wally. He's sniffing and sneezing like anything."

"Bai Jong! Is my natural gift to be ill?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in distress. "Wally, you fellows, this is too bad of Frazier!"

An hour later D'Arcy snigger and Joe Frazier were in the sanatorium with the other sufferers. There was no doubt that it was influenza, and that it was going the rounds. On the following day, Reilly and Harwood of the Fourth followed the others, and then Mellish, Blankinship, and Lashley-Lashley. In the New House, too, there were more sufferers—Dugan, Clunge, Thompson, and Kozart. Here, the Indian, and Bolton, Baker, and Moushott of the Sixth.

The St. Jim's fellows were in a decidedly unenviable state by this time—just the state to which Lawrence was going, as a matter of fact. Gore and Skimpole were the next to follow, and after them went Cutts of the Fifth, and St. Leger and Gilmore. Students of the Sixth and Darwell went the same way.

"It's going the rounds," said Tom Merry gloomily. "Whether it started in that blessed football match, or whether it didn't, it's going round the giddy school."

"Yess, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus dimly. "It's written here in Study No. 3 all on a chap's lovely oval, you know. And they won't let me go and see Blake, or Harwood, or Dig, or Jess I catch it, too."

"And we can't go and see poor old Manners!" said Lovelair.

"I'd like to give Skimpole a look in," said Talbot; "but it isn't allowed." Talbot shared a study with Gore and Skimpole, both of whom were on the sick list.

"You'd better dig with Lovelair and me while your symptoms are away, Talbot," said Tom Merry. "And you come, too, Tom Merry. You don't want to have a study to yourself. We'll make it a foursome—until some more of us go."

"Thank you, dear boy!" It was not clerical, with influenza "going the rounds." The school sanatorium was pretty nearly full now. Two

ST. JIM'S JINGLES. No. 1.



MONTY LOWTHER.

*All hail to his most genial Grace,
So jocular and jolly,
Whom none effectively offend
The monks of melancholy!
Before his bright and breezy staff
The world has reeled in wonder;
And dogs have held their sides in laugh
Till buttons burst asunder!*

*This lively hero has been
A student of Merry's,
And figures in each merry scene
With Digby, Blake, and Harrin.
Full of wit and frolic play,
He's more enthusiastic;
And few have learned to fear his ways,
So deadly and so drastic.*

*Soon Monty reached the wicket age
When many legs surrender
Towards a pause for the stage
And all its stately splendour.
He witnessed once a local play,
Becoming quite enraptured,
And by the scenes so grand and gay
His heart was truly captured.*

*Impelled by all the rochees whims
He roared both night and morning,
The faithful fellow left St. Jim's
Without a word of warning.
He joined a wild and careless band
Who through the country travelled,
And hoped the plot that he had planned
Might never be unravelled.*

*By rochees rancor he was forced
Of large amounts of money,
And stole his way quickly creased
To wear his milk-and-honey.
The luckless Lowther now could find
No chance of retracting,
And sick at heart, became engaged
To all the care of eating.*

*One evening, during Monty's dance,
Appeared the nervous doctor;
And when an actress met his glance
It absolutely shocked her!
But, meanwhile, each devoted mate
Had mixed the hapless brew,
And as they pondered 't'is his fate
Their spirits sank to ebb.*

*The prodigal to school returned,
And thanked his kind adviser;
And through the lanes he had learned
Became a great deal wiser.
Right soon the fatted calf was slain,
And many hands were passed
To greet the lad who ne'er again
Would be a Niall Coover!*

Next Week: FATTY WYNN.

notes had come from the cottage hospital in Wayland, but two were not enough. It was understood that the Head had sent for more nurses; but there was a shortage of them.

Tom Merry and Lovelair were a little glum in these days. They missed their chess and studymate, Manners. Talbot and D'Arcy shared their study with them for the time, in Manners' place. Fortunately, none of the four showed any sign of catching the flu.

But one evening, as he came into the study, Tom Merry had an alarm. Talbot of the Shell was sitting there alone, with a wrinkle in his brow, and an expression of deep gloom on his face.

"Talbot, old man—"

Talbot looked up quickly. He had a newspaper in his hand.

"You've got the flu?" gasped Tom. Talbot smiled.

"No! I'm as sound as a bell, thank goodness!" Tom Merry drew a breath of relief.

"Jolly glad of that! You were looking so down in the month. It was sure you'd got it coming on. The only way to dodge the flu is to keep cheerful, you know. Don't worry! What the deuce are you worrying about?"

"Lovison has just given me this paper. There's something in it that concerns me in a way."

Tom Merry looked uneasy.

"You remember that man who came here as a minute master?" said Talbot quietly. "He called himself Mr. Parkington here. He came with forged testimonials. He was really a crackman; they called him the Professor in the gang. Well, when I found him out, I gave him the chance to clear. But he tried to rob the Head, as you know, and was collared. He said when they took him that the lock wasn't made that could hold him. It seems it was true. He's got away."

"Got away?" said Tom. Talbot nodded.

"But—that if he has, he can't hurt you," said Tom Merry anxiously. "It is a bit rotten, Talbot, old man, that you should be worried about what's long past and done with. But that man can't come back here, at all events."

Talbot was silent.

Tom Merry sat on the edge of the table, regarding his class anxiously. It was evident that the news of the Professor's escape from the police worried the Shell fellow.

"What's the trouble, Talbot, old chap?" said Tom. "You can tell me, I suppose?"

"You know my story," said Talbot in a low voice. "You know I was a crackman's man, brought up in the gang of which my father was the leader. You know the life I led before I came here—a thief among thieves!" Talbot shivered a little. "It seems too horrible now to think of, but there it is. The Professor—his name is Rivers—was Captain Cross's right-hand man in the gang, and Captain Cross was my father. He knew me from my childhood, the Professor did, and—and I was brought up with his daughter Marie."

"He had a daughter?" said Tom Merry slowly. "The rotter! That ought to have kept him straight."

Talbot smiled faintly.

"Marie was one of the gang," he said. "A better girl never breathed, and I was very fond of her; she was just my age. But she was brought up to help her father in his work—and you know the kind of work it is—just as I was brought up. I've thought about her very much since I've been here, and"

wished I could get a chance of finding her and helping her to do as I've done—throw the past behind and make a fresh start."

"A girl—brought up to be a thief!" said Tom.

"Yes. And yet a better girl never lived—except for that. And how was she to learn better?" said Talbot bitterly. "I've had my chance, but she never had a chance. And her father is the biggest scoundrel in the gang! And she's fond of her—her father."

"It's rotten," said Tom—"rotten! But, old chap, all that's done with you, as far as you are concerned. Everybody at St. Jim's knows your history—knows that you are reformed. They need to call you the Toff—and you've proved a toff, and no mistake! The gang can't last any more. They did their worst against you when you attacked up the old life, and they can't do anything more."

"I hope so!"

"But—"

"The Professor isn't a man to be beaten easily," said Talbot. "He wants me back in the gang. Kid as I am, I was the best crackman, and he knows it. I should be worth a fortune to them. When he was here in disguise under a false name I gave him a chance to get out, for the sake of old times and for Marie's sake. Then he was arrested—at my word. The Professor doesn't forget! I've not heard the tale of him, I know that! He won't leave a stone unturned to get me back into the old gang. And he's cunning—cunning as a fox. What he will do I don't know—try to disgrace me here somehow, perhaps, and make it necessary for me to give up my scholarship and get out. Then I should be without resources, and he would think I should turn to the old life again."

"But you wouldn't," said Tom quietly.

"I know you, Talbot; you'd starve before you would steal!"

"You're right there, Tom. I've seen the light now," said Talbot quietly. "But it's not right for me to bother you with all this. You've had enough to put up with on my account already."

"I'm glad you told me," said Tom Merry. "You know you've got a pal to stand by you through thick and thin, anyway, Talbot. And if that scoundrel should try to trouble you again, he'll have two to deal with instead of one!"

But the cloud did not leave Talbot's face.

It was a hard struggle the Toff had made to throw off the influence of the dark days of the past and face life afresh. But he had made it, and he had won. But the shadow of the past, when he looked back upon it, was over his young life.

In the darkness of the past there was one bright spot. It was the face of his girl—his laughing face, with clear eyes of blue; a face he knew that he could never forget.

Marie—sweet, kind-hearted Marie—was still in the toils the Toff had escaped from, her devotion to her father blinding her to everything else. And her father was the Professor—John Rivers, the crackman and forger! To save Marie, to lead her to tread a new path—as he had done—that had been the Toff's dream. And with the Professor safe behind prison bars, it might have been possible.

But the Professor was free. And could Talbot raise his hand against the father of his old sweetheart—the girl who in those old days had turned her through a dangerous thicket and perhaps saved his life? He knew that he could not.

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An unscrupulous foe, who would hesitate at no cunning device, was already plotting against his loser and his happiness. He knew that. And in the struggle with his wily enemy the Toff was disgraced.

CHAPTER 4.

The Potted Thing!

"PUT on your best bib and tuck, dear boy!"

That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and the weather, having done its worst, had turned over a new leaf, and a keen sun was shining down on St. Jim's. Football practice was going on. With so many members of the junior team laid up, the Grammarian match had been scratched for that afternoon. But Arthur Augustus was not thinking about football.

The wall of St. Jim's was resplendent. Nerry had his trousers been so beautifully crossed—never had his elastic legs quite so many, or his silk hat so beautifully polished. There was evidently something "on."

"Hallo! What's the game?" asked Minty Leather, with a yawn. "Wherefore this splendour?"

"It comes Ethel coming!" asked Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus shook his head. "No, dear boy. I've just heard from Mr. Wootton that Miss March is coming, and I thought it would be worth a good idea to go and give her a greeting in the name of the school. You fellows and Talbot had better come along with me."

"But who is Miss March?" asked Tom Merry.

"She is the new niece," said Talbot. "Oh, a niece!" granted Leather. Arthur Augustus turned his capstern severely upon Minty Leather.

"You are probably aware, Leather, that there is a shortage of names. The Head has been waltz-bellied to get enough of them to look after the chairs in the sun-rooms. There is a new one coming to-day from an institution in London—in London—the Little Sisters of the Poor, they are called. One of the Little Sisters is coming here to-day, and I consider it would be worth decent for some chaps to meet her at the station. As they don't take any pay for nurses' people, it's very decent of them, and I wadish think we ought to testify some gratitude to the Little Sister—what?"

"Hear, hear!" said Minty Leather. "I'm going down to the footer, but you can testify my gratitude for me!"

"Lorward, you are!" said Tom Merry. But Minty Leather snarled away, and D'Arcy turned his capstern upon Tom Merry and Talbot. He was full of his new idea.

"I want you fellows are coming," he said. "It might look wadish pushing young men in London—the Little Sisters is a wadish young one. Very likely she will be wadish herself, and a kind greeting will back her up, you know. You are coming, Tom Merry?"

"Well, there's the footer, you know. On reflection, I think I can safely leave it to your hands, Gassy. You can do the honours for the whole school."

"You utter me! Psey don't walk away while I'm talkin', you duffish! Talbot, dear boy, I want you are coming. I don't want to go alone, you know. It started to woman she would love to be met by some one follows her up. Come along, dear boy!" Talbot cast a glance in the direction

of the football field, and then gave in. He was going to a good-natured fellow.

"Right!" he said cheerfully. "Come on, then, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "We had better get off."

The two juniors walked across the quad to the gates and set off down the lane to Rycomb.

Half-way to the village three figures were sighted, sitting in a row on a stile. They were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Wootton major, of the Fourth Form at Rycomb Grammar School, and at the sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Talbot they exchanged a grin.

Gordon Gay jumped down from the stile and stepped into the road.

"Hallo!" he said cheerfully. "Fancy meeting you, Gassy! What have you been watching the match today for?"

"Most of the fellows laid up with influenza, dear boy. Psey don't delay me, as I am wadish in a hurry."

"No lack, Gay," said Talbot. "We're going to the station."

"Lark!" said Gay solemnly. "Do I look as if I were looking? I want to inquire after the health of the poor little invalids. How are they getting on with their good, Gassy?"

"Wadly, Gay—"

"What! White?"

From behind the hedge came two sneaky and waddy lumps of turf, waddy dead men.

Arthur Augustus gave a yell.

One of them caught his silk hat and sent it flying, and the other landed in his neck, with wadish results to his beautiful collar.

"Oh! Oh! You awful wottable!"

"What! Spanish! Spanish! Spanish!"

Wootton major and Monk were going strong. The sight of Arthur Augustus arrayed in his most elegant style was irresistible. They didn't aim at Talbot; he did not look so tempting. But waddy lumps of turf were squashed all over his hat.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon Gay. "Gassy, you look waddy!"

Arthur Augustus dabbed at his face, which was streaming with mud.

Talbot ran round Gordon Gay to get out of the line of fire, and Arthur Augustus, his shaking legs fit as the Grammarian, followed Talbot. Turf whizzed after them as they sped along the lane, but they were soon out of range.

"My hat!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"We're out of fire now!" gasped Talbot.

"But my hat—"

"Your hat?"

"Yes, it's left behind."

Arthur Augustus looked back along the lane. The Grammarians were playing football with his silk topper in the distance. Arthur Augustus shook an indignant fist at them.

"Oh, the wottable! The wadish beast!"

"Nerry mind; we've got through," said Talbot, consolingly.

"Yes; but look at me!" gasped D'Arcy.

Talbot looked at him, and he could not help smiling. Halloo, Arthur Augustus was simply smothered with mud. The state of the wall of St. Jim's was deplorable.

"It's horrid!" growled Arthur Augustus. "I don't see anything at all to grin at, Talbot. I can't possibly meet Miss March in this shocking state. How can I present myself before a lady without a hat, and smothered with horrid mud?"

"Oh, I dare say she won't mind."



In a draggled crowd, Tom Merry & Co. followed Kiltara into the School House. As they came in, leaving road and pools of water where they tread, Mr. Mattson met them. "Blimey, my good!" he exclaimed. "What is this?" "The young fellows have been playing football in the pouring rain!" said Kiltara.

said Talbot, laughing. "I don't see how it can be helped now, anyway!"

"Wait! You must go on alone to the station," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose I can trust you to meet the lady, Talbot?"

"Yes, if you like."
"I will drop in at Mr. Wigg's, and get myself cleaned," said Arthur Augustus, with a shrug. "I am in a most disgusting state. He may be able to lend me a hat—no a cap, at any rate. Take a hat back and stop at Mr. Wigg's, and if I look all right by that time I will join you again—see!"

"Right—ho!"
The two juniors walked on to the village and Arthur Augustus left Talbot at the shop of the village tailor. The Shell junior, smiling, went on to the station alone.

CHAPTER 5. ON PAH!

"**M**ARIE!" Talbot panted out the name.

He had entered the station and gone upon the platform. The train was in and the passengers were coming towards the exit.

Talbot was there to meet Miss March, the nurse. But all thought of Miss March was suddenly driven from his mind at the sight of a face he knew well—a face he had not seen for a very long time, but which he was never likely to forget.

A girl of about his own age, with a charming, candid face, and clear blue eyes. She wore a long reincoat and carried a bag in her hand.

Talbot met her face to face as she came down the platform.

He stopped dead.

"Marie—what are you doing here?"

The girl stopped, too.

Talbot did not even raise his cap. He stood dumbfounded. The cool, iron-nerved Toff seemed to lose all his nerve at the sight of that fresh, pretty face, with the clear blue eyes that had a mocking light in their depths.

"The Toff!" murmured the girl.

"Marie!"
The girl nodded, showing a glimpse of white, even teeth.

"You came to meet me?" she said.

"No. I—I did not know you were coming here. I came to meet somebody else," stammered Talbot.

"But you are glad to see me?" asked Marie.

Talbot did not reply. He looked round among the passengers for the name he had come here to meet. But there was no sign of her. All the other passengers, besides Marie Brown, were men. The name had evidently not come by that train.

Talbot was glad of it.
"Well!" said Marie, gazing at him with her mocking eyes. "Well, Toff! You look as if you were in a dream!"

"It seems like a dream to see you again, Marie," said Talbot, in a low voice. "What are you doing here?"

Marie laughed.

"I have come by the train."

"And the Professor? Is he here?"

"You did not see him?"

Talbot started violently and looked round. But the passengers were gone from the station now; the train were left alone on the platform.

"He was there—among them!" asked Talbot.

"You did not see him?"

"No."

"Good!" said Marie calmly. "He has had more luck this time than when he came to St. Jim's as Mr. Pockington—and you betrayed him."

Talbot winced.

"Marie, what does this mean? What are you doing here? What is your father doing here? Tell me, Marie."

"I will tell you, if you like. Let us sit down—the porter is already staring at us," said Marie lightly.

They went into a deserted waiting-room. Talbot seemed to be dazed. The blow he had feared had come! The Professor had come back!

What did it mean—for him?

A look of deep gloom settled over the Shell fellow's handsome face.

Marie's mocking face softened, and she touched the Toff lightly on the arm.

"What is it?" she said softly. "Are you so sorry to see me again, Toff? And we need to be such pals, you and I?"

"Marie, you know I'm glad to see you," said Talbot desperately. "Even though it means harm to me, your coming here, I'm glad to see you. But—but what is the game? What is your father doing here? He means harm to me. I know that."

Marie shook her head.

"It is you who have done the harm, Toff. You have forgotten your old friends; you have betrayed an old pal. What change has come over you? In the old days you were the most reckless and daring of all. And now—now you have changed—now you are not even true to your old friends. You betrayed my father—"

"I did not," said Talbot. "You don't understand, Marie. I tell you I've

given it up—P've done with the past! The Professor came to St. Jim's in disguise, with forged papers to show the blond. When I knew at last who he was, I gave him a chance to go. But he would not. He trapped me and refused to carry out his scheme of adding the blond.

"You don't know how much Dr. Holmes has done for me, Marie. He has been like a father to me. If I had stood aside then, I should have been an ungrateful villain. I could not. I gave the Professor a chance, and he would not take it. Then I did what I had to do—my duty. And I am not sorry! Though, for your sake, I was glad to learn afterwards that he was free again. I knew what a blow it would be to you."

"You cared for that?"

"I did care for that, Marie."

"Yet you gave him away?"

"I had no choice, I tell you," said Talbot heavily. "I could not let my benefactor be robbed. What sort of a fellow do you think I am?"

"I think you are a fool, Toff!" said Marie, the speaking light in her eyes again. "What are you waiting your life at school for? You might be rich—so rich as you could desire—instead of working at a schoolbag on a poor scholarship, in want of money! What life is that, compared with the old life, Toff?" Marie's voice became very earnest. "You are playing a fool's game here; it cannot last. Sooner or later you will grow sick of the dullness of it; you will grow tired of poverty and hard work. Why not throw it up and come back to your friends?"

Talbot shook his head without speaking.

"They would all welcome you," said the girl eagerly. "They miss you—they resent your deserting them. But they'd forgive it all if you'd come back. Think of the life—danger, excitement, wealth—compare it with what you lead now. What does your present life offer you in comparison?"

"Honestly," said the Toff steadily. "A clear conscience, Marie. Better poverty and honesty with it than wealth that is not mine, Marie. When I came to St. Jim's, it was like the scales falling from my eyes. I had never seen things in their true light before. I was what I had been taught to be. If you knew the fellow—Tom Merry and the rest—you'd understand. They've been so decent. They know what I have been, and it makes no difference to them, because they have confidence in me; they know I'm straight now. Never will I betray their confidence. I've made a right choice, and I mean to stand by it."

Marie's lip curled.

"Then we are enemies?" she said.

"Never that," said Talbot.

"My father's enemies are mine," said Marie proudly.

"I'm not your father's enemy. I only ask him to let me alone," explained Talbot. "Why can't he leave me in peace?"

"You are so valuable, Toff. We've talked on bad days since you left us. You must come back."

"I cannot come back."

"Not even for my sake?" said the girl softly.

Talbot's lips twitched.

"Not even for your sake, Marie. I'd hoped—I thought that I might have a chance of seeing you, to—so bring you to my way of thinking, Marie."

"And desert my father?" said the girl contemptuously.

The Gem Library.—No. 1,548.

LAUGH THESE OFF!



—with Monty Lowther.

Hallo, Everybody!

Trains dashed through Wayland Station. "Why didn't it stop?" demanded Mr. Hatfield angrily. "I knew it wouldn't," answered the station-master placidly. "You see, the engine driver owns me five bob!"

What makes a GEM reader-happy and contented? Well, this week it's a gift!

"The last time I was shipwrecked," said the old salt, "I lived for a month on a tin of corned beef!" "My beef!" exclaimed Wally D'Arny. "You didn't have much room to walk about, did you?"

Blake tells me that all fishes will soon be made in colour. None are shall be able to see if the villain really looks gelatin.

"Baker's cart is much better up traffic," says a periodical. Road and jam!

A man once arrested in September for tripping over a doormat. The trouble was it was too new, and the doormat was in somebody else's house!

Many film stars are now refusing to give autographs, they say. A won't-sign of the times.

There is a sleep going round that Mr. Martin Gifford recently ditched a GEM along over the telephone. He has been asked not to do it again, as all the exchange operators plugged in to Martin!

"Now, you young scamp," said P. O. Crump, "you can't catch fish 'ere without a permit!"

"That's all right," replied Wally D'Arny airily. "I'm managing very nicely with just a worm."

They say Shakespeare's rather queer sense comes from his having slept where poetry under a strong quilt.

A Yorkshire reader wants stories about ice and snow. Two explorers met at the North Pole. They gave each other the frozen talk.

"Do you know any hot stories?" asks a reader. A man sat right on top of a volcano. And not for long.

I hear there is a man in Rydzko who is so two-faced his barber has to shave him twice.

Chin, chin, chaps!

"Your father has no claim on you if he persists in following a life of crime. He is clever enough to make his way in the world honestly—there is no excuse for him. And he has no right to drag you down with him," said Talbot heavily. "Give him his choice of turning up his way of life, or parting with you."

"Never! He is my father!"

"But—but for that, Marie, you would—"

Marie gave a shiver of her pretty shoulders.

"Perhaps! Who knows? But I will never desert him, and I will never disown him. He has enough money and false friends without his own child turning against him."

Talbot gave a groan. What was he to say before that blind devotion, a devotion noble in itself, though felt towards a worthless and unscrupulous enemy? He knew that nothing he could say would turn the girl from her purpose. For good or ill, she was bound to her father.

There was a long silence. The girl watched anxiously the working of the handsome face of the St. Jim's fellow. Talbot broke the silence at last.

"Why is he here?" he asked. "He has come for me?"

Marie nodded.

"He hopes to induce me to return, or to force me—"

"We never you so much, Toff."

"It will never be. You can remember, in the old days, Marie, I was always a fellow of my word."

"Then—the blue eyes gleamed—"

"You are my father's enemy, Toff!" "Not his enemy, for your sake, Marie. But I will have nothing to do with him. Let him go; the world is wide, and he need not cross my path. But if he tries to cross his gate at St. Jim's, then I will denounce him, come what may."

"Betray him and you betray me!" said the girl disdainfully. "Well, I am here, at your mercy. You have only to call the police now."

"You know I shall not do that, Marie," muttered Talbot.

Marie rose to her feet.

"It is useless to talk; you have lost your sense." She passed, a slight smile breaking on her face. "What did you come to the station for, Toff? You came to meet someone?"

"Yes—a man," said Talbot, rising heavily. "It doesn't matter, she has not come—"

"One of the Little Sisters of the Poor?"

"Yes," said Talbot, in surprise.

"How did you know?"

Marie laughed, a clear, silvery laugh. "How good! Then you can talk me to St. Jim's?"

"To St. Jim's!" said Talbot.

"Yes, so that is what you have come here for."

Talbot looked at her blankly. Marie laughed again.

"I am Miss March," she said. "I am the Little Sister."

CHAPTER 8.

THE NEW NURSE!

TALBOT staggered back.

"Marie!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

He had not dreamed of that. Miss March, the Little Sister of the Poor, the nurse who was coming to St. Jim's—it was Marie, the cook-room's daughter! It was a stunning blow to the unhappy boy. That was the professor's game, then! Marie was to

be placed in the school—for what, he could guess only too well. The Professor, lurking in the village in his ransacking disguise, would always be at hand to help her.

Talbot could not speak. He could only gaze at the girl in amazement. That was the game, he knew it now, and there was only one way of baffling it—to denounce the girl who had been his best friend, to hand over Marie to the police—and that, he knew, he could never do.

"Hai Jewel! Here you are!"

An elegant figure loomed up in the doorway of the waiting-rooms.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, resplendent as ever, with a brand-new silk topcoat—a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, from the crown of his shining hat in the tips of his elegant shoes.

Arthur Augustus raised his shining silk topcoat to Miss March, with the elegance that was all his own.

"I've been waitin' for you, Talbot, dear boy, and I came on to the station," he said cheerily. "So Miss March has arrived?"

"Yes," stammered Talbot—"yes! This—this is—"

The words died on his tongue. The train had come unexpectedly soon.

He had to present Marie Rivers to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as Miss March, the new name, or he had to

"Marie!"

Marie walked to the door. Talbot followed her with heavy, stumbling footsteps. All the light was gone out of his handsome face.

"You will go, Marie—you will go (there as a name)!"

"I am a name," said Marie calmly. "I am a member of the Little Sisters of the Poor. They do not know my name, but they know I am a good name. You should know that, too, Talbot; but you have a bad memory."

"I remember it, Marie, and I have never ceased to be grateful. But—"

"There was a time when you told me that you would do anything for me," said Marie mockingly. "You told me I had saved your life, and that your life belonged to me. You do not choose to remember it now."

"I remember it only too well, Marie; and you have just had proof of it," said Talbot harshly. "But tell me, Marie, you will go to St. Jim's simply as a name—you will not—you will not—"

"He broke off, "I shall do as my father directs me."

"Then—then I also must think what I must do," Talbot said desperately. "Come what may, Dr. Holman shall not suffer."

"Do as you choose!" Marie walked out of the waiting-

roomed him, but he felt certain he would not say anything. Marie was the security for that.

They arrived at the school, and after Arthur Augustus had paid the taxi-driver, the two juniors conducted Miss March to the Head's house.

Tom Merry and Lowther had come off the football field, and they spotted them in the queue, and raised their caps.

Monty Lowther expressed the opinion to his chums that the new name was "stealing." Indeed, he said that he envied Manners now.

"Talbot seems to look down in the mouth," said Tom Merry.

"Catching the flu, perhaps," said Lowther.

Miss March disappeared into the Head's house. Talbot and D'Arcy came back to the school House—the latter smiling with great satisfaction, the former fussy and silent.

"Did you see her, dear boy?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "Sorry we didn't come."

"Sorry you might," said Arthur Augustus severely, "though, of course, I should have gone just the same even if she had been a little bit homely like the other names. Quite a wisp of young lady. I've been thinkin'—"

"Go on!" murmured Lowther.

"I've been thinkin'," repeated Arthur Augustus loudly, "that turns

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betray her as the crackman's daughter. That was his choice, and he had only one instant in which to make it.

Marie was smiling. She knew the struggle that was going on in the Toff's mind; she knew of her danger. But not a sign of it appeared in her smiling face.

Arthur Augustus looked a little surprised. He could not help seeing that something was "on," though he was not particularly observant.

"Miss March," stammered Talbot, at last, "this—this is Gussie—this is D'Arcy, one of my pals at St. Jim's. We—we've come to take you to the school, if you will allow us."

"The die was cast!"

"You are very kind," said Marie sweetly. "I thank you very much. It is really kind of you."

"Not at all, my dear young lady," said Arthur Augustus. "It is an honour and a pleasure. A taxi is waitin' outside. Is there anything I can do—"

"My trunk, I think, is on the platform," said Marie.

"Right-ho! I'll look afish it at once."

Arthur Augustus, glad to be useful, hurried out on to the platform. Marie looked at Talbot with her mocking smile.

"Well, done, Toff! You have succeeded for me now—I enter St. Jim's as your responsibility."

Talbot gave a groan.

"Marie! It's not too late—you can't go to the school—"

"But I am going."

room. Talbot followed her slowly, miserably.

The problem was hammering in the shrewish boy's brain—what was he to do? He denounce Marie or to allow her to carry out the Professor's ardent undertakings? The choice was terrible—but it had to be made, and delay only made matters worse. Yet delay was his only resort; he must have time to think.

The little leather trunk had been placed in the taxi, and Arthur Augustus was waiting for them. The wail of St. Jim's helped Marie into the cab with his inevitable grace. He did not notice Talbot's harassed looks—Arthur Augustus was a lady's man, and all his attention was bestowed upon Miss March.

Talbot entered the cab, and it hoveled away down the village street. Arthur Augustus chatted with his fair companion, while Talbot sat silent and troubled.

A man passed them in the lane, snuffing along carefully—a man with a small, dark-brown beard and mustache, and an eyeglass, well-dressed, debonair. He paused to look at them; and Talbot's eyes fell upon him, and he started.

The man smiled a little; Talbot turned his eyes to stare at him as they hurried on.

It was the Professor. Talbot's eyes had penetrated the disguise. The man with the eyeglass snuffed on towards the village. He knew that Talbot

have washed a boat of a honey, lookin' afish beady invade. They weighin a little change and excitement, making Jack as dull boy. I've been thinkin' that it's up to us, you know, to see that Miss March has a little amusement while she is here—what?"

"Ho, ha, ha!"

"I fall to see any reason for wildish laughin'," said the wail of St. Jim's frontingly. "I wogard it (from a point of view of duty. What do you think, Talbot?"

"Oh?" said Talbot confusedly. "Yes, certainly, Tea ready, you fellows?"

"Yes!" said Arthur Augustus solemnly. "Hai Jewel, you've thinkin' about tea! I wogard you as an us, Talbot."

"Ho, ha, ha!"

"He was stinn' in the taxi without speakin' a word all the way back," said Arthur Augustus. "Lookin' like a boiled owl, hai Jewel! Anybody would think that Miss March was a Gorgee, instead of bein' very really as nice as my Cousin Fitch. I am surprised at you, Talbot."

Talbot smiled faintly and went into the School House.

The four juniors were soon gathered at tea in Tom Merry's study; but in spite of Talbot's inquiry after that week, it was noticeable that he spoke hardly anything. And he spoke scarcely a word. The Toff had one of his black moods on again evidently.

CHAPTER 7.

Frayne's Trouble!

MANNERS blinked at Tom Merry with wavy eyes. It was the day after Miss March's arrival at St. Jim's, and Tom Merry had obtained permission to visit his old chums in the sanatorium, with Lewther, for a few minutes.

Nearly all the beds in the school hospital were occupied, and the nurses had plenty to do. Manners was glad to see his chums again.

"How are you getting on, old man?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically—keeping well away from the bed, as he had been instructed by the head nurse.

"Keener!" said Manners.

"Free old chap?"

"It's brassy. I'm on the stand. I'm going to measure Frayne when I get well. All that fathead's fault! My head's buzzing like a beehive. Oh!"

"Hard cheese!" said Lewther. "I say, have you seen the new nurse?" asked Manners.

"Miss March? Yes."

"She's a giddy angel," said Manners. "Makes it much nicer for a chap when a nice girl comes and has a jaw with him for a few minutes. I hope you haven't cracked up the Miss I left in the study."

"Tom Merry smiled.

"They're all right, old son. I hope you'll soon be back. Talbot and Gassy are digging in the study at present."

"Next week!" groaned Manners.

The nurse made a sign to the lioness, and they nodded to poor old Manners and passed on, to exchange a word or two with the other invalids. They came to Frayne's bed and found the Third Formist looking decidedly queer.

The head nurse directed to them not to step there.

"Is he very bad?" whispered Tom Merry.

"He was best of all at first," said Miss Finch, the head nurse; "but today he seems to be worse, for some reason I cannot understand. He seems to be troubled in his mind."

"Troubled in his mind?" repeated Tom.

"Yes. He is rather an odd boy," said Miss Finch. "He speaks very differently from the others. Quite an odd boy."

"He's a splendid little chap," said Tom Merry. "He had hard luck before he came here, nurse. He was a wail in a London slum, and had an awfully bad time, and my uncle sent him to St. Jim's. He's as good as gold!"

Miss Finch nodded.

"He has been asking to see somebody named Talbot to-day," she said. "Is that a great friend of his?"

Tom Merry started.

"Talbot! That's a fellow in the Shell—my Poem. He knew Frayne in his bad days, a good time ago. They don't see much of each other here. Talbot would come like a chat if he knew that Joe wanted to see him."

"He is in too foreign a state for seeing anybody," said Miss Finch. "He has been mumbling most strangely about someone he speaks of as the Tall."

"That's a—a nickname for Talbot," said Tom Merry, colouring. He did not feel inclined to explain further on that subject.

"Oh, I see! He has been repeating another name, too—a girl's name," said



"Lizzie, not this ground's surrounded by a canal, a cemetery, a rubbish dump, and a hospital. We ain't going to lose, are we?"

Half-growned has been awarded to A. Tyler, 55, Finsley Crescent, Waterwood Estate, Sheffield 2.

Miss Finch. "Has he a friend at the school, or near by named Marie?"

"Marie?" said Tom. "Not that I know of. There's nobody about St. Jim's with that name that I've ever heard of." Then Tom gave a sudden start, remembering Talbot's confidences. "Yes, now that I think of it, he knew somebody of that name long ago, when he was a kid in Angel Alley."

"He has repeated the name many times," said Miss Finch, "quite devoutly. Indeed, he called one of the nurses Marie when she came to the bed to give him his medicine."

"Poor little kid!"

"But what the deuce can be worrying him like that?" said Morry Lewther, in wonder. "If you think he might see Talbot, nurse, Talbot would come at once."

"The doctor's instructions were that he was to see no one," said Miss Finch. "But when Dr. Short comes again I will speak to him about it."

The two Shell fellows left the ward, a little worried in their minds. They were concerned about poor little Joe. He was such a happy-go-lucky, careless little chap as a rule that it seemed extraordinary that he should have any trouble on his mind in addition to his illness.

They found Talbot in the study when they came back; he noticed their expressions at once.

"None of the fellows worse, I hope?" he asked quickly.

"Only Frayne," said Tom Merry.

"Young Frayne? Poor kid!" said Talbot, with feeling. "I hope it's not going to be serious. I suppose his constitution isn't quite so strong as the others; he must have had a lot of under-feeding in the old days. That sort of thing tells when you have to go through an illness."

"I don't know if it's that," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Miss Finch, the head nurse, says he got worse to-day; either he's feverish, or there's something on his mind. He wants to see you."

Talbot did not seem surprised.

"I'm ready to go to him," he said. "The nurse is going to speak to the doctor about it when he comes. He'll be here again this afternoon. You remember you mentioned a name to me the other day—a girl's name—"

Talbot turned pale.

"I—I remember," he said in a low voice. "Marie! It doesn't matter if you speak before Lewther, Tom."

"Well, that kid knew Miss Marie, I suppose, as well as you!" said Tom.

Talbot nodded.

"Yes. She did a lot for the poor," said Talbot. "She looked after Frayne when he was knocked down by a rail and laid up. Goodness knows how he'd have lived if she hadn't taken care of him!"

"He seems to have got her name on his mind now, the nurse says," said Tom Merry. "I dare say it's being ill makes him think of her; if she nursed him when he was ill before."

Miss Finch says that he called one of the nurses Marie when she came to do something for him.

Talbot started.

"Which nurse?" he asked. "Blessed if I know! I didn't ask. One of them," said Tom. "It shows the poor kid is feverish."

"I—I think I ought to see him," said Talbot anxiously. "You know, I've got a lot of influence over him. He used to like me when I was the Toff, and he hasn't forgotten a few trifling things I did for him then. I'd like to see him."

"It depends on the doctor."

Arthur Augustus came into the study with a smiling face.

"You weedy!" he asked. "I say, you chaps, she is weedy wippin'!"

"Who is?" asked Talbot.

"Miss March. She has just been takin' her constitutional in the gym."

Arthur Augustus explained. "I took the liberty of peering' her. I apologized for my cheek, but I explained that I thought she might like to be shown round St. Jim's. She looks wippin' in her uniform! Don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes!" said Talbot absently.

"You haven't an eye for beauty, you beast!" She is awfully intelligent for a gal, too!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have had quite a cheery talk, and I hope I have cheered her up a bit. She has been lookin' alk young Frayne, you know—lucky little beggin'! She's awfully interested in the school; asked all sorts of questions about the place, you know. She laughed like anything when I told her about the way we get out of the box-window exercises at half ten, and made me take her round the School House and point out the windows, and how we climbed up to it over the roofless. Hal Jove! What's the matter with you, Talbot!"

"Nothing!"

"You had quite a queer expression on your face, old chap. I trust you are not sickenin' for the fit?"

"Fit as a fiddle," said Talbot.

"Well, you don't look very fit. Keep your poekah up, dear boy."

And Arthur Augustus set down to tea. He kept up a cheery chat all the time, without noticing Talbot's silence.

But Tom Merry noticed it, and wondered. It was not like Talbot to be silent and downcast. Did it mean that his anticipations had been realized and that his old enemy had come back?

Tom Merry would not attempt to force his chum's confidence, but he felt very troubled.

There was a tap at the door as they finished tea, and Toby, the page, looked in.

"Master Talbot?" he said.

Talbot rose from the table at once.

"Dr. Short says that you can see Master Frayne now."

"Thank you," said Talbot.

He left the study at once. Arthur Augustus accompanied him as far as the school hospital in the hope of catching another glimpse of the charming Miss March.

Tom Merry and Monty Leather were left alone in the study.

"Something's up with Talbot," said Leather.

Tom nodded.

"It isn't a secret from you, Monty, though it's not to be jested about, of course. Talbot thinks that accident, the Professor—you remember the man who came here calling himself Mr. Parkington?—Talbot thinks he's coming back to make some attempt to get his legs into his old life!"

Monty Leather gave a low whistle.

"Talbot's only got to dot him in the eye or hand him over to Inspector Skoot," he said. "Old Skoot will be glad to bag him a second time!"

"His daughter—the girl we were speaking of—in Talbot's old rhaps. He can't last her father without hurting her. He won't do anything against the ratter. Look here, Monty, Talbot's our pal, and it's up to us!"

"Any old thing," said Leather. "If I come across the old villain I'll jolly soon put the boobies on him, I know that. His daughter isn't my chum."

"Nor mine," said Tom. "I'm sorry for the poor girl! She seems to be a good sort, by Talbot's description, but under the thumb of her rascally father. It's hard to blame a young gal for being led where her own father leads her; but what an utter villain he must be!"

"Awful ratter!" agreed Leather.

"Talbot's hands are tied, but eyes are free," said Tom Merry speedily. "Look here, Monty, if the fellow is hanging about here we ought to be able to spot

him. Strangers are pretty quickly noticed in a quiet country place like this. We'll find out if there's a stranger staying at Rylands, and if there is—"

"Harsh him on suspicion!" growled Leather.

"No, now find out if he's the man. And if he is we'll put Inspector Skoot on him without saying a word to Talbot."

Merry Leather regarded his chum admiringly.

"Tommy, old man, you're a giddy genius. I'm with you. Let's get a pass out of gobs from Kildare and cycle down to Rylands now. If there's a stranger in the village we shall find out at the headlamp, and then we can investigate."

"Good egg!" said Tom.

"And not a word to Talbot about it."

"Not a syllable."

Two minutes later the chimneys of the Shell were rising down to the village.

The Professor had other legs to deal with besides the junior who, for Marie's sake, he held in the hollow of his hand.

CHAPTER 8.
Hooest Injan!

"**T**OFF, you've come at last!" It was a faint voice from Joe Frogson's bed as Talbot halted by his side.

The wail of the Third was very pain, sure for a bright spot that burned in either cheek, and his eyes were feverish. Talbot's face was very kind as he bent

beside him. He knew what was in the mind of the sensitive wail of Angel Alley.

"I've come as soon as the doctor would let me, Joe," he said.

"You've seen Marie?"

"Hush!"

"That is the name he has been rattling and repeating, Master Talbot," whispered Miss Finch. "Calm him if you can."

"I will try," said Talbot. Joe's eyes wandered in the maze.

"Leave me alone with Master Talbot," he said. "I want to speak to the Toff, and I don't want nobody else to hear!"

"Joe, old chap!" murmured Talbot.

But Miss Finch nodded and smiled and left them to themselves.

Marie was not visible in the ward.

"You know 'er Marie's 'ere, Toff?" muttered Joe.

"Yes," said Talbot.

"You've seen 'er, then?"

"Yes, old chap. Don't you worry about that. There's nothing to worry about," said Talbot, with an effort.

"You'll make yourself worse if you worry, lad."

"I ain't got nothin' agin' Miss Marie—Miss March they call 'er 'ere!" whispered Joe.

"Which she was like an angel when I knowed 'er in Angel Alley. You remember the time, p'aps, when that bloke 'oo called 'imself my father—which 'a never was my father at all. You remember 'im being drunk in the garage, and me 'avin' with my legs 'set out' so that our brookin' was over. Miss Marie, she looked arter me like an angel; and you remember you used to



"Marie!" exclaimed Talbot in astonishment. "What are you doing here?" The junior seemed to lose all his nerves at the sight of that fresh pretty face, with the clear blue eyes that had a mocking light in their depths. "The Toff!" she murmured.

come in and give me money for the things I needed, Toff. Which I know 'ow you got the cod in these days, but I was grateful, all the same. And Marie was an angel, Toff. But—"

"She was always good, Joe." "So you understand I ain't got nothing 'gain 'er," said Joe. "But—but you've she done 'ere, Toff? You remember when you first came I told you if you was up to the old game I wouldn't stand it 'ow—not even arter all you'd done for me. It's the same now with Miss Marie. Won't she do 'ere, Toff?"

"She has come to help mine," said Toff.

Joe smiled. "Yes, I know; ar' I know that in them days she went to 'elp mine in other places, and I know you 'appened in them places, Toff. You know, too. You was in the thick of it in them days?"

Toff chuckled. Then, days, as Joe Frayne expressed it, were not so very far behind him, but whole oceans of time seemed to have flowed between his old life and his new.

But what he had been, Marie still was, and the evident suspicion of the lady went was well founded, and not all his gratitude for old kindnesses would keep Joe Frayne silent if he found that the old game was afoot at St. Mar's.

The feverishly bright eyes were watching Talbot's face. Joe seemed to be seeking to read his thoughts.

"Toff," he went on, "you wouldn't let them do it—'ow wouldn't, arter all that's been done for you 'ere. I know as Marie was your pal, but you couldn't do it, Toff—you couldn't let the Professor carry out his game 'ere."

"You can rely on that," said Talbot quietly.

"I won't be far off—the Professor," said Joe. "I know what Miss Marie is 'ere fer—I ain't a fool! All ready for the Professor to get busy, Toff. They'll get you into their 'ands if they can; but anyway, the 'ead's safe in their game. And it ain't goin' to 'appen, Toff—not even if I 'ave to give Miss Marie away!"

Talbot drew a quick, almost sobbing breath.

"Don't do that, Joe." "Which I don't want to!" growled Joe. "But the game ain't goin' to be played 'ere, Toff!"

"You can rely on me, Joe," said Talbot, sinking his voice. "I know it all, and I'm on my guard. I promised you that what you're afraid of shall not happen. You know I'm a fellow of my word. I'll stop it, even if it means ruin to me, as it may. On my word, Joe, there's nothing to be feared."

"Honest Japan, Toff!"

"Honest Japan!" said Talbot. Joe stretched a feeble hand over the counter, and Talbot took it in his own strong palm.

"I know what I've got to do, Joe," said the Shell junior. "You can trust me. Don't think anything more about it. Don't worry; you'll only make yourself ill. Leave it to my hands."

Joe's feverish face was already calmer.

"That's all I wanted to know, Toff; I know I can trust you."

Joe Frayne sank back on his pillows. The nurse approached.

Talbot pressed Joe's hand and left him. He left him reassured. The faith of the little waif in Talbot was complete.

Talbot left the ward. Marie was arranging a pillow for Blake as he passed out.

The Gem Library.—No. 1,548.

She came away from Blake's bed, and gave Talbot a smile and a nod. He whispered a word in passing.

"I must speak to you!"

"I have at eight," she whispered in reply, and passed on.

Talbot left the building. It was dark in the quadrangle, but he did not return to the School House. He passed to and fro under the old elms, thinking.

The interview with Joe Frayne had introduced a fresh factor in the problem—a new complication. It was not all in the Toff's hands now. If there were a robbery at the school, there was another tongue to speak—and that would speak. Did Marie know her danger? If she did not know, he would tell her; and the Professor, at least, would understand that it would not do.

The intervention of the little waif might indeed solve the problem that baffled Talbot.

He passed in and fro in the dark quad till eight o'clock rang out from the tower. Then he hurried away to meet Marie.

The girl came away from the next-room with her coat on, glad to breathe the fresh air of the quadrangle after the warmth of the wards.

Without a word, she followed Talbot towards the Head's garden, where it was quiet and secluded, and their interview was not likely to be seen.

"I have only a quarter of an hour, Toff," murmured Marie. "Have you decided?"

"I decided long ago; I have not changed my mind."

Marie smiled.

"Then why have you asked me to come here?"

"I have just seen Frayne."

"Yes; he has been asking for you. He knows me?"

"He knew you at once, Marie; and if there is anything here, you understand, he will speak. Even if I keep silent, he will speak."

"It is a new complication," smiled the girl. "But Joe is a good boy; he likes me. He will not hurt me if he can help it. And if anything happens here, he will not know until too late. No one is allowed to carry disturbing or exciting news into the wards. You are aware of that. And if he speaks afterwards—after I am gone—it will not matter, will it, Toff?"

"Marie!" muttered Talbot wretchedly.

The new hope that had risen in him died away again.

"Joe will know nothing until it is too late," said Marie.

"I have given him my word that I will see to it!" said Talbot in a choking voice. "I have, given him my word of honour that I will see that the Professor does no harm here!"

"Keep it, then!" said Marie scornfully. "I am loose at your mercy! You have only to go to Dr. Holmes and speak a word."

"You know I cannot!" growled Talbot. "But—but I swear that—that I will keep my word to Joe, at any cost! I know you have begun already; you have been gaining information for the Professor—"

"As I need to gain it for you, Toff!"

"I know it! No need to rub that in! But it won't do, Marie—it won't do! Promise me this, at least—save your father and try to make him give up his design. You might do that at least for me."

"On one condition, Toff."

"And that?"

"That you come with us."

"Impossible!"

"Then there is nothing more to be said!" said the girl coldly. She looked at her companion. A ray of starlight fell upon her face, and shivered it white and strained with misery. "Toff, don't look like that! There was a quiver in her voice. "I don't mean to hurt you. But—"

"There's nothing more to be said!" muttered Talbot dourly. "There's only one thing for me to do—to go. But if I go, I shall not go back to the old life. There is always work for honest hands to do."

"Honest?"

"Honest are honest now, and will always remain so. Be your word, Marie! You will see that I will keep my word!"

"I—I want to do my best for you!" faltered Marie. "I—I will see my father, Toff. I will go to him. On my word, if I can make him give up this scheme, I will do so. I promise you! And I, too, can keep my word."

Before Talbot could reply, the girl turned and left him.

"Marie!"

But she was gone.

The Toff drew his hands deep into his pockets, and strode away towards the School House.

Marie would keep her word. But what influence would she have upon the cold, hard, unscrupulous crackman?

Talbot had little hope. Before five was a dark and dreary prospect; whichever way he looked there was no light.

CHAPTER 3.

Mark's Father!

TOM MERRY and Monty Lowther wheeled their bicycles up to the Hylcombe Arms, and leaned them against a tree and walked to the inn.

The chance of the Shell had been busy; they had been investigating, and they had learned at least a little.

In a village like Hylcombe, a stranger who stayed more than a day was certain to be remarked and commented upon. If the Professor was there, whatever his disguise might be, his presence, at least, would be a subject for discussion among the villagers.

And the two juniors had set themselves to discover whether there was a stranger staying in the village. They (Continued at foot of next page.)



"Goodness, what must have changed his mind and gone back!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss M., "N. 23, Naines Green, Surrey Avenue, Marsh Hill, London, S.W.24.

IDENTIFYING STAMPS

Discovering the origin of a foreign stamp is often a difficult matter. In this article our expert gives many useful tips to help you in this direction.

WHEN examining your stamps, haven't there been quite a few you've found it hard to place? Most beginners have the same experience. But, if you go about it the right way, you'll find tracking down stamps' countries of origin real fun.

Search for Clues.

Put yourself in the place of a detective who's had a problem brought to him. Try searching for clues.

Most fruitful, obviously, would be the reading of a stamp. If several Roman characters are used, there's some hope you'll get a start on their significance, even though the language they express is a near relation to Double-Dutch. If reading words doesn't help, try repeating them aloud. Sometimes foreign words sound different from what they look.

If the lettering isn't Roman, it's not unlikely that the characters give it away. Printmakers, you'd never mistake Chinese or Japanese for, say, Russian. Arabic, again, is very distinctive.



When the wording fails, turn to the stamp's subject. It's exceptional for a stamp not to refer directly to some aspect of life or learning in the country that issues it. For with its world-wide circulation, a stamp is really something of a penny placard, and countries are usually only too eager to seize the opportunity it offers to advertise their progress or excellence.

Very often you'll find a stamp's subject is in keeping with the climatic conditions of its country. In other words, it would be pretty safe to say that a picture of an Eskimo igloo was sponsored by a country in the colder climes.

Portraits, too, are often a very fruitful source of facts. The clothes the subjects wear help a good deal, and it is possible to check up on a person's identity



by comparing it with an illustration in a book of biographies or in an encyclopedia.

Printing and Paper.

Sometimes the way a stamp is printed is a clue to its identity. Hand-
up, less progressive nations or states have found it im-

possible to pay for first-class printing, and so have had to resort to local jobbing printers to provide their stamps. The case for coarse, cheap paper is similar. In Russia, just after the War, things were so bad that cigarette paper had to be pressed into service.

Unless you have a really experienced stamp-collecting friend who can confirm your deductions, refer to a stamp catalogue.

Now, here are some stamps which often prove stumbling-blocks. Let's see how we can practice what we preach. Firstly, the specimen with the crown on it. The wording doesn't tell us much, but the design does, especially the crown. Look in any world-wide encyclopedia or book dealing with crowns and you'll quickly discover that the odd-shaped, turreted crown is that of St. Stephen of Hungary, and from Hungary this stamp hails.

Just one other interesting point about this issue. Before the crown you'll notice a building. Why a bank? The answer's obvious when compared with the three five-bank's home—less, an example to the world of thrift and industry. What's that got to do with a Post Office? Why, surely the savings bank. And that's exactly what was the case. This stamp was intended for use in Hungary during the War in connection with that country's savings bank service.

Whose Badge?

Item No. 2. Here, the wording is useful. You'll note it says a parca-

They entered the old-fashioned inn, where they found the proprietor. That plump and rubicund gentleman told them that Mr. Judd was in the reading-room.

To the reading-room the two juniors immediately proceeded.

Mr. Judd was alone there. He was seated in an armchair, reading the latest paper obtainable in Elycombe. He glanced up carefully as the juniors came in, and then resumed reading his paper.

Monty Leather looked at Tom Merry in doubt. Mr. Judd seemed a perfectly ordinary, respectable gentleman of about forty. He bore not the slightest resemblance to Mr. Packington, who had posed as a science-master at St. Jim's. He looked a bigger man—though that might have been due to the cut and make of his clothes. Certainly, he looked at least twenty years younger.

The only thing against Mr. Judd was

Obviously the stamp's face value. Which country uses or used parca? The encyclopedia says it's a small coin of Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia, Cyprus and Egypt. Obviously the stamp comes from one of these. Well, what about the star and crescent at the top of the stamp? Whose badge was this? The Sultanate. They've disappeared, to be succeeded by whom? The Turks. This, then, is a Turkish stamp, as any catalogue will confirm. The wiggly design in the centre is the totem, or signature, of Sultan Mohammed V. According to ancient decree it was forbidden for the All Highest to have his portrait illustrated, and so his signature had to suffice. Later, this ban was lifted.

Item No. 3. Though some of the letters in the wording do look rather English, the rest of their bear little relation to any we know, for the very good reason that they belong to the Slavonic language. It's the picture which "gives the show away." There's no doubting that the possessor is Russian.

And now for a useful little check list of countries which give trouble:

BAVARIA—Bavaria; BRAUNSCHWEIG

—Braunschweig;

CHERKASSO—

YENSKA—

—Czechoslovakia;

COMMUNIST

—Spain;

—Soviet Union;

—Soviet Union;

—Soviet Union;

—Soviet Union;

—Soviet Union;

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the fact that he was a stranger in Elycombe, and, of course, that was nothing at all. The juniors were at liberty to observe him as much as they liked, but all they could observe was that he did not look in the least like a suspicious person.

Tom Merry sat down at the table opposite Mr. Judd, and while affecting to look over an illustrated paper he eyed the man.

Mr. Judd did not appear to observe it. He read his paper calmly.

The two juniors strolled away to the deep bay window, and stood looking out into the lighted street. Monty Leather nudged his companion.

"Well?" he whispered.

"Looks all wrong," admitted Tom Merry.

"Can't you very well ask him if he's a giddy workman in disguise," murmured Leather, with a nod towards the street. "There's Miss March."

Tom Merry looked down from the window. Miss March had just appeared in sight, coming down the old High Street with her light, graceful walk.

To the astonishment of the janitor, she turned into the porch of the Rykonde Arms and disappeared into the inn. It was no business of theirs, of course, but the janitor could not help wondering what the little Sister would have to do in the village inn at that hour in the evening.

They looked round as the door of the room opened.

Miss March came in, and, without noticing the two juniors in the deep window, assumed at once to the man seated by the table.

"I am sorry I am late," she said, in her clear, sweet voice.

Mr. Judd rose to his feet. He made a gesture, and the girl turned towards the janitor. Tom Merry and Leather advanced at once.

"Top of the evening, Miss March!" said Monty Leather cheerfully.

"You are late out of gates," said the Little Sister, in surprise. "I thought janitors had to be indoors by locking-up!"

"We've got a pass-out," explained Tom Merry. "We've got to be in by half-past eight, though, and it's close on that now. If you are going back to the school—"

Miss March smiled.

"My uncle will see me as far as the school," she said.

"Your—your uncle?"

The janitor felt inclined to kick one another. This brown-bearded gentleman with the spectacles, whom they had suspected of being a possible criminal, was the uncle of Miss March. His business in Rykonde was explained; he had come there to see his niece!

"Yes." The girl turned to Mr. Judd. "These two young gentlemen belong to the school, uncle."

Mr. Judd bestowed a nod on the two juniors. Tom Merry and Leather had a rapid retreat from the reading-room.

Outside the inn they looked at one another grimly before they mounted their bicycles. Tom Merry was frowning, but a grin lurked about Leather's face. He could see the humorous side of the matter.

"What a sell!" growled Tom.

"Harried!" said Leather. "We've spotted the only stranger in the village, and he turns out to be nursery-nanny's term niece."

"Then the Professor can't be in Rykonde, at all events," said Tom.

"If he's come here, he may have put up in Wayland," remarked Leather.

"It's fatherly of, but—ahem—rather a big order to spot and examine all the strangers in Wayland—a vast town. And we've only got ten minutes left."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Tom Merry. "Let's get back!"

And ice chains of the Shell rode back to St. Jim's.

In the room they had left, Miss March was in conversation with the man she had called her uncle. March's quick wit had not failed her, unexpected as the meeting was with the janitor.

Mr. Judd smiled as the door closed behind the boys.

"What were they doing here, father?" asked Maria.

Mr. Judd, alas the Professor, shrugged his shoulders.

"Sitting at me chiefly," he replied. "Sitting at me chiefly," he replied.

"Only interested in me because I am a stranger here, I suppose—they cannot suspect anything. I don't look much like Mr. Frayton now, Maria, do I?"

Maria laughed.

"No, dad! But—but it's odd that they should be here, all the same!" Her pretty brows wrinkled for a moment. "The Toff cannot have told them anything."

The Professor made an impatient gesture.

"Never mind them. Have you any news for me?"

"Yes," said Maria.

"The Toff—what has he said?"

"That he will never come back, in any circumstances. And he means it, father—he means every word of it."

The man with the spectacles sneered.

"He will change his mind; I shall see to that."

"It is useless, father."

"Nonsense!" said the Professor harshly. "Why has he not already given me up, then? He knows I am here. It is for your sake, Maria. And for your sake, too, he will come back. If he does not, there are ways and means."

The Professor smiled easily. "We shall see."

"Father, there is more news than that. Do you remember a little fellow in Angel Alley—a boy with a drunken father, named Frayton?"

"What of him?"

"He is at the school."

The Professor started, and knitted his brows.

"I remember. Hinky Walker told me something of that. I had forgotten. I did not notice the boy when I was here, but he had changed probably. Certainly, he did not know me. I had forgotten. What of him? He is there—has he recognized you?"

"Yes."

"He has spoken?" asked the Professor.

"No; he is ill. I nursed the poor little fellow. You know he used to be devoted to me—and he has not forgotten. He has spoken to the Toff and gone. He has spoken to the Toff and gone to take him Tubbot has promised him to see that—that—you understand. Joe knows why I am there."

"If he is ill, then he need not be reckoned with," said the Professor. "I have, and he has left it all in the Toff's hands, it will be safer still. The Toff will not speak."

"But—"

"You are seeking trouble!" exclaimed the Professor, with a sharp look at the clouded face of the girl.

"Come! What is in your mind? Tell me!"

Maria's lips quivered.

"Father, I—I can't bear this!" The tears rose to her eyes. "If you see the Toff now you would pity him. If he wishes to leave our warts, father, why not let him go! Let us leave him in peace!"

The girl paused as she saw the better sense on the hard face before her.

"I expected something of the sort," said the Professor grimly. "First the Toff, and then you, Maria. He has



"It won't be far off—the Professor," said Joe Frayton, to get busy, Toff. The girl's wife in the corner. And it Tubbot pressed Joe's hand reassuringly.

deserted his old friends, and he is inducing you to desert your father."

"I will never desert you, father," said Maria firmly. "But—but I beg you to give up this scheme. Leave the Toff to lead his own life."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"That is all," said Maria, with a sinking heart.

"Very well; now I will give you your instructions," said the Professor coolly.

"As for Frayton, since he is ill, and in your charge, there is no danger in that quarter. And since you see his nurse you can take care that he does not get well in time to interfere with our plans."

"Father!" It was a cry of horror from the unhappy girl. "What are you saying? Do you think that I could—that I would?"

"Bah! Leave him out of the discussion," said the Professor contemptuously. "I tell you there is no danger in that quarter. As for the Toff, we shall see." The Professor set his teeth for a moment. "But you have your work to do, Maria. I must leave money."

"Money?" muttered Maria.

"Money?" the Professor said sarcastically. "Does that astonish you? What else are I in my profession for? I have not five pounds in my pocket. I am in need of money. Hence they I have set special precautions at the school since I was there! It is likely enough!"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"

"I—I do not know—"



How what Miss Marie is 'ere for—all ready for the Professor's visit to appear—out runs if I 'ave to give Miss Marie away! I 'ave it in my hands," he said.

"You do not know?" exclaimed the Professor fiercely. "You have been in the school twenty-four hours, and you do not know!"

"What do you want me to do, father?" said the girl dully.

"I want you to do what you are there to do," said the Professor severely.

"There are rich boys there. There is money to be had—plenty of it. You know what you are to do."

Marie stood silent.

"What does this mean?" said the Professor harshly. "Why do you not answer me? Has the Toff influenced you so much, then, in one day? At his word you will abandon your father—"

"Nonsense!" said Marie; but her voice had lost all its sweetness, and sounded dull, listless. "I will do as you tell me."

"I have told you what to do. Now, do not stay longer; you do not wish to cause remark and suspicion, I suppose?" greeted the Professor.

Marie shivered, and drew her coat more closely about her. Without another word she quitted her father, and hurried back to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10.

The Watch That Went!

"**B**AD JESU! This is very remarkable!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's expression, also, was remarkable as he made that statement.

"What's the trouble?" purred Lovison of the Fourth.

It was Monday, and lessons were over. The rain was falling in the quadrangle, and most of the School House juniors were in their studies or the Common-rooms—those who were not "down" with influenza.

It was in the Common-rooms that Arthur Augustus stated that it was very remarkable. Two or three fellows turned their heads to look.

The smile of St. Jim's was according to the pockets of his waistcoat. He seemed to expect to find something there which was missing.

"Lost something?" asked Smith senior.

"Yes."

Arthur Augustus went through his waistcoat pockets again.

"A n'y body seen my watch?" he asked. "Some silly one has taken my watch of me, and I want it!"

"Oh, no! You've left it somewhere," said Kerruish.

"I have not left it anywhere, Kerruish. Somebody has taken it off me!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"I suppose this is one of your tricks, Lovison."

Levison started.

"It. What do you mean, you silly one?"

"I refuse to be called an ass, Lovison. You are always playin' some watten conjurin' trick, and you took my watch once and hid it in my hat, you know you did!"

"Well, that was a lark," said Lovison. "I did it to watch your silly one."

"Yes, and now pray hand over my watch."

"Hain't," said Lovison. "I've seen nothing of it."

"Then where has it gone?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"How should I know, fethrod?" said Lovison irritably.

"I presume it is one of your tricks. Anyway, I want my watch."

"Go and find it where you left it, then, you duffer. You're always leavin' something somewhere!" growled Lovison.

"I had it an hour ago," said D'Arcy.

"I remember when I went into the museum to see old Blake, Miss March asked me the time when I went in. I took out my watch to tell her. So I must have had it on, you see. And I haven't looked at it since I took it out of my pocket on that occasion. So somebody must have taken it for a silly joke, I presume."

"I don't see how anyone could take your watch, Gussy," said Mosey Lovether. "Perhaps you've dropped it."

"How could I drop it, you duffish! It was fastened on the chain, of course, and the chain was fastened on my waistcoat. It has been unbuttoned, and the watch and chain are gone. I couldn't possibly drop them, could I?"

"I guess it wouldn't be easy," said Buck Fitt, the American janitor.

"Somebody has hooked it off you for a joke, Gussy."

"Nonsense, withal! And Lovison is the only chap who could do it," said Arthur Augustus, taring his eyeglass severely upon the black sheep of the Fourth.

"Lovison is the only beastly conjuror in the House. Where's my watch, Lovison?"

Levison jumped up, red with anger.

"I tell you I don't know anything about your silly watch!" he shouted.

"Oh, wate! P'ray hand it over, and don't play the giddy on!"

"Can't you take my word, you duffery?"

"I refuse to be called a duffery. And you can hardly expect me to take your word, Lovison, when you know what an awful fisher you are!"

"Hain't, hain't!" murmured Mosey Lovether.

"Hand it over, and don't be an ass, Lovison," said Kerruish.

"I tell you I don't know anything about it," said Lovison savagely. "The silly one has left it somewhere and forgotten all about it!"

"Wate!"

"Have you changed your waistcoat lately, Gussy?" asked Mosey Lovether, with a suspicious air.

"Certainly not!"

"You have worn the same waistcoat for a space of an hour and a half?"

"Yes, you fethrod!"

"Then I move that you are called upon to explain this departure from your usual habits!" said Mosey Lovether severely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pray don't be an ass, Loveth! My watch has gone—"

"Well, wasn't it made to go?" demanded Lovether.

"You wish me?" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I refuse to listen to your heady old puns. Lovison, will you hand me my watch, or will you not?"

"Fethrod!" was Lovison's reply.

And he swung out of the Common-room with an angry brow.

"Well, bad Jees!"

"Perhaps it wasn't Lovison," grinned Crook of the Shell, with an ill-natured grin. "Lovison wouldn't keep it if he took it, anyway. Ask Talbot if he's seen it."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strode towards the end of the Shell, his eyes gleaming.

"Are you makin' a beastly, cowardly insinuation against my friend Talbot?" he asked, in measured tones.

Crook backed away a little.

"Oh, I didn't mean—I only said—"

"You said a watten, beastly thing, Crook!" said Arthur Augustus disdainfully. "You know that old Talbot is as straight as a die!"

"Well, we all know what he was!" sneered Crook. "And if your watch is really missing, what's become of it? Lovison says he hasn't taken it. And I suppose nobody but a professional thief, or a conjuror like Lovison, could take your watch and cheat all of you without your knowing it."

"That's right enough," said Smith senior.

"Oh, wate! It must be one of Lovison's beastly jokes, of course!"

"Hat he says—"

"Buddhick! We all know he tells lies!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away with a frowning brow. The loss of his watch, which had been a present from his noble pater, worried him; and the

(Continued on next page.)

THE GUY LEMMONS.—No. 1, 194.

The Editor's Chair

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



HALLO, chums! By a little wangling I have just managed to get in a few words on this page. It has been a difficult task finding room for everything in our first grand Free Gift Number, but I felt I had to say a few words to the new chums who will be reading the Gem this week. I should like to extend to them all a hearty welcome. I feel assured that they will find many hours of splendid entertainment in the old paper, and that, after reading this issue, they will readily become regular subscribers of the oldest schoolboy paper in the world. For their information, the Gem has been published for over thirty years—clear testimony, if needed, of the popular appeal of Tom Mooty & Co. of St. Jim's, whose adventures are a regular feature of the paper.

"THE BOY THEY BETRAYED!"

Next Wednesday there will be ten more Free Foreign and Colonial Stamps for readers, and this splendid gift, coupled with another grand story programme and all the other ripping

possibility that, if it were not found, suspicion might fall upon Talbot, worried him still more.

The Colonel's remark was just. It was no easy matter for a watch and chain to be detached from D'Arcy's waistcoat without his knowledge.

Levison, who was a clever conjurer, could have done it easily enough. He had often played such tricks. But if Levison had not done it, it was evidently the work of a professional pickpocket, and such a person, of course, was hardly to be expected within the walls of St. Jim's—for which reason it was quite clear to Arthur Augustus' mind that Levison had done it.

CHAPTER 11.

Not the Toll!

KILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, looked into the Junior Common-room a little later. There was a frown upon his usually good-natured face.

"Which of you young rascals has been lurking in my study?" he demanded, addressing the remark to everybody present.

"Lacking?" said Monty Leather, in a shocked tone. "Us? Oh, Kildare!"

"None of your cheek!" said Kildare, who was evidently not in a humour for Monty Leather's little jokes. "Some young one has been lurking in my study—in a silly way, too! Who was it?"

"Not guilty, my lord!" said Leather. The Gem Lasser.—No. 1,944.

feature, makes our second Free Gift Number a winner all the way.

The main attraction will be the next great yarn in the "Toll" series. Martin Clifford has unravelled himself with this story, which tells of the treacherous plot devised by the Professor for disorganising Talbot at St. Jim's, and forcing the junior to return to the crochets gang to which he once belonged.

How far the Professor succeeds in his scheming I will leave Martin Clifford to describe to you, in his most thrilling and dramatic style, next week.

"GREYFRIMS VERSUS ALIENS!"

The next Greyfriars yarn is even more funny than the one in this number. Harry Wharton & Co., feeling themselves clipped by their rivals of the Upper Fourth, accept the challenge of the schoolboy aliens of the Foreign Academy to a faster watch. As you will read, that game is the most amusing and exciting ever played at Greyfriars.

All readers, I know, welcome the

"But what's happened?" asked Black Finn.

"Somebody has taken the silver challenge cup," said Kildare. "I suppose it is an idiotic lark, and I am going to warn the jokers when I find him!"

"What an indictment for him to own up," murmured Leather.

"I say, that cup's worth ten guineas!" said Kerruish. "Somebody has pinched it, Kildare!"

"Nonsense!" said the captain of St. Jim's sharply. "It's a silly joke, of course!"

"Guss' lost his watch, too," said Crooks.

"D'Arcy! His watch!" exclaimed Kildare.

"Yes. He says it was taken off him without his knowing it!"

Kildare started.

"That's very odd! I suppose there's some previous practical joker at work! I'll jolly soon find out who it is, too, and stop his jolking!" said the St. Jim's captain angrily, as he strode out of the room.

The juniors looked at one another curiously. The loss of the silver cup—a very valuable trophy, won by St. Jim's last eleven—following upon the loss of Arthur Augustus' famous gold "wicker," which was well-known to have cost twenty-five guineas, impressed the juniors strangely. If it was the work of a practical joker, he was a fellow who dealt in valuables, evidently.

Kildare strode away to Mr. Bailton's study. He found the Housemaster

return of Monty Leather's joke column, and next Wednesday he is again in first-class funny-making form. The physician takes Fatty Wynn for the subject of his second St. Jim's Jingle, and there will also be a portrait of the Welsh junior of the New House. Finally, our stamp expert has many interesting things to tell you about stories behind stamps, and there will be more illustrated jokes.

OUR SPECIAL OFFER.

In conclusion, I wish to draw readers' attention to the grand Stamp Collector's Oath which is being offered to Gem readers at the ridiculously small sum of 2s. 6d. The aliens above could not be bought for double the price! Full details of this special offer appear on page 22. Take your chance now of securing the Oath.

Also, don't forget that a packet of foreign stamps, every one of which is different from those given free with the Gem, is presented in this week's "Makers' Boy."

All the best, chums!

THE EDITOR.

with an unusually serious expression on his face. Kildare did not notice it for a moment.

"What is the matter, Kildare?"

"Somebody has taken the silver trophy from my study, sir," said Kildare. "I can't get at who has done it. If you would order an inquiry, sir—"

The Housemaster started.

"Do you mean that it has been stolen, Kildare?"

"Oh, no, sir! It must be a joke, of course. But the young rascal who has done it ought to be caught. He might damage it."

"I hope it is a joke, as you say, Kildare. But it is very odd. Have you heard of anything else being missed in the House?"

Kildare looked surprised.

"Yes; Crooks of the Shell mentioned to me that D'Arcy has lost his watch. I hope it is the work of the same practical joker."

"The fact is, Kildare, I also have missed something from my study," said Mr. Bailton gravely. "I had only just made the discovery when you entered."

"By Jove, sir!" said Kildare, startled. "Anything serious?"

"A number of currency notes, amounting to ten pounds," said the Housemaster quietly.

"How?"

Kildare could not help looking surprised. It was not like Mr. Bailton's usually careful habits to leave money

where it could be handled. The Housemaster understood his look.

"I am not usually careless with notes, Kildane, as you are aware, I was doing the House account, and had taken the money from my desk, when I knew it looked wrong, I was called away to see the Head, who wished to speak to me. I put the notes, with my papers, in the table drawer. When I came back, a few minutes ago, they were gone. The papers are just where I left them, but the notes have been taken."

Kildane knitted his brow.
 "That doesn't look like a practical joke, sir. It must have been a theft."
 "I fear so."
 "I—I say, sir! That's rotten—a thief in the House?" said Kildane, with a worried look.

"It is very serious. I am afraid it may cause some of the boys to think unflattering things on the subject of Talbot. In a matter like this, he is certain to be thought of in connection with it. I am perfectly convinced of his honesty, of course. Suspicion fell upon him once before, when Treagus of the Fifth was the guilty party. The poor boy will always have that difficulty in connection with his past. However, in this case, probably the matter may be cleared up as far as he is concerned. I was not absent from my study more than a quarter of an hour—drew cover to a quarter past. I shall ascertain at once where Talbot was at the time. Do you know where he is now?"

Kildane shook his head.
 "I understand that he shares Tom Merry's study while his studies are in the sanatorium," he said. "He is not in the Common-room; I have not seen him there. He may be in Merry's study."

"I will go there at once. Pray wait for me here till I return."
 "Certainly, sir."

Mr. Railton proceeded at once to the Shell passage. He tapped on the door of Tom Merry's study.

"Come in!" sang out Tom Merry's merry voice.

The Housemaster entered, and Talbot and Tom Merry, who were there, rose to his feet at once.

The Housemaster's expression showed them at once that he had come on a very unusual errand, and they waited anxiously for him to speak.

"I wish to speak to you, Talbot," said Mr. Railton quietly. "There has been a very unpleasant happening—some currency notes have been taken from my study."

Talbot turned white.

"Oh, sir—"
 "Don't imagine that I suspect you for a moment, Talbot," said Mr. Railton kindly. "My object is to ascertain at once where you were at the time, so that your name cannot be dragged into the matter."

"You are very kind, sir," said Talbot.

"I feel you in this study," pursued the Housemaster. "How long have you been here in company with Merry?"

"I don't know, sir—about half an hour."

"About that, sir," said Tom Merry. "Whenever went into my study must have done so between seven and a quarter past," said Mr. Railton.

"Having my absence, you understood. You see the importance of the matter, Merry. Can you assure me that Talbot was with you here before seven o'clock?"

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry promptly. "I heard seven o'clock strike while I was talking to Talbot, sir."

"Very good," said Mr. Railton. "Talbot has been here ever since?"

"Yes, sir."
 "He has not left the study?"

Tom paused.
 "He went out to get a soap, sir—but he only popped into the next study and back again—two minutes at the most."

"You are quite sure of that, Merry? He could not have descended to my study and returned in two minutes."

"I just stirred the fire while he was gone, and then he was back again."

Mr. Railton nodded.
 "That settles that point, then. I am very glad of this. You must not

suppose, Talbot, that suspicion regarding you entered my mind for a moment. My desire simply was to prevent suspicion entering other minds, and that is accomplished now. Merry's evidence is quite sufficient."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Railton gave the juniors a kindly nod and left the study.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Jolly lucky you were with me, Talbot, old man!" he said. "Not that any of the seven chaps would have said a word about you, but there are some of them—Crooke and his set—who might have tried to make capital out of it. It's lucky, isn't it?"

Talbot did not reply. He had sunk into his chair. His face was white, and his eyes had a hard look.

"Talbot, old man, what's the matter? You can't think that anybody would suspect you now?" asked Tom Merry.

Talbot shook his head.

"It's not that!"

"Then what's the matter?"

"It's come at last!" groaned Talbot.

Tom Merry regarded him in amazement and alarm.

"Talbot, what's come at last? What do you mean?"

Talbot did not reply. He rose to his feet.

"Don't talk to me now, Tom," he muttered. "I want to think this over."

He quitted the study without another word.

Tom Merry did not follow him. He stood rooted to the floor. It was impossible that the Tall could have done that—impossible! But what was the cause of his strange emotion—of the horror that Tom had read in his stricken face? The captain of the Shell felt a chill at his heart. His faith in his chum did not waver. But—what was the matter with Talbot?

CHAPTER 12.

Levison on the Warpath!

M R. RAILTON returned to his study with a thoughtful brow. Kildane gave him an anxious, inquiring glance.
 "Talbot is quite cleared of possible (Continued on the next page.)"

A SWELL GUY.



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suspicion," said the Headmaster quietly. "He has been with Tom Merry in his study since before seven o'clock. I have Merry's word for it."

"That quite clears him, then, sir?"

"Yes. It remains to find the guilty party. There is a possibility that the affair might turn out to be a foolish practical joke. In any case, it is a matter for inquiry and severe punishment. The fact that the notes were taken from here between seven o'clock and a quarter-past narrows down the inquiry considerably. It must be ascertained who passed along this passage in that time, and each person who can be found to have done so must give an account of himself."

"You saw me, sir?"

"No one, excepting one of the nuns, who was with the Head when I went to see him. Miss March must have come out this way. I saw no one in the passage, save Langton. Of course Langton is above suspicion—a product of the Sixth. Still, I will speak to Langton, as a matter of form, he may have seen someone, too."

Kilbane coloured a little. Langton of the Sixth was his class, and as straight a fellow as ever breathed; but there had been a time when Langton had been cocksure, and had got himself into a scrape with a bookmaker. If the thief were not discovered, it might mean some unpleasantness for Langton.

Mr. Bailton did not waste time. He proceeded to make inquiries at once.

"In a very short time the School House was in a hum with the news.

There had been three distinct thefts, all within a short space of time—D'Arcy's watch, the silver cup, and Mr. Bailton's bookcase. If it was indeed the work of a thief, the rascal had made a haul of close upon fifty pounds. But the idea that there was a thief in the School House was scouted by most of the fellows, especially where the class of Talbot was clearly proved. Tom Merry's evidence proved conclusively enough that it couldn't have been Talbot—though few of the fellows would have suspected him, in any case. The Toff

had made an impression upon his school-fellows that was not easily shaken; they believed that, whatever he had been in his early days, he was straight as a die now.

"It's not a thief at all!" Arthur Augustus announced in the most decided manner. "I refuse to believe anyone's of this kind. It's a wretched practical joke, and the head who has done it means to let the things be found somewhere, and laugh in his sleeve at us afterwards."

"I hope it's so!" said Tom Merry. "It's a jolly queer sort of joke, though! And if it's a joke, who's the joker?"

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"There's only one fellow who's cunning" enough to play wotten jokes like that! You all know him?"

"No, of course!" exclaimed Levinson furiously.

Arthur Augustus looked at him steadily.

"Name, you, of course!" he said. "Nobody but you could have whisked off my watch and chain without my seeing it. You've done it before, for a wotten joke; and you've done it again for a wotten joke."

"Fool!"

"Why, you wottah—"

"Look here, Levinson," said Tom Merry seriously. "If this is one of your queer jokes, the best thing you can do is to own up before it goes any further."

"Make a clean breast of it, and get off with five hundred lines," urged Moody Leather. "If it goes on you'll be set down as a thief."

Levinson panted.

"You—you look! You idiots!" he shouted.

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"British language, you wottah!"

"I tell you I know nothing about it!" shrieked Levinson. "Of course, you are all down on me! I expect that from you!"

"I don't want to be down on you," said Tom Merry. "But it's plain enough that you are the only chap who could have got Gussy's watch without his knowing it. You can play beauty

conjuring tricks, and you've done it lots of times. Nobody suspects you of being a thief; but this is just the kind of rotten joke you've played before."

"I give you my word!" said Levinson. Tom Merry was about. It went against the grain with him to doubt anybody's word.

But Arthur Augustus broke out violently.

"You gave me your word last time when you took my ticks and hid it in my topknot. And you were telling rubbish!"

"I'm telling the truth now," said Levinson desperately.

"What?"

"You don't believe me!" demanded Levinson fiercely.

"No, I don't."

Levinson advanced upon him.

"Then put up your hands, you rotter!"

"What?"

"Oh, choose it, Levinson!" said Tom Merry. "This isn't a matter for fighting. Clunk it!"

The juniors all looked at Levinson in surprise. He was not a fighting man as a rule; but he was fairly on the way-path now.

"D'Arcy will take back what he says, or he's going to fight me here and now!" said Levinson between his teeth.

"I refuse to take back a single word."

"Then take that!"

"Ow—ow!"

"That" was a dot on Arthur Augustus' asceticistic nose, which brought the water to his eyes.

He staggered back; but only for a moment. The next instant he dropped his eyebrows, pushed back his cuffs, and went for Levinson like a whirlwind.

"Shut the door," growled Leather. "We don't want any spectators here. Go it, Gussy! One for his job!"

Kerwick hastily closed the door of the Common-room. Arthur Augustus and Levinson went "going it" huzzy and songs. The juniors gathered round in a ring.

Tramping to and fro, panting, glaring, the two juniors hammered at one another. Levinson soon had "beliefs to send"—cigarettes were not good for the wind. But he put up an unexpectedly good fight.

Arthur Augustus' Greek nose began to resemble a Roman one; it was, as Leather humorously declared, changed into a Roman-iron nose. His left eye lidded up sadly. But Levinson was getting very severe punishment. At the end of one or seven minutes a terrific right-handler swept the black sleep of the Fourth off his feet, and he tumbled headily on the floor.

"Well done, Gussy! Right on the wheel!"

"Back up, Levinson!"

Levinson lay panting. He was evidently "done."

"Get up, you wottah!" shouted Arthur Augustus, whose noble blood was up. "I am going to give you a beautiful thrashing!"

"Ow!" growled Levinson. "Ow! Ow! Hang you! I'm done!"

Arthur Augustus unbuttoned his belt.

"Very well, Levinson; that's all right. But I expect you to own up."

"You rotter!" growled Levinson. "I don't know anything about your beastly watch. I hope you won't find it, that's all!"

"Woddly, you wottah—" Arthur Augustus seemed a little inclined to begin again, but Tom Merry pushed him back.

"Nuffa at good as a feat, Gussy."

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Besides"—he hesitated—"I—I can't help thinking that Levison is telling the truth."

"Oh, wait!" said Arthur Augustus. "I presume you are not diffident enough to suppose that I have made a mistake. You Mewsey?"

"Impossible, of course!" remarked Levison blandly.

"I give you my word I don't know anything about it," said Levison. "If that's not good enough for you, you can go and eat cake!"

And Levison jumped away to touch his eye, which needed it badly. Even Arthur Augustus was a little impressed by the way he spoke.

"But—but it must have been him, dear boy!" he exclaimed. "If it wasn't Levison, Tom Mewsey, who was it?"

"Oh, don't ask me!" said Tom. The captain of the Shell was puzzled and perplexed. He did not believe that Levison was the culprit. But if it was not Levison, who was it?

CHAPTER 22.

The Toff's Resolve!

"MARRIED!"

The girl started.

Marie had come out of the school hospital, looking a little pale and tired. The rain had ceased, and the stars glistened in the dark sky.

As the girl came down the path towards the quadrangle, a dark figure detached itself from the blackness of the trees, and stood before her.

"You startled me, Toff," said Marie, with a catch in her breath.

"I have been waiting an hour for you," said Talbot.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes. You knew why?"

Marie peered at him in the dark. She could see that Talbot's face was white. Her own look was uneasy.

"Why, Toff?" she asked, in a low voice.

"I know what you have done, Marie."

"What have I done?"

Talbot made a weary gesture.

"It has come at last, Marie. You have done what the Professor ordered you to do. I am not condemning you. A few months ago I should have acted as you have acted. I have no right to judge you, to condemn you. But I know what I must do, Marie, and I'm going to do it."

The girl's face hardened.

"What are you going to do?" she asked quietly.

"I am going to keep my word to Joe Frayne," said Talbot steadily. "I am going to do my duty by the Head."

"You are going to betray me!" Talbot shivered.

"No. Not that! I am going to see the Professor, and unless he goes I am going to denounce him to the police."

"You will never—"

"I shall!"

There was a short silence. Talbot's tone rang with grim determination.

"He has left me no other resource," he said. "Even for your sake, Marie, I cannot keep silence now. And—what has been stolen must be returned, Marie. And you must leave the school."

"You are too late."

"Too late!" said Talbot with a start. "How too late?"

Marie gave a little mocking shrug.

"Did you think that I should carry the book about with me, or place it in my room? It is already in the Professor's hands."



The baffled Professor shook a savage fist at Talbot as the train drew out. "I go now," he exclaimed, "but I shall return—don't doubt that! You have not heard the last of me! You shall remember—"

"But—but—no one? How—how—"

"The Professor has been here. He was waiting outside the walls after dark—waiting for my signal. An hour ago I gave the signal, and he answered it, and a bag was tossed over the wall. Do you understand now?"

"Then—then the plunder—what you have taken—is no longer in the school?" said Talbot, drawing a long breath.

"No."

"I—I didn't expect that." Talbot knitted his brows gloomily. "But he shall return it."

"He will not!"

"Then he shall take his choice between that and arrest!" said Talbot, between his teeth.

"And I?" said Marie bitterly. "Is that your friendship, Toff? Where my father goes, I go. You know that?"

"You can leave in safety."

"I cannot. When he is arrested, it will be known that I am his daughter. Two of your friends already have seen him with me, and I called him my uncle, to deceive them. Even if I keep silent, it will be known. And the stolen things—it will be known that they were stolen by someone inside the school. You will send me to prison, Toff, as well as my father."

Talbot gave a groan.

"I cannot do that, Marie."

"You must, unless you keep silent."

"I must keep my word to Frayne. I must do my duty here, or feel myself an ungrateful villain!" said Talbot dully.

Marie's eyes flashed.

"You will send me to prison?"

"No, no!" gasped Talbot. "Never that! There is some way—there must be some way—I will think—"

"There is no way. What I have

taken—I make an secret of it to you—let it be found upon my father, and my guilt is proved. Even you could not save me then from disgrace, prison!"

"Marie!" growled Talbot.

"What is the use of fighting your fate?" said the girl softly. "Break with it all, Toff, and come back to me."

"Never!"

"Then betray me?" said the girl.

"And that I cannot do."

The girl laughed softly.

"But one or the other you must do, Toff—and you cannot betray me. That I know."

"You know it only too well, Marie!" said Talbot wearily. "I must save you—and I must do my duty. Ah!"

Marie looked at him curiously, peering at the white face in the dark. A sudden light had come into Talbot's eyes.

"What are you thinking of, Toff?" muttered the girl, vaguely uneasy.

"There is one way—the only way."

"And that?"

"I am going to the village row. Unless the Professor returns the stolen things to me tonight I shall denounce him. That I have resolved upon. Nothing shall alter that. But as for what has been stolen, it shall never be known that it was by your hand."

"It must be known—"

"No! The innocent will suffer for the guilty," said Talbot quietly. "It will not be difficult to make them believe that the Toff had broken out again, and reclaimed his old wraps—that it was I who conveyed the plunder to the Professor. It is ruin for me; but I shall save you."

"You—"

"Enough said, Marie. Good-bye! You will not see me again."

The Girl Lingers.—No. 1506.

The girl caught him by the arm as he was turning away.

"Toff! You don't mean that! You—you will punish!"

"I shall consider."

"It will be ruin!"

"I know it."

"They will send you to prison!"

"Better send me than you, Marie."

His eyes upon his arm tightened.

Her eyes looked into his—not once with tears.

"Toff! You would do that? You are so much as that?"

"You shall see."

"But it is madness!" panted Marie.

"Toff! They will send you to prison—what of your new life—your good name? Have you forgotten all that?"

"I have not forgotten," said Talbot dully.

"Better keep my lover than my good name, if I cannot keep both. Let me go, Marie."

"But—"

"There's nothing more to be said. You shall not suffer; that I promise you. After all, perhaps the evil was bound to come—the fight's been too hard for me. You shall be safe, Marie. Your father will be silent—he will be glad enough to see me suffer in your place," said Talbot with a bitter smile.

"Let me go!"

"But—"

Talbot drew himself away. Marie stood speechless, looking after him in the darkness. Her father would never yield—she felt sure of that. And—

And Talbot was to suffer in her place—to save her. That was his reason for her share in the plot against him. The girl's heart ached with misery.

"Toff!" she called out.

But there came no reply. The Toff, whose struggle for right and honor had come to a tragic end at last, was gone. The black night had swallowed up the hurrying figure.

CHAPTER 14.

Boston at the Finish!

"WELCOME!"

Mr. Judd, alias John Rivers, alias the Professor, spoke the word, with a sarcastic smile. Mr. Judd, the only guest in the Elyconite Arms, had the

reading-room to himself that evening. He had been using the telephone in the corner, and as he laid down the receiver the door opened, and Talbot strode in.

The Sheriff followed closed the door behind him and came directly towards the Professor.

"They told me you were in here," he said.

"Yes—and glad to see you, Toff," said the Professor. "Welcome! You have decided at last?"

The Professor rubbed his hands.

"Good!" he said. "Good, my boy! I have heard how it went and—you were bound to come back, Toff! You'll get a warm welcome—all bygone will be forgotten. They won't hear any more for your desertion, Toff—they will be glad to have you back. But I'm glad you've decided."

Talbot laughed harshly.

"I have decided," he said. "But I have not yet told you my decision."

John Rivers looked at him sharply.

"What do you mean? You are coming back?"

"No."

"Then why are you here?" demanded the Professor angrily. "Has anything gone wrong at the school? Has Marie—"

"Marie is safe—and will remain safe. She has carried out your orders and you have the stolen property. That is what I have come for."

The Professor laughed.

"You are joking, of course."

"You will find that I am not joking," Talbot looked at his watch. "I have broken bounds to come here. It is a quarter to nine. The train leaves Elyconite at nine-fifty. You are going to take that train, and I am going to see you take it."

"Really?"

"And before you go you are going to hand me the things that Marie took from the school at your orders."

"You are quite amusing," panted the Professor.

"Or else," said Talbot, his voice deepening, his eyes glimmering—"or else you will be handed over to the police now—at once."

The Professor yawned.

"I'm in earnest!" said Talbot.

"And Marie?" said the Professor,

watching him narrowly, in spite of his assumption of indifference. "You seem to have overlooked, my friend, that it was Marie who handed to me those things—were in my possession. Are you prepared to send Marie to prison?"

"Marie need not suffer, unless you choose to betray her," said Talbot, with white lips. "William as you are, you will not do that."

"It will not suit with me. It will be known that these articles were stolen inside the school and that I cannot have done it. It will be known that the thief was in St. Jim's."

"That is true."

"Do you say that Marie will not suffer?"

"She will not suffer—for I shall confess to the theft," said Talbot harshly.

"Now do you understand?"

"Yes," gasped the Professor—"you are fooling me!"

"I am in earnest."

"You lie!" said the Professor fiercely.

"You think you can deceive me—an old hand! You will go to prison—you will lose your liberty—lose everything—for the sake of restoring these wretched trifles worth fifty pounds at the most—"

"I shall suffer to save Marie. That is, unless you come to my terms. Will you go?"

"I will not go!"

"You do not believe that I am in earnest?"

"Hardly!"

"Very well," said Talbot, with a deep breath.

He crossed the room and took up the telephone receiver. The Professor watched him with burning eyes. Was it possible that the boy was in earnest, after all? He wondered anxiously. Talbot spoke into the receiver:

"Number one tonight, see, please!"

"What number is that?" asked the Professor, with a mocking smile, as Talbot stood like a statue, receiver in hand, waiting for his number.

"The police station," said Talbot quietly.

John Rivers clenched his hands.

"You are bluffing me," he said between his teeth. "You dare not call up the police!"

Talbot did not answer. His resolve was taken and he was past argument now. He waited in grim silence.

The bell rang.

Talbot spoke again, clearly and calmly, the Professor watching him with clenched hands and burning eyes.

"Is that Elyconite Police Station?" asked Talbot clearly.

"Yes."

"I wish to speak to Inspector Skeat."

"I am Inspector Skeat. What is wanted?"

The Professor had approached—he strained his ears to listen and caught the reply. His face went white.

"Toff," he muttered thickly, "you—you dare not—"

"Will you go?"

"No!" snarled the Professor.

Talbot gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"What's wanted?" came the inspector's sharp voice again.

And Talbot replied:

"I have information to give. The crookman John Rivers, alias the Professor, is now in Elyconite—"

A savage curse dropped from the Professor's lips. He grasped Talbot's arm and dragged the receiver away.

"Enough! Curse you! I will go!"

"You have decided only just in time," said Talbot grimly.

(Continued on page 22)

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"I will make you repeat this!" hissed the coachman. "You shall suffer for it—you shall suffer!"

"You have none too much time to catch the train, and Inspector Bland knows now that you are in Hyde Park," said Talbot quietly. "You have no time to lose."

The Professor realized that. He made a movement towards the door.

"Where is what I have come for?" asked Talbot calmly.

"In my room, come you, Toff!"

"I will come with you."

Five minutes later the Professor stepped into the town at Hyde Park Station; and Talbot, with a bag in his hand, stood on the platform and watched him go. The buffed policeman shook a savage fist at him from the train window.

"I go now!" he muttered. "I go, Toff; but I shall return; don't doubt that! You have not heard the last of me! You shall remember!"

The shriek of the whistle drowned his voice. The train glided out of the station, and the Professor disappeared from Talbot's sight.

Quietly the porter turned and left the station.

"Toff!" The whispored voice in the dark quadrangle made Talbot start. He had climbed in over the school wall, Marie, her face quite pale, caught him by the arm.

"Marie! You here!"

"I have been waiting for you!" panted the girl breathlessly. "Toff, you have seen him? I know he will not go. Toff, I shall confess everything. You shall not suffer for me! If he will not go, Toff, you shall not suffer."

Talbot smiled gently.

"It is finished, Marie. He is gone."

"Gone?" murmured Marie. She looked; the reaction was too much for her.

Talbot steadied her with his arm.

"Yes, Marie, he has gone; and in this bag I have all that was—was taken.

I shall leave it where it can be found in the morning. It will be supposed that it was taken for a joke, and it will be forgotten. There is nothing to fear, Marie. The danger is over now."

A shudder ran through the girl.

"I—I have been waiting—so long—for you to come back," she whispored. "I would not have let you suffer, Toff. And—and is he really gone?"

"I watched him in the train."

Marie gave a sob.

"And you are saved, Toff, and I am safe. But they will miss me in the ward. I must go back. But before I go, Toff, you have my word, so long as I am here, there shall be nothing more—nothing more of that. You understand?"

Talbot drew a deep breath, and his face grew very bright.

"Thank you, Marie!"

"Whatever my father says, there shall be nothing more of it here! I—I am ashamed, Toff, and yet that has never come to me before. I have never cared. It is you who have made the difference, Toff."

Talbot pressed her hand silently.

Marie fitted away into the darkness. A quarter of an hour later Talbot entered his study in the School House.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy were there, finishing their preparation, and Monty Lovelace was busy upon his comic columns for the "Wreckly."

They all looked inquiringly at Talbot.

"Where have you been, you bewitched?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"You haven't done your prep. You will get into a wee in the morning."

Talbot smiled.

He could smile now.

"What about supper?" he said cheerily. "I've had a walk, and I'm hungry. Never mind prep for once. I'll chance it with Livinia."

Tom Merry gave him a quick look.

The Toff met his eyes with a smile; and Tom Merry understood that the trouble, whatever it was, that had weighed like a black cloud upon his

dream was lifted. He asked no questions; he was only too glad to see Talbot his old self again. And supper in Tom Merry's study was a merry meal that evening.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made a surprising discovery the next morning.

He went into Study No. 4, so long deserted, for a book to read Talbot, and there, upon the table, he beheld a startling sight—nothing less than Kildare's silver cup, his own watch and chain, and ten currency notes for one pound each, set out in surprising array.

"But Jane!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Look here, you fellows!"

"My hat!"

"The giddy plunder!"

"And a note with it! Hal Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, taking up a slip of paper that was pinned round his watchchain. On the paper was written in block letters, evidently for the purpose of leaving no clue in handwriting:

"RETURNED WITH THANKS!"

"That is a very practical joke, after all," said Tom Merry, with a deep breath of relief.

"Yess, wotnot! You fellows will wotnotthink that I told you so all along!" said Arthur Augustus triumphantly.

"Wonders will never cease," remarked Lovelace. "Goodness, I call upon you all to witness the fact that the one and only Gussy Adolphus has been right, for once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wendy, Lovelish—"

"Better call Mr. Railton to take those things," said Tom Merry. "I'm jolly glad it's turned out to be only a wotting joke—though I don't envy the joker if Railton gets hold of him."

Mr. Railton, too, was very glad to discover that the packing affair was evidently only a practical joke. The Housemaster made some efforts to discover the unknown practical joker, but in vain.

However, the missing property was restored in its entirety, and there was no harm done, so the matter soon dropped. The fellow who contrived it (supposed was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The smell of St. Jim's, in fact, was never quite tired of reminding his chums that he had said all along that it was simply a practical joke.

Arthur Augustus was very satisfied with the perspicacity he had shown on that point.

There was another point, however, upon which he was not quite so satisfied—and that was the fact that Miss Harlow, who was still on duty in the ante-room, and very popular there, especially with Joe Frayser, and who had now made a good many acquaintances among the juniors, seemed to like Talbot the best of all.

Of course, as Gussy admitted freely, old Talbot was a splendid chaps; but he would really have expected the Little Sister to show a little more favour in another direction—really!

(Next Wednesday: "THE BOY FIRST BETWEEN?" Look out for the second thrilling page in this grand series—adding how Talbot is discovered at St. Jim's. And don't forget, there will be another packet of foreign stamps free in next week's GEM. Order your copy early.)

PEN PALS

A fine feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest with each other. Readers wishing to reply to notices appearing here must write to the addresses given. Notices for publication should be accompanied by a return on this page, and sent to The GEM, Railway Street, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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PEN PALS COUPON

25-12-37

A SPARKLING STORY OF THE CHUMS OF GREYFRIARS AND THEIR ALIEN RIVALS OF THE FOREIGN ACADEMY.

BILLY BUNTER'S RAID!

By Frank Richards.

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

A Run for the Aliens!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
 "Hark!"
 "They're playing football."
 Bob Cherry played gleefully.
 "Here, come on, we must have a look at this!"

And Bob Cherry dragged his two companions off towards the Cloisters. It was a lovely October morning, and Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent—the chums of the Greyfriars Reserve—were strolling in the Cloisters before breakfast. As they drew near the Cloisters a series of startling shrieks and yells rang through the wicket air.

On the other side of the wide Cloisters stood the Foreign Academy—the great red-brick building presided over by Herr Rosenblum, and tenanted by the sons of foreigners resident in England.

The yells, shrieks, and shouts came ringing through the Cloisters from the playground of the new academy, and the chums of the Reserve grinned as they heard them.

"On to ball!"
 "On to ball!"
 "Not you pass, you duffair!"
 "Ach! I pass to ball, ain't it?"

The three Reservists dashed through the Cloisters, eager to see the aliens at the great game. The big gates of the academy grounds were open, as was usually the case. The Reservists stepped in the gateway and looked on at the scene before them with irrepressible excitement.

The aliens were playing football, having, doubtless, determined to meet the Greyfriars fellows. But their knowledge of the great game was limited. They knew that a football was required for the game, but that seemed to be about all they did know.

Two teams had been formed—of French and German juniors—but they were not limited as to number. There were about twenty fellows on each side, so that in point of numbers the match resembled a Rugby game. It bore another resemblance to Rugby, too, for the aliens handled the ball as such as they wished to. The Soccer portion of the play consisted in kicking wildly at everything and everybody that came within their reach.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.
 "On the ball, my ones! Ha, ha, ha! There's a dozen of them on it now!"

Fritz Hoffmann, the German captain, was on the ball with a vengeance, sprawling across it on the ground; and Adolphe Brevier, the French skipper, was sitting on Hoffmann. A goalkeeper had seized Hoffman by the ears, and was trying to drag him off, and Lisalle had just hauled himself off Lisaberg.

"Where is not ball!"
 "On to ball, ain't it! Pass!"
 "Get off your pack, you French pig!"



There was a terrific splash as Bunter was flung up by the aliens and thrown into the water. He gave a strangled gasp as the water closed over him. "Ow! Hellup! Murder! Help!"

"Oid! I am murder! Sherman beat!"

The ball came out of the press of players like a pip from an orange. The aliens did not notice it for a moment, and the struggle continued.

"I say, look, we ought to take that ball away before they do themselves any damage," grinned Bob Cherry.
 "What do you say to giving them a run round the Close?"

"Ha, ha! Good whomp!"
 Bob Cherry darted in and was "on the ball" in a moment. He passed to Nugent, who kicked it to Harry Wharton; Wharton dished the ball away

When Billy Bunter went tuck-raiding and caught a cold instead!

through the Cloisters, and a terrific roar rose from the aliens.

"Ach! Vere is not ball!"
 "Zey have taken it!"

"Oid! Aftair soon!"
 The aliens, forgetting their mutual rivalry, dashed in possession of the Greyfriars chums. The three Reservists sped out of the Cloisters and into the wide green Close. After them the aliens dashed, breathing vengeance.

"Come on!" shouted Bob Cherry.
 "Pass!"
 Wharton passed, and Bob Cherry ran

the ball on, and then let Nugent have it. Passing like clockwork, the three Reservists ran the ball swiftly on, with the whole crowd of aliens yelling in pursuit.

They easily kept ahead, passing the ball one to another, while the foreigners laboured and shrieked after them in vain.

A crowd of Greyfriars fellows came out of the House, watching the absurd scene with yells of laughter.

The chums of the Reserve ran the ball on till they had made a circuit of the Close and reached the Cloisters again; then they halted, panting and laughing themselves out of breath. The aliens came plodding on.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gaped Bob Cherry.
 "Of all the howling idiots at football, I think these screaming duffers take the cake! Football! They ought to be playing snooker!"

"Ov duffness!" said Nugent.
 Harry Wharton laughed and kicked the ball into the Cloisters.

"Well, we've given them a little run," he remarked. "It will do them good and will count as the first lesson in Soccer. Let's clear!"

It was time to clear, for the aliens were coming up. The Reservists sprinted off towards the School House, and the panting aliens shook impatient fists at them.

"Zey have got away via amusements."
 THE GUN LINGER.—No. 1,246.

said Adolphe Messier. "But we make our own small for eat."

"Ach! That is right, ain't it?"

"We challenge you to no game of football and boat race at our own game," said Messier. "I think sat put you in our place."

"Main goodness!" exclaimed Fritz Hoffman. "Adolphe, my friend, that is a great idea!"

"I think so," said Messier modestly.

"I think we've made time to challenge you, ain't it?"

And the others, somewhat comforted by the prospect of beating the Grayfriars fellows at their own game, trooped off to their quarters.

Buster Plans a Raid!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter was standing in the doorway, and he intercepted the charms of the Remorse as they came in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, giving the fat junior a playful dig in the ribs which made him gasp for breath. "What's troubling you, jolly?"

"I say, Cherry, I wish you wouldn't poke me like that; it quite takes my breath away. I'm rather short in the wind—"

"Bosh!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "You're a jolly sight too long-winded, that's what's the matter with you."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"The long-windedness is terrible," chimed in the Nabob of Bonaparte, joining the charms. "My esteemed comrades, I had the pleasure of watching your exploits with the foreign football. It was ripping!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, run away and play, Buster!"

"It's important, Cherry!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at the Remorse through his big spectacles. "If you fellows don't want to hear about my schemes, I'll get somebody else to back me up. I'm giving you first chance as you belong to my study."

"After that we can't refuse to hear it, anyway," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Go ahead, Buster!"

"Come into a quiet spot, then; it's a dead secret."

Billy Bunter led the way to a quiet spot, the Famous Four following him. In a corner, by a deep window, Bunter stopped and looked round cautiously. Bunter was extremely short-sighted, and the glasses he wore did not avoid his vision much, to judge by the ludicrous blunders he was continually making. On the present occasion at least a dozen fellows observed his cautious glance round, and some of those strolled up to see what was on. But the short-sighted Owl of the Remorse did not observe them.

"Well, get on with the wadding!" said Nugent impatiently.

"I'm getting on with it, Nugent. Now, look here! Would you fellows care for a big feed?"

"Is that a consideration?"

"No, Cherry, it isn't a consideration. My idea is to send a feed."

"Baird it! Are you thinking of robbing Mrs. Minable at the tuckshop?"

"No, I'm not. It's a read on the sly."

Bob Cherry gave a whistle.

"The alman! How are we to read them?"

"That's the idea. If you fellows back me up, it will come off all right," said Billy Bunter eagerly. "I don't see

what there is to nibble at in that suggestion, Bob Cherry. The alman are going to stand a feed."

"How do you know?"

"Because the fat chap, Hoffman, came over to the school shop here early this morning, just before you had that you over the football, and laid in a big supply of grub. I was in the tuckshop, and I see him. I shouldn't wonder, if he were going to stand a feed to the whole academy. Don't you think it's a jolly good chance for a read?"

"Yes. But how are you going to do it?"

"Oh, you can rely on me! I shall lead you—"

"Yes, I can see you leading us—I don't think!" said Bob Cherry, with a sniff. "It might be possible to raid the tuckshop after dark, but I expect all that grub will be scooped by to-morrow."

"Oh, we can't leave it so late as that!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "They may eat it if we let the grass grow under our feet. My idea was to raid the academy during the morning recess."

"In broad daylight?"

"Nothing venture, nothing win, you know."

"Not good enough, Buster," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "You'll have to think of something better if you're anxious for a free feed."

"But, I say—I say, you fellows—"

But the charms of Steady No. 1 were walking away. Billy Bunter blinked after them indignantly. It was too bad to have to give up a really ripping idea for want of proper backing up. He turned round as he felt a tap on the shoulder.

"Hallo, Russell!"

"It isn't Russell," said the voice of Baldrade, the bully of the Remorse. "I heard what you said to Wharton, Buster—"

"Oh, did you?" said the Owl. "Just like you to listen! Oh! Leggo my ear! What I really meant to say was that I'm jolly glad you found me speaking to Wharton."

"That's better," said Baldrade, releasing the fat ear, which Billy Bunter proceeded to rub restfully. "Wharton won't help you in this scheme!"

"It's a case of jealousy," said Billy Bunter. "Wharton is always touchy when he thinks I am likely to eclipse him in any way. It means nothing to lose that feed because—"

"You can get somebody else to back you up."

"It's! You perhaps—"

"No 'perhaps' about it!" said Baldrade heartily. "I'm one, and I'll soon get more of the other fellows to join in—Skinner, Scoop, and Stott."

Billy Bunter brightened up wonderfully.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "With four fellows to help, I could manage all right. Now, my idea was to stand by the gate, you know, either side of the Cloisters, and direct you. You fellows will go into the academy grounds, and cover the building at different points, and look for the grub. It's bound to be hidden in the dormitory, or in one of the studios. I will remain on the watch in the gateway, and direct operations. You can rely on me to do that."

"Yes, I'm sure we can rely on you to remain in the gateway, Buster. I'll speak to Skinner, Scoop, and Stott, and we'll try after lessons."

"Good—jolly good!" said Billy Bunter, with great satisfaction.

And he went in to breakfast with a beaming smile on his fat face.

Baldrade did speak to Skinner,

Scoop, and Stott, and the way they laughed when he explained to them showed that they considered the scheme to be an excellent one; but whether Baldrade's intentions were just the same as Billy Bunter's was another matter.

Buster Leads!

BILLY BUNTER looked extremely pleased with himself that morning. The prospect of dining as a party leader, and of carrying a substantial feed, and eating it afterwards, was a very attractive one to the fat junior.

When the class was dismissed after first lesson for the usual recess at eleven o'clock, Baldrade, Skinner, Scoop, and Stott followed Bunter out into the Close.

"The fat junior blinked round at his fellows."

"You fellows ready?" he asked.

"We are," said Baldrade.

"Good! Back me up, and we'll have the feed all right. Come on!"

And Billy Bunter, with a very important air, led the way across the Close, Baldrade & Co. winked at one another solemnly, and followed him.

The raindrops disappeared into the Cloisters. They reached the gate that gave access to the academy grounds, and found it shut.

"It's! That's because of the raw this morning," said Baldrade. "It's frozen, too. The alman don't seem to be in sight. Are you going to get over the gate, Harry?"

"Oh, no!" said Bunter. "It's my place, as leader, to direct operations. You fellows will climb over the gate, and I shall direct operations from here. I can see through the bars, you know, so it's really just as good as if I were over the gate."

Skinner shook his head solemnly.

"I think you ought to climb over the gate, Buster. It would give us more confidence if you were with us."

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Much more confidence," said Scoop.

"Of course, we don't want our leader to enter the House; but he ought to be inside the gate."

Bunter hesitated. He didn't want to get on the dangerous side of the gate. But his fellows had evidently made up their mind, and he reflected that if they came scuttling back, with the alman after them, he could climb the gate and escape first.

"Well, if it would give you fellows more confidence," he said reluctantly, "I don't mind. Are there any of the alman in sight, Baldrade?"

As a matter of fact, Fritz Hoffman and Lindberger were standing near the corner of the red-brick academy, staring at the group of juniors by the gate. But the Owl of the Remorse was far too short-sighted to see them. Baldrade shut his eyes tight and turned his face towards the academy.

"I can't see any," he said.

"That's all right, then. Give me a back-up."

"Right you are!"

The Remorse gave Bunter the required back. He clambered to the top of the gate, and succeeded in putting one fat leg across it. Hoffman and

Lindberger watched the proceeding in astonishment. For one of the Grayfriars juniors to invade their quarters under their very eyes seemed to them very preposterous of cheek.

"Main goodness!" murmured Hoffman. "I don't like to believe that steady eating, ain't it?"

"I think so," said Lindberger.

Buster roared on top of the gate, gasping for breath.

"I—I think I'll stop here, you fellows!" he exclaimed. "I—I can see better from the top of the gate, and can direct operations from here much better than from the ground inside."

The Removites had climbed the gate and were sitting astride the top. Balstrode grasped Buster by the shoulder.

"Better get down inside. It will give us more confidence."

"I—I— Hold on, Balstrode! Don't shake me like that! I shall fall!" looked Billy Buster, as the Removites leered, under the pretense of helping him, forced him over on the inner side of the gate. "I—I shall fall! I—I— Oo!"

Buster swung over the gate, clinging on by his hands and kicking wildly against the bars. He held on for a few seconds, and then dropped to the ground.

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I'm quite

playground beyond. There was a yell of delight as the prisoner was seen.

"Owl! It is as prisoner of war!" exclaimed Moulder.

"Owl!"

"Leggo! Lemme alone! I'll get out if you like. I'm sorry I came over the gate!" howled Billy Buster. "It was that beast, Balstrode's fault! Don't pull me about like that! Rescue! Rescue! Oo!"

"Ye capture him, and ye make an example of him!"

"Duck him in as fountain!"

"Oo!"

"Help! Rescue!"

A dozen pair of hands were grasping the fat junior. He was yanked along to the fountain, and there was a terrific splash as he was lifted up and thrown into the water. He gave a strangled gasp as the water closed over him, and he was dragged out again as limp as a rag.

"Owl! Help! Murder! Help!"

with a shrieking whoop, swarmed on his track; but Buster reached the gate. He clambered wildly up, and Skinner lent him a hand, and he was dragged over.

He dropped on the safe side, panting like a frightened rabbit. The jokers of the Removite shrieked with laughter. The aliens were shrieking also through the bars of the gate.

"The game seems to be up," said Balstrode. "No good trying to raid the alien if our leader turns tail like this."

"Oh, really, Balstrode—"

"I'm off," said the Removite bully, and he walked away with Skinner, Knop, and Scott, the four of them roasting with laughter.

Water was dripping from Buster's clothes, and there was quite a pool where he stood. He wiped his drenched spectacles and jammed them furiously on his nose.

Moulder was rattling at the fastened gate, and Buster, terrified at the idea



"Owl!" exclaimed Moulder despondently. "I despise you and point as finger of scorn at you!" And the alien department solemnly pointed its fingers of scorn at the Removites. Harry Wharton & Co. roared with laughter. "Ha, ha, ha!"

out of breath! Come over, if you're coming. There's no time to waste. I suppose you're not going to hold back now I've led the way. Oo! Who is that? Is that you, Balstrode?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the bully of the Removite.

He was still on the top of the gate, and so were the others. It was Fritz Hoffman who had held of Billy Buster.

"Ach! I have got him before!"

"Ye captures him!" grinned Linsinger.

Buster gasped when he found himself in the grasp of the aliens. He yelled frantically to the practical jokers on the gate.

"Help! Rescue! Owl! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the jokers.

"Ye capture him, after all, ain't it?" shrieked Hoffman. "Fring him away."

"Behr goot!"

"Is it not you who sorry set you capture our quarters?" demanded Adolphe Moulder.

"Help!"

"Duck him in as fountain van over time!"

"Oo!" shrieked Buster. "I'm sorry! I'm anything you like! I'm wet all over! I'll get out if you'll only let me go! Oo!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ze fat poog is sorry!"

"It is van glorious victory, mein friends!"

"Help! Owl! I'm dripping all over!"

"Grough! Lemme go!"

"Keeck him out!"

"Shuck him out!"

Hoffman released the wriggling Buster. He pointed to the gate.

"That you mean for it," he said. "Ye gotta you success start."

Billy Buster understood. It was not much of a start, but he darted off, and the ransing he put up under those trying circumstances would have done him credit on the cinder track. The aliens,

of falling into hostile hands again, baled through the Clustine.

In the Close a hand grasped him by the shoulder and stopped him.

"Leggo!" howled Buster.

"Balstrode, you cad! They're after me!"

"It's not Balstrode, no!"

"Oo, is that you, Cherry! They're after me!"

"They're not," said Harry Wharton, with a glance in the direction of the Clustine.

"It's all right, Buster. How did you get in that shocking state?"

"The—the beast checked me in the fountain!" gasped Buster.

"Phew! Have you been over the fence?"

"Yes, and Balstrode, Skinner, and the other outside wouldn't back me up. They were only fooling all the time. Buster, I call them! Oo! I know I shall catch a cold!"

"You certainly will, if you don't be quick and change your things," said

Tom Clee Linsinger.—No. 1548.

Whitson. "Cut off and get a good rub down."

Billy Baxter cut off. But the damage was done, and when he came down after changing his things he was smiling and content. Balstrode & Co., instead of showing the sympathy which the fat junior naturally expected, seemed to regard his cold as really the cause of the joke.

A Deputation from the Allies:

"O HAIR!"

"Hair good! Order, and do not crowd."

"I wish you to impress upon me," said Adolphe Messier, "that we hope in good order; and mind, my friends, I speak to us remains our own."

"I wish that I do to speaking, Messier."

"I know that I do him better, Hoffman."

"I wish—"

"I wish—"

"Don't interrupt me, you French men!"

"I interrupt you as often as I like, you Sherman beast!"

"French peep!"

"Sherman roarin'!"

And then there was a respite. The allies were mustering in the Cloisters after school hours in the dusk of the dim October evening. They had decided to send a deputation over to the Greyfriars Remove with a challenge to a football match, and they intended to make the deputation an imposing one.

Half a dozen allies had been selected as deputies, and most of the others had come to the Cloisters to see them off. Unfortunately, the old dispute between

French and Germans had restarted, and both fair to top the scene in the lead. Linburger pushed his way forward as Hoffman and Messier staggered against a stone pillar, fighting.

"That you hold on!" he exclaimed. "I tell you—"

"French peeply peeply!"

"Fat Sherman roarin'!"

"That you shut up!" roared Linburger. "Hold on and stop, ain't it! Is it not here you send to deputation, fathead!"

"It is to look of fat French peep!"

"It is all due to fat Sherman roarin'!"

"Stop, I say! Let it go! You make friends, for it good to us come," said Linburger persistently.

"Oh! That is a good idea!" exclaimed Charpentier.

And they dragged the combatants apart. Hoffman and Messier had both received some severe punishment, and they were not unwilling to cease fighting.

"I wish I make friends if Messier wish it!" gasped Hoffman.

"I wish I make no friend via Fritz."

The quarrel being amicably settled, the discussion of the order of the deputation was resumed, the rivalry of Hoffman and Messier now being replaced by an overpowering politeness.

"So just of me speaker of a deputation I leave to my friend Fritz," said Messier.

Hoffman shook his head.

"Nois, nois, nois friend! To post of me speaker I leads to you."

"You speaks as better of so two."

"Nois, nois."

"Let it go! Let you both speaks," said Linburger. "You both speaks and push one another up."

"I think that is a good idea."

"I agree to say."

"Then let us go!" exclaimed Lavelle.

"We are very polite, ain't it?"

The deputation formed up again. The six chosen juniors marched off into the Greyfriars ground. Hoffman and Messier went last, then Charpentier and Linburger, and then Lavelle and Sadie. They marched across the Close with an air of great dignity, and crossed the House without hindrance, as most of the Greyfriars fellows were indoors in the cold October evening. But as soon as they looked into the Communion-room, there was a yell.

"Hallo, hallo!"

"Check, coming here!" greeted Billy Baxter. "Better dash them in the fountain and give the beasts a cold, same as they've given me."

Messier waved his hand in a sign of peace.

"We are a deputation," he announced.

"We come in unity. We stick to our Wharton."

The allies were looking into the Junior Communion-room. They did not enter, not liking exactly the looks of the Greyfriars juniors.

"Wharton's in his study," grinned Balstrode, "with his friends. But you can deal with us. We're here."

"Better," said Messier. "And the fellows are just outside."

"Dash them!" put in Baxter.

"I say that we are a deputation! Let you keep off!" exclaimed Adolphe Messier. "We come in peace, but you—"

"Dash them!" shouted Balstrode.

Some of the juniors made a rush. The deputation advanced back along the passage and took up arms. Balstrode & Co. dashed after them, but the allies were quicker. They reached Study No. 1 safely.

Messier bang the door open. Balstrode stopped on the stairs. He did not care to pursue them into Harry Wharton's quarters. The allies breathlessly rushed into the study. The Express Four were at their preparations, and they started in surprise at the sudden invasion of the foreign youths.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Allies!"

"Check!" ejaculated Nagest, picking up the fire shovel. "Raiding our own quarters! Go for them!"

"The chocklones is terrible!"

"I'vee. Ye come in peace!"

"That is correct. Let there be peace, now outdoors!"

"Ray with the shovel, Nagest," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Glad to see chaps want here!"

"We are a deputation."

"Ye comes to bring to challenge."

Harry Wharton stared at them.

"What challenge? What are you going to challenge us to?"

"Is no game of football?"

"What?" roared the Removites in one voice.

Messier grinned with delight at the impression his challenge had created.

"So game of football," he repeated.

"We challenge you to meet us at 20 yards, and we will give you our fearful licking via yourselves."

"That is right—a fearful licking, you friends."

Amusement held the chains of the Removites silent for a moment. Then they burst into an uncontrollable roar of laughter.

"Ho, ha, ha!"

Declined With Thanks!

"H A, ha, ha!"

The allies stared at the Removites in amazement.

At last they thought that the laughter was a pretence to cover up



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year and measured at the challenge, but they soon saw that it was genuine. As a matter of fact, the Famous Four were simply couraged with excitement. The idea of the alien playing football at all was amusing, after what they had seen that morning; but to think of playing the Remove was really too funny.

"Football!" yelled Bob Cherry. "I beg pardon—football! They are going to play so football!"

"Good old football!" giggled Nugent.

"My hat!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"They—they are too funny to live!"

"The funny business is terrific!"

"Football! Oh, my only Aunt Susannah!"

"So football," said Nugent. "Yes, I can see them playing the Remove. Ha, ha, ha!"

Huffman and Messier & Co. glared at the corralled Removers. They began to see that they had not impressed the Famous Four very much at all.

"Ach! I think—"

"I sink—"

"Happy!" gasped Harry Wharton. "You must excuse us—we couldn't help it. You see, your football challenge struck us as funny."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We call it football nowadays; but, of course, that's a detail—"

"So games is played via both feet, I sink," said Messier.

"Yes, but—"

"Yes I sink not as proper name is football. If it is so football you play via only one of so feet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I sink not Adolphe is quite right, sir, it."

"Oh, football, if you like!" said Wharton. "Of course, you should know. You play the game so splendidly. Do—"

"You takes any challenge!"

"Well, you see, we haven't any convenient dates just now—"

"If you refuse to challenge, Wharton, we think you are afraid, ain't it. We discuss you as to coward."

"That will be rather rough, of course," grinned Wharton. "But I think we'll risk even that rather than play football with such a ripping team as you are."

"Rather!" murmured Nugent.

"I think that you are afraid. You make much show of it football, and you get up a challenge you dodge out of hand. Yah."

"Yah!" said the deputations in chorus.

"I points to finger of scorn at you?"

And Huffman said the same as the word. "Ach! Ye despise you?"

"Ye do, Fritz. I also point as finger of so scorn."

And Messier did so. The whole deputations followed suit, and six fingers of scorn were solemnly pointed at the chumps of the Remove. Strange to say, instead of being crushed thereby, they went off into a fresh yell of laughter.

"Oh, my hat!" said Wharton, laughing. "We—we can't accept your challenge, you know, because there are difficulties in the way. What sort of football—I mean football—do you play?"

"We have not play much, so far, but we are taking up to game."

"Yes, it correct."

"And where do you want the match to come off?"

"On Saturday afternoon we plays you and puts you follow. We have been learning to play football for several days, and we plays up well."

"They've been learning football for several days!" murmured Bob Cherry faintly. "Oh, carry me away to die, somewhere!"

"It will go to first match to have played with an outside team," said Fritz Hoffman. "I have no doubts but ye likes you better potato."

"I sink not in certain."

And the deputations all solemnly nodded their heads. What they did not know about football would have filled large volumes, but they had a solemn confidence in themselves.

"What kind of game do you play?" asked Wharton, trying to be serious.

"You see—"

"We plays no game of football."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I mean, do you play the Rugby game? I should think that was what you were aiming at when I saw you playing this morning."

"Ye plays football."

It was evident that Messier had never heard of the Rugby code, and probably he was quite unaware that there were two varieties of the national game.

"But there are two kinds of football," Wharton explained. "Rugby is one, and Association is the other. As you don't know the difference, I'm afraid it will be impossible for us to play you—"

"I think you seek to evade so challenge because you are afraid."

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"I think to come as my friend Adolphe."

"My dear chaps, we'd play a match with you with pleasure, but you know as much about football as you do about the Chinese alphabet!"

"Ye brands you as coward if you do not play."

"Oh, go ahead with the branding, then!" said Wharton. "Go and get it done while we're finishing prep. Good-night!"

Messier waved his hand dramatically.

"Did! I despise you, and points so finger of scorn at you! Adieu!"

And the deputations solemnly pointed six fingers of scorn at the Removers once more, and then dragged up their shoulders and marched out of the study.

Harry Wharton gasped with merriest.

"My only hat!" he murmured. "These fellows are too funny in line! I can see the Remove team playing a match with them. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that fearful one!"

There was a sound of bumping on the stairs. The chumps rushed in the door. The alien deputations was being rolled down the stairs by Halstrode & Co., who had been waiting for them to come out.

Wharton ran down the stairs.

"Let them alone. They're a deputations."

"Oh, rats!" said Halstrode.

Harry along him aside, and he sat down with violence on the stairs.

The other Removers crowded back, and the breathless aliens took to their heels and vanished into the dusk of the Close.

A Disappointment for Buster!

THE chumps of the Removers were still chattering over the visit of the aliens and the absurd challenge when Billy Buster came into the study.

Buster's face was very grim. His nose was red, and his eyes were watering, and he kept up a wailing and swiffling that was almost incoherent. He certainly had a cold, but his sufferings were probably not quite so great as he wished the Removers to believe.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in apparent surprise. "Buster's got a cold."

Buster blinked at them indignantly.

"You knew I'd got a cold!" he grumbled.

"Did I? Yes, now I think of it, so I did!" asserted Bob Cherry. "I suppose it's the same cold as you had this afternoon?"

Buster did not deign to reply to that foolish question. He turned to Harry Wharton.

"I say, Wharton, you can see I've got a cold!" roared Buster.

"Yes, you look like it, Buster," asserted Wharton.

"You know what I need for a cold?"

"Knows it is good thing," said Bob Cherry. "If you like, I'll chase you up and down the corridor with a kitchen towel. I'll willingly do any little thing I could to cure you. You might give us the cold if you're not careful."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Or you would give up rating for a time," suggested Nugent. "You feel a fever and starve a cold, you know."

"A hot you know about it!" grinned Billy Buster. "You feed a cold and starve a fever. I was going to suggest, as there's danger of you fellows catching my cold, that you dash together and help me get rid of it by feeding it."

"The cheekfulness of the honourable Buster is terrific."

"I don't see it," said Billy Buster severely. "We had an epidemic of colds here a short time ago. I suppose you don't want all that over again—the whole Remove going about coughing and sneezing and swiffling. And I've got a cold."

"People always catch it?"

"You'll see plain if you give it to us," said Bob Cherry. "I don't like you good-night again till you're quite well—so there!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I wish you wouldn't make fun of a serious subject. It would be no joke for me to expire in agony in this study some evening when you're doing your prep—"

"You'll jolly well get a thick ear if you start doing anything of the sort!"

"I've got a delicate constitution, and I can only keep going by having plenty of nourishing food. I shall have to raise funds somehow to feed my cold. It's important. I've been disappointed about a postal order, so I wouldn't think of troubling you selfish borders on the subject."

"Which postal order have you been disappointed about?" asked Bob Cherry innocently. "The one that was coming this morning, the one that was coming last week, or the one that was coming the week before?"

Tom Cox Lecture.—No. 1,248.

