

**"BETRAYED BY HIS COUSIN!"** GRIPPING YARN OF SCHOOLBOY INTRIGUE AT ST. JIM'S **INSIDE.**

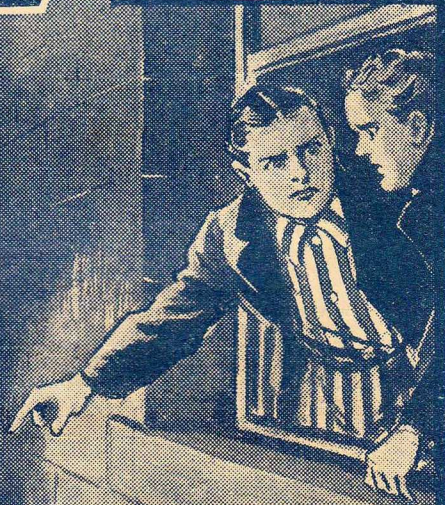
# The GEM

2!

**CALLING ALL  
ARMAMENTS  
STAMPS  
COLLECTORS!**

**FULL DETAILS WITHIN  
OF THE SECOND  
MONTH'S PRIZE-GIVING!**

**SEE PAGE 2.**



*"Look! It was  
a trap to  
disgrace you!"*

# THE GREAT ARMAMENTS RACE

## 10 More First Prizes of New Bikes!

### 4,000 Other Grand Prizes

### Still to be Won FREE

## SECOND PRIZE-GIVING—SEARCHLIGHTS WANTED!

**H**ALT! Here's great news, pals! This is the end of the second month's lap in our Great Free Stamp-Collecting Race, and we are now giving away Five More "Hercules" Bikes and up to 2,000 of the other super prizes. They will be given FREE to the readers who have collected the highest number of SEARCHLIGHT Stamps!

So lose no time! Get out all the stamps you have been collecting each week, and add to them those given in this issue (five on this page, and fifteen more on Page 35). Sort them out carefully and then count up how many Searchlight Stamps you have altogether, and remember that all the Searchlights given so far can be used. No other stamps are wanted this month!

Having found your total, write it clearly in ink on the coupon given here, remembering that no allowance will be made for incorrect totals. Add your name and full address also, and fill in at the foot of the coupon which of the following prizes you would like in the event of your being a second-prize winner:

FOOTBALL  
WRIST-WATCH  
DART BOARD

CRICKET BAT  
PEN-AND-PENCIL SET  
CAMERA

A FAMOUS BOY'S BOOK  
FOUNTAIN-PEN  
PROPELLING PENCIL

When you have completed the coupon in full, pin or clip your Searchlight Stamps on together, and attach them to the coupon. Post, in a lfd. stamped envelope, to:

GEM "Armaments" (June),  
1, Tallis House,  
London, E.C.4. (Comp.).

This Month's Closing Date for Home Readers is FRIDAY, JULY 1st, 1938.

**OVERSEAS READERS!** Remember that you, too, are included in this scheme, and special awards are to be given for the highest collections from overseas readers. Send in your stamps according to the directions for Home Readers, but note that in your case the closing date is specially extended to Wednesday, October 12th, 1938.

N.B.—As you know, this great gift scheme is also appearing in other popular boys' papers like "Modern Boy" and "Magnet," and you will find more stamps in them to swell your total.  
And here's a good tip, pals—this week's "Modern Boy" (issue dated June 25th) contains FOUR BONUS Searchlight Stamps, making twenty-four stamps in all in that issue.

When you have sent in your Searchlight Stamps, keep all the other stamps you have collected safely. There are still Five More Bikes and 2,000 other Prizes to be given away. More stamps will be given next week, and at the end of next month you will again be told how and where to send in for the third month's prizes. So keep at it, and accumulate all the stamps you can, because even if you don't happen to secure a prize this month, you still have other winning opportunities.

**RULES.** Five First Prizes of £4 7s. 6d. "Hercules" Cycles and up to 2,000 other prizes will be awarded in order of merit each month during the contest to the readers declaring and sending the largest collections of the stamps called for. Cash value of any of the first prizes may be divided in case of a tie or ties for such prizes. Ties for any other prizes will be decided by the Editor.

All claims for prizes to be sent on the proper coupon (as given here); no allowance made for any coupon or stamps mutilated or lost or delayed in the post or otherwise. No correspondence. No one connected with this paper may enter, and the Editor's decision will be final and legally binding throughout.

You can also collect or swap Armaments Stamps with pals who read "Magnet," "Modern Boy," "Thriller," "Detective Weekly," "Triumph," "Champion," "Boy's Cinema," and "Sports Budget."

## "THE GEM" ARMAMENTS RACE (June)

Herewith I enter

..... stamps of  
SEARCHLIGHTS

In entering this competition, I agree to accept the Editor's decision as final and binding.

Your Name .....

Address .....

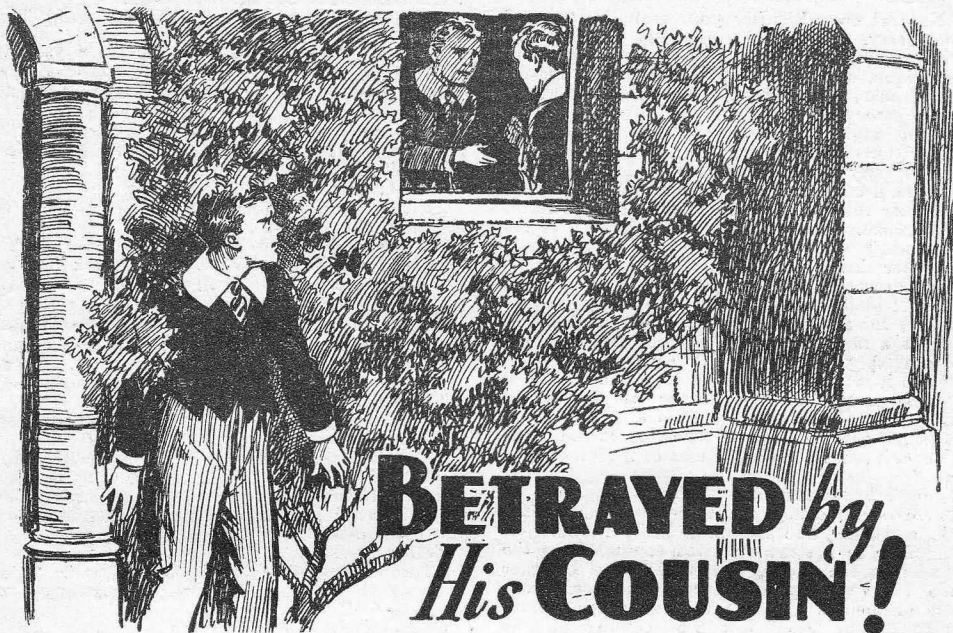
Prize you would like if a second-prize winner.

NOTE: The total of stamps to be given above is your total of Searchlights only—no others to be included. See that your total is correct. No allowance made for error.

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**IN TRYING TO RESCUE CROOKE FROM TROUBLE, TALBOT WALKS INTO HIS COUSIN'S TRAP TO BRAND HIM AS A THIEF!**



**BETRAYED by His COUSIN!**

"You don't seem to know what you're asking, Crooke," said Talbot, his voice unsteady. "You're asking me to break open Mr. Linton's desk in the middle of the night—like a burglar!" "You can pick the lock as easy as falling off a form," said Crooke. Outside the window Levison listened to every word keenly, his eyes glittering.

**CHAPTER 1.**

**Cousins and Foes!**

"TALK of angels," remarked Monty Lowther, "and you hear the rustle of their giddy wings. Only Crooke isn't precisely an angel!"

Four juniors of the Shell at St. Jim's were lying in the deep grass by the shining Rhyl, enjoying a comfortable slack after cricket.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Talbot had made good scores against the New House, and they felt entitled to a rest.

Monty Lowther had been bowled by Fatty Wynn for a duck's egg, but, as Lowther pointed out, it was the only duck's egg scored in the match, so he was really more distinguished than the others.

The Terrible Three had been talking cricket—Tom Merry and Manners chiefly discussing Lowther's brilliant score.

Talbot of the Shell spoke little, and seemed to be in a thoughtful mood. And when Tom Merry asked him the subject of his meditations, he replied briefly: "My cousin, Crooke!"

It had come as a great surprise to St. Jim's—and more especially to Talbot—when it had been discovered some time earlier that

Talbot, the one-time Toff, and the prince of cracksmen, was the nephew of Colonel Lyndon, a governor of St. Jim's.

The colonel had taken an interest in Talbot when visiting the school to see his other nephew, Gerald Crooke, the cad of the Shell. The colonel had learned from the Head about the peculiar past of Talbot, and he had been struck by the junior's likeness to his own sister, who had died years before after an unhappy marriage.

When the colonel had taxed Talbot about his parents, the junior had produced a locket containing a photo of his dead mother, and this had convinced the colonel completely that Talbot was his sister's only son.

Gerald Crooke had been furious at the amazing discovery. Talbot, a reformed cracksmen, was his cousin! The black sheep of the Shell had always disliked Talbot, but now his dislike had turned to hatred.

"I don't want to be disrespectful to your merry relations, Talbot, old fellow," yawned Manners, "but Crooke can go and eat coke! He had a bet on the House match, the worm—excuse me! I saw him settling up with Racke afterwards."

"He backed the wrong horse," chortled Monty Lowther. "He

**By  
MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

*Masking his treachery under a cloak of friendship, Gerald Crooke pursues his cunning scheme to bring disgrace on the cousin he hates—Reginald Talbot!*

thought the New House was going to win the match—"

"Natural enough, after your score," remarked Tom Merry.

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Lowther. "My score was unique, at any rate. But what's the matter with Crooke, Talbot? Has he been trying to borrow money of you?"

Talbot laughed.

"No. Crooke has plenty of money—more than I have. My uncle's home from India, and I expect he'll come to St. Jim's soon to see us both. It's rather rotten for me to be on such bad terms with Crooke. Colonel Lyndon would like to see us friends."

Lowther shook his head.

"My dear chap, I really can't approve of your making friends with Crooke! He really isn't fit company for an innocent youth like you. Besides, he's got a new pal—I've heard so, at all events. Not a chap you would pull with."

"Who is it?" asked Talbot.

"Lodgey, the billiard-sharper at the Green Man," grinned Lowther. "He's a newcomer in this neighbourhood, and Crooke and Racke made his acquaintance at once. Birds of a feather, you know."

Talbot's brow clouded.

There were footsteps in the grass of the towing-path, and the juniors glanced lazily round.

A junior in a straw hat was coming from the direction of the school, and then Monty Lowther made his remarks concerning angels and the rustle of their wings. For it was George Gerald Crooke of the Shell who was coming up the towing-path.

He glanced at the four fellows in the grass as he came along, and scowled.

The sight of Tom Merry & Co. was enough to make Crooke scowl. The black sheep of St. Jim's was on the worst of terms with the cheery Co.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther affably. "Just speaking about you, Crooke."

"You might have minded your own business," suggested Crooke.

"But you're such a fascinating subject of conversation," explained Lowther. "So sorry you lost your quid to Racke over the House match."

"If they'd all batted like you, I should have won it," said Crooke.

"Got you there, Monty!" grinned Manners.

"Never mind; as you're a betting chap, Crooke, I'm open to make a bet with you," said Lowther, unmoved.

Crooke stared.

"Hallo! Are the good little Georgies turning over a new leaf?" he asked sarcastically. "Well, I'll take you on. What's the bet?"

"I'll bet you a thick ear to a black eye—"

"You silly ass!" roared Crooke.

"That you'll be sorry for calling on Mr. Lodgey this afternoon," pursued Lowther. "In fact, I'll give you the odds—two thick ears to one black eye."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crooke scowled, and tramped on up the path. At a short distance was the garden path of that ill-favoured inn, the Green Man, which Lowther sagely guessed was Crooke's destination.

And Lowther was probably right in surmising that Crooke would regret his visit. It was very probable that he would leave most of his spare change in Mr. Lodgey's possession.

Talbot sat up in the grass.

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"Crooke!" he called out.

His cousin did not turn his head.

"He won't stop for you, Talbot," said Tom Merry. "Let him rip."

"I think I'd better speak to Crooke," he said, with a troubled look. "He can't know what that man Lodgey is like if he's chummed with him."

"Know anything about him?" asked Tom.

"I've met him!" Talbot coloured deeply. "It was in the old days, before I came to St. Jim's."

"Oh!" said Tom. "I see."

Talbot rose to his feet.

"I'll speak to Crooke," he said. "It can't do any harm, if it doesn't do any good."

Without waiting for his chums to reply, Talbot followed quickly on the track of Gerald Crooke. The black sheep of the Shell was close to the gate when Talbot overtook him.

A man with a hard, coarse face was leaning on the gate, looking out over the towing-path and the river.

"Crooke!" Talbot exclaimed breathlessly.

The Shell fellow faced round angrily.

"What are you following me for?" he snapped.

"Only a word—"

"You know I don't want any words with you," said Crooke sourly. "Still, if you want to come into the Green Man, you can come. It's really more in your line than mine, considering what you used to be."

Talbot flushed.

"I don't want to come there," he said. "You know that I want to give you a word of warning—"

Crooke burst into a laugh.

"You can keep your sermons till I ask for them!" he said.

"I don't mean that. It's about that man."

Talbot made a gesture towards the man at the gate who was staring at him curiously. "If you are going to see that man Lodgey—"

"Suppose I am?" sneered Crooke. "Are you going to tell my uncle, and get me into a row?"

"You know I'm not. I want to tell you that I know that man—"

"Old friend of yours, perhaps?" sneered Crooke.

"An old acquaintance," said Talbot quietly. "You seem to think that he's a common sharper, but, as a matter of fact, he's the associate of criminals."

"Yes, he would be, if he's an old acquaintance of yours," assented Crooke coldly.

Talbot bit his lips.

"He's a dangerous man to know," he said. "I don't mean that he'll merely swindle you—that's certain, anyway—but you won't find it easy to get rid of him if you want to. He's an utter scoundrel, and he has been wanted by the police."

"Well, so have you!" jeered Crooke. "But I'm expected to be civil to you, all the same. I don't see much to choose between you."

Talbot clenched his hands hard. But he held his anger in check. He had not come there to quarrel with Crooke.

"Very well, I've nothing more to say," he said. "I thought I ought to speak, knowing the man as I do. If you'd let me, Crooke, I'd like to be better friends with you. Colonel Lyndon would like it."

"I'm not looking for a reformed criminal as a pal, thanks! And you can't spoof me, even if you can spoof that silly old fool!"

"Are you speaking of Colonel Lyndon?"

"Yes, the old duffer!" said Croke. "You know you've spoofed him; you're spoofing him now! You're after his money—the money that would have come to me if you hadn't turned up. I suppose you're getting a yarn ready for him when he comes to the school. Well, he may hear something from me, too, when I get a chance of catching you out. You're currying favour with him for his money, and hoping he'll make his will in your favour. Let go, you cad!"

Croke struggled savagely as Talbot's grasp fell on him.

"You bound!" panted Talbot. "You lie, and you know it!"

"Let me go!" yelled Croke, shaken like a rat by a terrier in the grasp of the sturdy Shell fellow. "You rotter! Let me go! Lodgey, lend a hand!"

The man at the gate had come out on the towing-path. He ran to Croke's aid, and grasped Talbot by the shoulders.

"Ands off that young gentleman!" he exclaimed.

Talbot's eyes gleamed. His left shot out, and caught Lodgey on the point of the chin.

Lodgey let him go suddenly.

The blow swept him backwards, and he crashed down in the grass on his back.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Oh! Ow!"

Talbot released Croke. He looked for a moment as if he meant to knock him down across his precious friend, and Croke backed away.

But Talbot restrained himself. He thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and strode off.

His face was deeply clouded as he rejoined the Terrible Three. They looked at him curiously. The trees had hidden from their sight what had happened at the inn gate. But they had heard Mr. Lodgey's howl.

"Well," said Lowther cheerily, "what's the news?"

"Oh, never mind!" said Talbot. "You fellows coming in? It's past tea-time."

"Any old thing," yawned Manners.

The chums of the Shell sauntered down the towing-path to the school.

Talbot's handsome face remained clouded, and his chums did not question him.

**CHAPTER 2.**  
**A Precious Pair!**

"MY 'at!"  
Mr. Lodgey sat upon the grass and gasped.

He was glad to see that Talbot had gone. The weedy, unfit rascal was no match for the sturdy young junior of St. Jim's, and that one drive had been quite enough for him. He blinked at Croke.

"Bit of a scrapper, that young feller," said Mr. Lodgey, caressing his chin.

"Hang him!" muttered Croke.

Mr. Lodgey rose to his feet, and they entered the garden of the inn together.

The sharper was still rubbing his chin.

"What might that young feller's name be, Master Croke?" he asked. "I've seen him before somewhere. Schoolmate of yours—vot?"

"He's in my Form at St. Jim's," said Croke.

"Yes; I reckoned so from his clobber. If it wasn't impossible, I should think he was a cove I used to know—once upon a time."

"It's not impossible," said Croke, with a sneer. "He's told me he knows you. His name's Talbot—at least, he's called 'Talbot.'"

"Never 'eard the name. Knows me, does he?" said Lodgey.

"He used to be called the Toff."

The sharper jumped.

"The Toff? That's the Toff?"

"Yes. You know him now?"

"I thought I knew his chivvy," said Mr. Lodgey, in a state of great bewilderment. "But what is the Toff doing in a school like yours, Master Croke? If he's the Toff I know, the police want him—bad!"

Croke grunted.

"No chance of that. He's reformed."

"My eye!"

"And it seems to be genuine," growled Croke. "I suppose he knows which side his bread's buttered. He was one of a gang of cracksmen once, according to what I've heard."

**THE GEM SPELLING BEE**  
**THINK THESE WORDS OUT!**

Here is another list of ten words. Can you tell how many of them are incorrectly spelled?

- SUPERFLOUS
- CATARACT
- COLLIQUY
- ETIQETTE
- FELLONOUS
- POLTRON
- REDUNDENT
- LACKADAISICAL
- WITHHOLD
- GALLERY

Correct with a pencil the words which you think are misspelled, and then turn to page 31, where the answers are given.

He could crack any safe in the kingdom, and when he chucked it up, they were keen to have him back."

"That's him," said Mr. Lodgey. "That's the Toff!"

His eyes glittered, and he rubbed his chin again.

"The peelers would like to see him," he remarked. "I reckon I'll make him sorry for punching a fellow!"

Croke shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"No chance of that. He got the King's Pardon long ago."

"My 'at! The Toff was always a deep one," said Mr. Lodgey admiringly. "That lets him out. But you mean to say they let a cove like that into your school?"

"Oh, he can soft-sawder anybody!" said Croke scornfully. "The Head's quite fond of him, all the fellows like him, though they know what he's been. He pitches a yarn about having been brought up among rascals, and chucking it up as soon as he had a chance."

"Awfully deep card, the Toff," murmured Mr. Lodgey.

"And it turns out that he's the nephew of a big gun—my own uncle," snarled Croke. "It seems to be proved, too. And Colonel Lyndon is as taken with him as everybody is. Hardly anybody at the school is down on him, excepting me."

"And you're his cousin?"

"Well, I can't help that. I'm not proud of that connection," sneered Croke. "I'd like to see him break out, and get kicked out of the school. But there's no chance of that; he's too deep. He's got plenty of tin now, too. My uncle makes him an allowance, and I believe he's down in the old fool's will—for the money that ought to come to me, by rights. He's cut me out there."

Mr. Lodgey grinned. Looking at Croke, and looking at Talbot, he was not surprised that the Toff had found more favour in the eyes of Colonel Lyndon.

Croke scowled, reading easily enough the rascal's thoughts.

"That's 'ard on you, Master Croke. But if the Toff should break out again some time, you'll 'ave him down."

"No chance of that; he's too deep."

Mr. Lodgey rubbed his chin again.

"You'd like to see him come a cropper?" he asked.

"I'd give a year's pocket-money to see it!" growled Croke. "But there's nothing doing."

"You might be able to help him—that way."

Croke stared.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"If the Toff won't play his old tricks," said Mr. Lodgey, in a low voice, "he might be made to seem to."

"Nothing doing! Do you mean I might bag something and plant it on him? Too jolly risky, for one thing, and he's deep enough to wriggle out of it for another. He was under suspicion more than once, owing to his past, but he always wriggled out of it."

"There's more than one way of killing a cat, Master Croke. If I could 'elp you work the trick, what would you say?"

Croke's eyes gleamed.

"If you could, I'd stand you a fiver, Lodgey—more than that, too. It would be worth a lot to me if he could be shown up in his true colours; it would mean the finish of him with my uncle. That means that the colonel's money would come to me—"

Mr. Lodgey looked curiously at Croke. He was thinking what a callous young scoundrel this well-dressed young fellow from the big school was.

"But it can't be done," went on Croke. "There was a chap at St. Jim's who went to the bad, and tried to fix it on Talbot, but it was a failure. He has old Harry's own luck!"

"But you'd work it if you could, Master Croke?"

"Of course I would. I should be justified in showing him up in his true colours. I know jolly well he's spoofing—just playing this game because it pays him."

"It might be did," said Mr. Lodgey meditatively. "I owe him one, and I always pay my debts—that kind! And you'd be a wealthy man some day, Master Croke, if that upstart was out of your way?"

"I shall be wealthy, anyway," said Croke arrogantly. "My father's rich. But it would

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mean five or six thousand a year when I come of age, if Talbot doesn't cut me out with my uncle."

"That's a lot of money," said Mr. Lodgey. "And a generous gent like you wouldn't forget an old friend who'd been useful to him?"

Croke nodded. It occurred to him that this unscrupulous rascal—little better than a criminal, as he knew—might be of use in his scheming against his cousin.

Croke had thought over the matter many times, but there seemed no way of accomplishing what he desired. And it did not occur to him that if he placed himself in the rascal's power, by entering into a shady scheme with him, he would find Mr. Lodgey exceedingly hard to get rid of afterwards. He was not aware that a scheme of unending blackmail was already floating in Mr. Lodgey's crafty brain.

"I reckon it might be worked," said Mr. Lodgey, after some thought. "What terms are you on with the Toff, Master Croke? Bad, I reckon."

"Of course."

"You could make friends with him—he'd let you?"

"He'd be only too glad," said Croke contemptuously. "My old fool of an uncle wants to see us friends, and it suits Talbot to play up to him."

"And if you were friends with him, you could ask him to do you a little favour?" said Mr. Lodgey.

Croke stared.

"I suppose I could," he said. "What in thunder are you driving at, Lodgey?"

"I remember the Toff was a good-natured cove in the old days," said Mr. Lodgey reflectively. "I didn't know him more'n middling well, but I noticed that. He'd do anybody a good turn. By gum, it could be worked! If you could make up your mind to make friends with the cheeky young 'ound, Master Croke, and arter that you asks him a big favour, 'cause you're in a fearful scrape, and then he does it, and—the chopper comes down, and he's caught! By gum!"

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Croke impatiently.

"I mean that the Toff will be sorry he knocked Jim Lodgey down, if you foller my advice, Master Croke! Come indoors. Tain't safe talking 'ere. We can 'ave a little chat over a smoke."

"Right-ho!"

Croke followed the dingy rascal up the path, and they entered the house. There, Mr. Lodgey further outlined the scheme that had come into his fertile brain, while Croke smoked cigarettes and listened.

Mr. Lodgey watched the junior's face carefully as he unfolded his plan, ready to back out at a sign of disgust, disapproval, or horror. But there were no signs of anything of the kind in Croke's hard, callous face. He listened eagerly, drinking in every word.

"By gum!" he exclaimed, when Lodgey had finished. "What an idea!"

"And safe as houses!" grinned Mr. Lodgey.

Croke chuckled.

"Safe enough!" he said. "Even if it failed, there's nothing to hurt me. And I don't see how it could fail!"

Mr. Lodgey rubbed his dirty hands. And he rubbed his chin, where a blue bruise was forming under the stubble. Mr. Lodgey had his own little debt to pay, and he was prepared to pay it with interest.

"Then it's a go!" smiled Mr. Lodgey.

"Yes, rather!"  
 "And now, wot do you say to a 'undred up, Master Croke?"  
 "Good!"

The hundred up cost George Gerald Croke a pound, though he was close on winning when Mr. Lodgey ran out with a twenty "break," and Mr. Lodgey agreed that his luck was cruel.

But Croke was not thinking of the pound as he left the Green Man and strode home by the towing-path. He was thinking of the cunning scheme which was to bring to his feet the fellow who had never harmed him, but whom he persisted in regarding as an enemy and rival. And Mr. Lodgey had pleasant reflections, too, as he stared from the window after Croke.

He was thinking how much that arrogant young blackguard would be worth to him, when they shared a guilty secret that Croke could not afford to have revealed!

CHAPTER 3.

A Friend in Need!

"**T**ALBOT here?"  
 Levison of the Fourth looked into Talbot's study in the Shell passage.  
 Gore and Skimpole were at tea there.

"No," said Gore. "I think he's having tea with Tom Merry."

"My dear Levison," said Skimpole, blinking benevolently at the black sheep of the Fourth, "pray come in! I think I can be of some assistance to you!"

Levison stared.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, my dear fellow! Come in!"

"How the dickens do you know what I want to see Talbot for?" growled Levison.

Gore grinned.

"Hard up?" he asked. "Have the geegees come in eleventh and twelfth?"

"Something like that," said Levison coolly. "But I haven't come here to borrow of you, Gore!"

"Not much use if you did!" said Gore, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Oh, rats!" Look here, Skimmy, if you mean business—"

Skimpole nodded. The expression on the good Skimmy's face was very earnest and benevolent.

"I gather, Levison, that you are in money difficulties?" he said.

"Exactly! Broke to the wide!"

"I have heard, Levison, that you have formed



"You're currying favour with Colonel Lyndon for his money," sneered Croke, "and hoping he'll make his will out in your favour. Let go, you cad!" Croke struggled savagely as Talbot's grasp fell on him. "You hound!" panted Talbot. "You lie—and you know it!"

a decidedly disreputable acquaintance. You and Crooke—"

"Go hon!"

"You have visited this disreputable person at the Green Man and elsewhere, and by this time you probably owe him money."

"You're a thought-reader, Skimmy!" said Levison sarcastically. "But the question is, how much can you shell out?"

"My dear Levison, my object is to be of assistance to you!"

"Can you stand three quid?"

"What?"

"Ha, ha, na!" roared Gore.

"My dear Gore, there is no occasion for laughter. Levison, my dear fellow, I cannot assist you in a pecuniary way, but I hope to be of great assistance to you by speaking a word in season."

"You silly, thumping ass!" howled Levison.

Skimpole blinked at him in surprise.

"Do not let your angry passions rise, Levison! My object is to assist you by pointing out that you are treading the downward path, and—"

Slam!

Levison was gone. Skimpole blinked at the door; then he blinked at Gore, who was chuckling.

"My dear Gore, have I said anything to make Levison angry?" he asked. "I am sure that my intentions were most friendly. I fully intended to point out to him the error of his ways, and perhaps save him from proceeding recklessly upon the downward path, but he appears to have misapprehended my object."

"Fathead!" said Gore politely.

But Skimpole still looked puzzled. He could

not see what there was for Levison to be angry about.

Levison was hanging about the passage with a moody brow. He could hear cheery voices from Study No. 10, where the Terrible Three and Kangaroo and Talbot were at tea.

He did not care to interrupt the tea-party, and he waited for Talbot to come out.

Crooke came along the passage with his study-mate, Racke.

Both of them grinned as they passed Levison.

Crooke and Levison were pals, in a way. Their tastes were very similar. They were often together in shady adventures. But Crooke was rich and Levison was poor, and in that way there was a great gulf between them. When Levison was hard up, as in the present instance, it was not much use his applying to Crooke for a loan. Crooke did not believe in helping a lame dog over a stile.

As a matter of fact, Levison had tried already to borrow of Crooke and Racke, and they had cheerfully told him to go and eat coke. Friendship did not go to that length with the black sheep of the School House. If Levison landed himself in a scrape he must get out of it without the assistance of his pals.

Levison scowled as Crooke and Racke went grinning into their study. After a few moments' hesitation, he followed them.

"Did I ask you to tea?" said Crooke sarcastically.

"I haven't come for your dashed tea!" growled Levison. Hardened young rascal as he was in many respects, Levison was sensitive, and the overbearing patronage of his rich pal got on his nerves. His feeling towards his pal was sometimes very near hatred. "I asked you to-day, Crooke, if you'd let me have three quid till the end of the week."

"Till the end of the century, you mean!" said Crooke humorously.

"I could settle up this time."

"You didn't settle up last time."

"You mean that you won't do it?" growled Levison.

"Of course I won't! I can't afford to pay your debts, as well as my own. Mine have been pretty heavy lately. Ask Racke."

"Better not," grinned Racke. "I should have to refuse!"

"You couldn't lend me three quid for a few days?" said Levison. "And you're rolling in money!"

"Well, you're not going to roll in my money, at all events," said Racke coolly. "Like your cheek to ask, if you want my opinion!"

"I don't know that I'd care to touch your money," sneered Levison. "I'm not a particular chap, but money made from profiteering is rather too dirty for me to touch. What puzzles me is why your pater hasn't been sent to prison yet."

And with that friendly remark Levison quitted the study, leaving Racke scowling and Crooke grinning.

With a gloomy face, Levison loitered about the passage till the door of Tom Merry's study opened, and Talbot and Kangaroo came out.

Kangaroo went up the passage to his own study, and Talbot came towards Levison. He gave the Fourth Former a friendly nod.

Talbot was always civil to Levison. He saw more good in the black sheep than the other fellows did.

"Got a minute to spare?" asked Levison.

Talbot stopped.

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"Certainly!"  
 "I dare say you can guess what I am going to ask you," said Levison, eyeing him. "You needn't tell me it's like my cheek. I know that. You're the only chap in the school who'll lend me any tin. I've refused to let you lend me anything till now. You're the only chap I wouldn't stick for all I can get. Queer, isn't it?"

"You're quite welcome, if you're hard up, Levison. I'm better off than I used to be, too, and I'm in funds now, as it happens."

"I don't want you to misunderstand me, though," said Levison. "I'm not quite a rotter. Because you're willing to lend me money, I've made up my mind not to stick you for it. Only this time I can really let you have it back at the end of the week—honest Injun—if you think my 'honest Injun' is worth anything!"

"I take your word, of course!"

"You're about the only fellow in the School House who would," said Levison. "And I suppose that's the reason why you're the only fellow I wouldn't spoof. I mean business!"

"How much?" asked Talbot quietly.

"Three quid."

"I can manage it."

"And you'll do it?"

"Yes."

"Blessed if I know why!" said Levison.

"You did me a good turn once."

"You've done me a dozen good turns since then," said Levison.

"Never mind that," said Talbot, with a smile. He had taken out his pocket wallet, and he extracted three pound notes from it—all it contained in the way of money, as Levison could see.

"That clears you out, I suppose?" said the Fourth Former uneasily.

"I've some change," said Talbot. "It's all right. I get my allowance on Saturday, too."

"You get a good allowance from Colonel Lyndon?"

"Yes. He is very good about everything."

"That would be knocked on the head if Crooke could work it. He won't leave a stone unturned to get you into trouble with your uncle."

Talbot's brow clouded.

"I know it," he said. "Never mind that. I don't think my uncle is likely to be prejudiced against me. Take the cash."

"You're an ass to lend it to me."

"You're a queer kind of borrower, I must say!" said Talbot, laughing. "It's all right. Take it!"

"But I really mean business this time. I wouldn't take your money otherwise. It's different with Crooke—not that the cad would be likely to lend me anything but a few bob. And you're lending me all your tin, without even asking where it's going."

"I'd rather not guess," said Talbot.

"You do guess, all the same!"

"I suppose so."

"And you don't even give me a long sermon with the oof."

"I don't think a sermon would be much use to you, Levison," said the Shell fellow quietly.

"If you asked my advice I'd give it. But you know what that would be without asking it."

"Yes, I know," Levison laughed. "Good advice is no good to me; I'm past praying for, you know. It's no good, I must have the excitement. And it's no good talking to me about the risk. I like the risk—I enjoy it. And it's no good telling me it's blackguardly and shady. I'm



"Now do something with your left foot, mister!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Joyce, 12, Merriens Close, Birmingham.

a shady blackguard, you know, and shall never be anything else. But—but if I can ever do you a good turn, there's not much I would stop at to do it!—That's honest Injun!"

And Levison walked away quickly, with the currency notes in his hand.

Talbot looked after him curiously. Levison's nature was a strange mixture of good and evil, and the evil predominated. But the Toff's early life had made him tolerant of weaknesses in others, and he was not down on Levison.

He knew, too, that his influence over the reckless fellow was good, and, though their ways were wide apart as the poles, he had a kind of friendship for the dingy blackguard of the Fourth.

And to the Toff, Levison showed his best side. False as he was, he was sincere with Talbot. Unscrupulous as he was in money matters, Talbot was the one fellow he would not swindle.

In his study Levison addressed a letter, and slipped the currency notes into it—a proceeding which was watched with great surprise by Trimble, Mellish, and Lumley-Lumley, his study-mates.

Levison had been trying to raise funds in his own study that afternoon in vain.

"Robbed a bank?" asked Mellish.

"No; I've robbed a pal," said Levison cheerfully. And he went out to post the letter—refraining from dropping it into the school letter-box, lest by chance the address should be observed.

#### CHAPTER 4.

#### Crooke Takes Up Cricket!

"GOING down to cricket?"

It was after lessons the next day, and the Terrible Three and Talbot and several other fellows came out of the School House together, in flannels.

Crooke of the Shell asked that question, much to the surprise of the cricketers. Crooke was not supposed to care anything about the game. He never attended the compulsory practice if he could invent an excuse for shirking it.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "Coming along, Crooke?"

"Yes, if I shan't be in the way."

"Not at all. Come on!" said the captain of the Shell.

"Poor old Crooke!" said Monty Lowther sympathetically.

"Eh? What do you mean?" exclaimed Crooke.

"So sorry you're ill!"

"Ill!" Crooke stared at the humorist of the Shell.

"My mistake!" said Lowther gracefully. "I thought you must be. But if you're not ill or potty, why this business? Why are you taking up cricket, instead of smoking behind the woodshed? What's the matter with smokes, all of a sudden?"

"You silly ass——"

"Oh, cheese it, Monty!" said Tom. "Keep the jokes for the family circle, old chap!"

"My dear chap, we must keep cheerful," said Lowther. "We must have our little jokes, by hook or by crook."

"Oh dear! Chuck it!"

Monty Lowther, quite pleased with his pun, walked on cheerfully.

Crooke dropped behind with Talbot, much to Talbot's surprise. The cad of the Shell was looking very uncomfortable.

"I—I say, Talbot!" he blurted out suddenly.

Talbot looked at him.

"You—you spoke to me yesterday." Crooke's face was very red. "I—I answered you without thinking. I—I'm sorry for what I said."

"Oh!" ejaculated Talbot.

"I—I've been thinking it over," continued Crooke. "After all, old Lyndon—I mean uncle—would be pleased to see us on better terms. It's rather rotten to keep on at loggerheads. If you meant what you said about our being better friends, I'm willing to meet you half-way."

Talbot's face brightened up.

"I meant every word," he said, "and I'm jolly glad to hear you say this, Crooke! Colonel Lyndon may come in any day now, as soon as he can get time, and I know he would like to see us friends. And if you're thinking of taking up cricket——"

"I—I am," said Crooke.

"Then you can depend on me if I can help you in any way."

"I—I was going to ask you," said Crooke. "I'm a bit off colour at present, but I'd like to shape a bit better by the time the colonel comes. He wants to see me take up games, and all that. And—and I'm going to begin to-day. I don't see why Lowther should jeer at me because I'm taking up cricket!"

"That was only his joke," said Talbot quickly.

"They'll be ready to back you up when they see you mean business."

"Well, I do mean business!"

"I'm glad we're going to be friends," said Talbot simply. "And, of course, you needn't be afraid of any sermons; your private affairs are no business of mine. But—if you'd let me mention that again—I wish you'd think over what I told you about that man Lodgey. He is a dangerous man to know."

"I've thought it over," said Crooke. "I've seen him for the last time. I hope you don't think I could be really friendly with a rank outsider like that. I—I had a letter from him to-day. I'm not going to answer it."

"For goodness' sake don't!" exclaimed Talbot anxiously. "If he got anything in your handwriting, he would have you under his thumb!" Crooke started.

"By gad, I never thought of that!" he ejaculated, sincerely enough. "I shall be jolly careful about that! That's a tip. Anyway, I'm not going to answer his letter."

"It was awfully risky getting a letter from him here," said Talbot. "It might have been opened. If a master saw it——"

"Yes, I know. I've put it in a safe place."

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"Better burn it, I should say."

"I'll burn it when I go in," said Crooke. "It's in my study."

"Now then, is Crooke going to bowl?" called out Monty Lowther. "Prepare to see your sticks go down, ye cripples!"

There was a laugh, and Crooke scowled.

Monty Lowther tossed him the ball, and Crooke caught it clumsily. He went into the field.

"You fellows might go a bit easy with my cousin," said Talbot quietly. "Crooke means to do his best, and he ought to be encouraged, don't you think?"

Tom Merry whistled.

"Rather a new departure for Crooke," he said. "But certainly he ought to be encouraged, if he's going to be decent. Have you made it up with him?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm glad."

"Same here!" said Monty Lowther affably.

"As that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say, the gladfulness is terrific. Crooke shall be taken up tenderly and treated with care. I only hope he won't brain me with that ball."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Talbot's appeal was regarded, and the Shell fellows were very considerate to Crooke. If he wanted to be decent, even for a time, they were the fellows to encourage him in his new departure.

And Crooke seemed really to be doing his best. He was clumsy and out of practice, but he was not slacking. The fellows round Little Side were all interested, too. Crooke was so hopeless a slacker and shirker that it was surprising to see him exerting himself in any way.

Levison of the Fourth arrived on Little Side. Levison was a slacker, too, where games were concerned, but he sometimes came down to watch.

He jumped at the sight of Crooke at the wicket.

"What the dickens is the game?" he said to Racke, who was looking on with a grin. "What's Crooke up to?"

"Playing cricket!" chuckled Racke. "The giddy leopard is changing his spots. Getting ready to surprise his uncle when he comes, I suppose."

"Oh!" said Levison. "I knew it was some spoof. I suppose it's that. May mean a tip from the old boy if Crooke can make him think he's playing the game."

Levison watched the practice curiously.

Talbot was coaching Crooke, and the cad of the Shell was receiving his good-natured instructions with great docility. And when the practice was over the cousins came off the field together, and walked away to the School House, chatting amicably.

Levison stared at them blankly.

"The lion and lamb over again!" grinned Racke. "They're friends now."

"Rot!" said Levison.

"Well, it looks like it."

Levison knitted his brows.

"Crooke hates Talbot," he said. "What in thunder is he playing that game for? He can't stand Talbot. Talbot doesn't talk geegees, he doesn't smoke, he doesn't blag; he doesn't do anything that Crooke can stand. What the merry dickens is the game?"

"Tip from nunky, I suppose."

Levison shook his head and walked away very thoughtfully.

Racke's explanation did not wholly account for the phenomenon, in his opinion. That Crooke was

# LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty Lowther.



Hallo, Everybody!

**I hear old Isaacs, the Rylcombe tailor, complains that business is just sew, sew!**

Story: "Yes, I've been to Africa and back in this car," said the owner proudly. "It certainly doesn't show any signs of wear," said the manufacturer, astonished. "Well, you told me to run it in carefully for the first few thousand miles," explained the owner, "so I got the native bearers to carry me in it!"

**Wait for this: A roller-skating enthusiast has been skating round and round the same square of space now for twenty years. He wants to keep in practice—and he is due to be released shortly. Sorry—it's a cell!**

Then there was the chap who asked his boss for a rise, but he only got blown up!

**An astronomer predicts that the world will end about the middle of this week. Well, that will certainly get me out of doing that chemistry paper on Friday!**

genuinely making it up Levison did not believe for one moment. He was of a suspicious turn of mind, and he knew Crooke.

But what game was the cad of the Shell playing? What trick had he in view in thus assuming a friendship he did not feel? He had an axe to grind. Levison did not doubt that for a moment.

Levison joined Crooke in the Common-room that evening.

"What's the little game, Crooke?" he asked abruptly.

"Game?" repeated Crooke.

"What are you spoofing Talbot for?"

"I've made it up with my cousin," said Crooke calmly. "I think we've been enemies long enough—all about nothing, too."

"And you don't think he's cut you out of your uncle's will now—what?"

"I don't think about it at all."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm sorry I didn't make it up before," said Crooke. "Talbot was willing. And—and Uncle Lyndon would be pleased. It's up to his nephew to meet his wishes, and all that."

"Yes, I can imagine you a dutiful nephew—I don't think!"

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Crooke. "No business of yours, I suppose, my relations with my own cousin?"

"Well, it might be my business," said Levison deliberately.

Man sued a butcher in Wayland. "Did you suggest that the joint you bought could have been wrapped up in a tram ticket?" asked the defending counsel. "No," said the accuser; "on second thoughts it might have fallen through the hole punched by the conductor!"

**I hear Knox caught Baggy Trimble bending at his keyhole. The eternal pry-angle!**

Latest Song from Foreign Battle Front: Ta-ra-ra-bomb-de-ay!

**News: A famous film star knows now that he disappointed his Scottish jans in his last film. He has a huge pile of unstamped letters of disgust already!**

"Records of Nightingales Singing to be Broadcast." A tweet in store?

**"Literary Critic Crusades For Better Pronunciation." Naice work if you can get it.**

I hear the first prize at a Wayland Fancy Dress Ball was won by a plumber. He forgot to go!

**Believe it or not: Blake saw an airman landing with a parachute in a high wind. "My hat," exclaimed Blake, "you've got a nerve landing with a parachute in this wind." "I'm not landing with a parachute," retorted the stranger. "I went up just now in a tent!"**

Here's high flying, fellows!

"I don't see how you can make that out."

"I'll explain. Talbot is a decent sort, and he's stood by me several times. Once he saved me from going right under. He did me a good turn yesterday, when my own pals wouldn't. I'm not going to see Talbot tricked, Crooke. You've got some dirty trick up your sleeve, and I know it."

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at!" yawned Crooke. "And Talbot won't thank you for meddling in his affairs, either."

"Possibly not; but I'm rather a meddling fellow," said Levison coolly. "Talbot's done me good turns—"

Crooke burst into a laugh.

"What do you care for a chap who's done you good turns? Don't be funny!"

"Not a rap, as a rule; but I make an exception in Talbot's favour," said Levison, unmoved. "And if you're thinking of playing any dirty trick on Talbot, Crooke, you're up against me, too."

Crooke smiled sarcastically.

"If I'm going to lose the boon of your friendship, you may as well settle up the quid you owe me," he said.

"Never mind the quid. You can whistle for it. I've warned you."

"Oh rats!"

"Look here, Crooke—"

"Can't jaw now. I'm going to play chess with Talbot."

"With Talbot?" ejaculated Levison.

"Certainly!"

Levison drew a deep breath. He watched Croke and Talbot settle down at the chess table.

To all appearances the two were excellent friends now, and Talbot evidently had no suspicion that anything else was the case. So far as friendship was possible between two such dissimilar characters, Talbot was prepared to be friendly, and he did not doubt that it was the same with Croke.

The Toff was keen, but he was not suspicious, and there did not seem to be any adequate motive to assign for spoof on Croke's part.

But Levison was not only keen, he was suspicious, too; and he knew the envy, malice, and hatred that ran riot in Croke's breast.

Croke was playing a game—a troublesome game for him to play, which implied a strong motive, and Levison of the Fourth meant to know what that motive was.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Danger Ahead!

"CROOKE!" Mr. Linton's voice was sharp and angry.

It was morning in the Shell Form Room.

The Shell were following Mr. Linton's lead in a tour of the classics, and Croke had been called upon to construe.

Croke did not seem to hear.

"Croke!"

Several fellows glanced round at Croke.

His occupation amazed them.

He had a book open under his desk, and was reading it—a trick the juniors sometimes played when their Form-master was not watchful.

But a fellow who wasted his time that way was generally on the alert not to be caught out.

Croke did not seem at all on the alert.

He seemed to be immersed in the book. His eyes were glued to it, and he was blind and deaf to his surroundings.

Mr. Linton's brow assumed a thunderous expression.

"Croke!"

It was the third time he had repeated the name, and still Croke did not look up.

Talbot gave him an anxious look, but he was too far away to nudge his cousin.

Tom Merry would have called his attention, but he also was too far distant.

Croke seemed to be asking for trouble. Mr. Linton was a severe gentleman, and not at all the kind of master to be trifled with in this way.

"You ass, Croke!" whispered Kangaroo.

"Linton's calling you."

"Noble!"

"Ye-es, sir."

"You need not speak to Croke."

"Nunno, sir!" stammered Kangaroo.

Mr. Linton came striding in among the forms.

Croke became aware of him as the Form-master towered over the desk.

He looked up, closing his book hastily.

"Croke!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir!" stuttered Croke.

"I have spoken to you three times!"

"Oh!"

"Did you not hear me, Croke?"

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"N-n-no, sir."

"You were reading."

"I—I—I—"

"Give me that book."

"If you please, sir—"

"Give me that book at once!"

Croke handed over the volume, with a red face.

Most of the eyes of the Shell were upon him.

"You had the audacity to bring this book into the class-room, Croke, and read it during lessons?"

"I—I was interested in it, sir."

"Indeed! You were too interested in this book to be able to devote any attention to your lessons," said Mr. Linton sarcastically. "The Form-room is not the place for reading. I shall lock up this book, and return it to you at the end of the term. You will take two hundred lines of Virgil."

"Yes, sir," faltered Croke.

Mr. Linton rustled to his desk, and threw the offending book into it, with a frowning brow.

Then Croke was called upon to construe, and, as usual, he construed in a way worthy of a fag in the Third. His lines increased to three hundred before he sat down again.

He looked sullen during the remainder of morning lessons.

"Hard lines!" said Talbot, joining him as the Shell left the Form-room. "You must have been pretty deep in that book."

"Lucky it wasn't the 'Lucky Tipster'!" grinned Monty Lowther. "What an escape for you, Croke!"

"Well, it wasn't," snarled Croke. "It was called 'Rivals and Chums,' and I borrowed it of D'Arcy yesterday."

"But it was rather rash taking it into the Form-room," said Talbot. "Linton isn't quite so sleepy as Mr. Lathom."

"Well, I got deep in it," muttered Croke. "I—I say, did you notice whether Linton locked his desk?"

"No; but he always does," said Talbot.

"I—I suppose there's no chance—"

"My dear chap, you couldn't think of getting the book out," said Talbot. "That would be jolly serious. You can get another copy, too. There's sure to be another about the school somewhere."

"It isn't only that!" muttered Croke. "Linton took me by surprise. But never mind. It's my own fault."

He walked away quickly, leaving Talbot in surprise. His last words seemed a little mysterious.

Croke was looking very thoughtful at dinner. After dinner, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth bestowed an affable nod upon him in the passage.

"How do you like the book, Cwooke?"

"Oh, ripping!" said Croke. "You're not in a hurry for it, I suppose?"

"Not at all, deah boy!"

Talbot joined them.

"I'm sorry about your book, D'Arcy," he said.

"I hope you didn't want it."

"Nothin' happened to my book, has it?" asked D'Arcy.

"Didn't Croke tell you? It's locked up in Mr. Linton's desk."

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I was just going to mention it," said

Crooke. "Linton caught me reading it in the Form-room this morning."

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Weally, Cwooke, that was wathah wotten, you know! It's wathah bad form to wead books in lesson-time!"

"Oh, blow the book!" said Crooke. "It cost fourpence, I believe. You can get a new one by sending to the publishers. I suppose it's all right if I stand you the fourpence?"

He slid his hand into his pocket.

"Not at all, Cwooke. I do not want you to pay for it. Besides, as it is my book, I have no doubt Mr. Linton will return it to me if I ask him."

get you a new one. Linton is ratty about it, and he'll come down heavier on me if he's bothered about the matter at all. You might let it drop when I ask you."

"Of course I will let it dwop, if you put it like that," said Arthur Augustus, in wonder. "But pway don't talk about buyin' me a new one. I wefuse to entaintain the ideah at all."

"All serene, then."

"Wight-ho!" said Arthur Augustus.

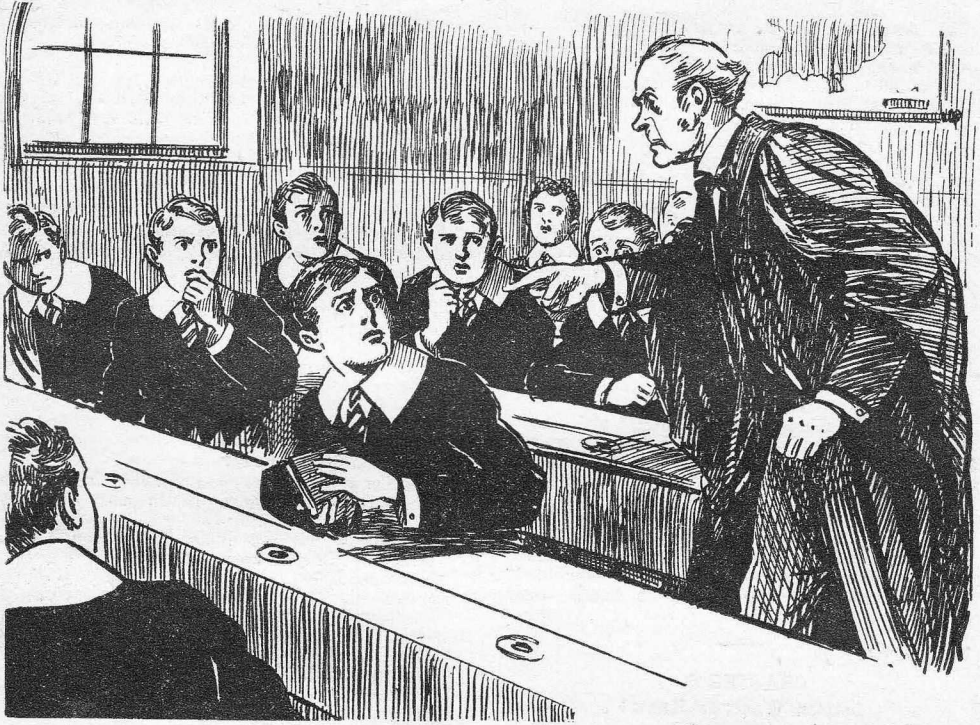
And he walked off.

Crooke turned to Talbot.

"I'm in a pretty fix now," he said.

Talbot looked at him in perplexity.

"I don't quite understand," he said. "Lots of



Mr. Linton came striding in among the forms. Crooke became aware of him as the Form-master towered over the desk. He looked up, closing the book hastily. "Crooke!" thundered Mr. Linton. "I have spoken to you three times!"

"Don't do that!" exclaimed Crooke, starting.

"Weally, it seems to me the pwopah thing to do. Mr. Linton does not want to keep my book locked up, I suppose?"

"He—he thought it was mine."

"Howevah, if I explain to him that it is mine, he will give it to me, I suppose. He may ask me not to lend it to you, pewwaps."

"Look here, I'll get you a new copy, and you can let the matter drop," said Crooke irritably.

"Wats! Why should I not wequest Mr. Linton to hand me my pwoperty?"

Talbot looked at his cousin in surprise. He could not fathom why Crooke did not want Arthur Augustus to ask for the return of his book.

"I—I'm sorry it's confiscated," said Crooke. "You might let the matter drop, D'Arcy. I'll

the fellows have had things locked up in Linton's desk. Gore's catapult is there at this minute. What does it matter?"

"I've got to get that book, somehow."

"If you're keen to finish it, you can easily get another copy."

"It isn't that. Hang the book!" said Crooke irritably. "Blow the book! It's what's in it!"

"I don't quite—"

"For goodness' sake don't let the fellows know I'm anxious about it," said Crooke. "Somebody would be sure to jaw. It's all right so long as Linton doesn't look in it. But if he did—"

"There's something in the book you don't want Mr. Linton to see?" asked Talbot, his face becoming very serious.

Crooke nodded.

"That's bad! Is it anything very serious?"

"A letter," growled Crooke.

"Mr. Linton wouldn't read your letter, Crooke, even if he found it there."

"He might! He might know the writing, for anything I know; or he might catch sight of the signature," muttered Crooke. "It wasn't in an envelope. I shoved it into the book to keep it out of sight when Racke came into the study just when I was reading it. It wouldn't do for the letter to be seen. It—it wasn't a letter from home, you understand."

Talbot knitted his brows.

"Crooke! You awful duffer! Was it from——"

"Lodgey!" muttered Crooke.

"Great Scott!"

"If Linton sees it, the game's up for me," said Crooke sullenly. "Goodness knows what I'm going to do. It means the sack. The silly idiot wrote a lot of stuff to me—mentioning our game at the Green Man, and telling me he'd meet me on Saturday if I liked, to give me my revenge—and—and—referring to horses, and—and other things. It's a clean show-up if that letter gets seen. And now it's locked up in Linton's desk. For goodness' sake don't say a word about this, Talbot—not to Tom Merry, or anybody. You've said you were willing to be friendly. Well, I can trust you, can't I?"

"Of course. I shan't say a word to anybody," said Talbot quietly. "But this is an awful scrape, Crooke. What are you going to do?"

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know! I've got to think it out. Ripping for old Lyndon to get the news that I'm sacked, while he's on leave in England. What?"

Talbot looked deeply troubled.

"It would be a nasty blow to him," he said.

"Oh, it's rotten! Just when I'd made up my mind to have nothing to do with that rotter again," muttered Crooke. "It always happens like that. You can't shake a thing off when you want to."

"What will you do?"

"What's the good of asking me? I don't know. Perhaps you can think of a way out for me!" snapped Crooke savagely. And he strode away before Talbot could reply.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Levison Wants to Know!

"PENNY for 'em, Talbot!"

Levison was going down to the gates after lessons that day, when he spotted Talbot in the quadrangle, under the elms.

The Shell fellow was alone, and there was a wrinkle of thought in his brow.

Levison, for reasons of his own, had been keeping an eye on Talbot of late. He joined him at once under the leafy old elms.

"I—I was just thinking," said Talbot.

"You're not at cricket with the rest," said Levison, eyeing him curiously. "You generally lead the strenuous life. Taken to slacking in your old age?"

"Not likely."

"And you won't accept a penny for your thoughts?"

"Not worth it," said Talbot.

"Which means that you want me to mind my own business," said Levison, laughing. "Well, I can do that, as a rule. I don't care twopence

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about anybody's affairs but my own. And my own are looking up. I'm going to shear a sheep, and I think I'm going to shear a wolf. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose that means that you are going to see that blackguard at the Green Man," said Talbot quietly. "Levison, old chap, I never shove advice on you, but I wish you'd think over it a bit."

"Bless you, I've thought it over, but as I've told you before, I'm fond of excitement."

"I wish you'd chuck it before it's too late, Levison! You're an ass to throw away your chances as you do!" went on Talbot earnestly. "You're cleverer than half the fellows in the House, if you didn't let your brains run to waste. You could be a good cricketer if you liked. I've seen you play. You could do the same as Crooke has done."

Levison chuckled.

"I've done that often enough," he said. "I'm a more hardened spoofer than Crooke, if you come to that. As soon as it suits my game to spoof you can rely on me."

"What do you mean? Crooke is not spoofing!" said Talbot sharply.

"Isn't he?" grinned Levison. "Well, I know him better than you do, and you'll find out. That's why I've stopped to speak to you when I'm due at the Green Man. You've got a big think on your mind."

"Well?"

"Is it anything to do with Crooke?"

Talbot was silent.

"You see, I guessed it," said Levison. "What Crooke is spoofing you for I don't know, but it's brought you some kind of trouble already. That's why you're marching about here, thinking, instead of playing cricket. Isn't that so?"

Talbot's brow contracted.

"You're quite mistaken, Levison."

"Will you say what you're worrying about, whatever it is, is nothing to do with Crooke?" asked Levison incredulously.

"I shall say nothing about it, Levison!"

"Exactly! Silence means consent."

"Nonsense!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose it's no use asking you what's the matter?" he inquired.

"There's nothing the matter with me!"

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing!"

"Blessed if I quite catch on! Will you tell me what you were thinking about when I spoke to you?"

"No!" said Talbot abruptly.

"You think it's like my cheek to ask?" grinned Levison.

"Well, yes, it is, if you want me to be plain!"

"That's my way. But I'm not inquisitive this time. Crooke is playing a crooked game, and I'm up against him!"

"Crooke is doing nothing of the sort!" said Talbot angrily; "and if you're up against my cousin, Levison, you needn't tell me so!"

"Go it!" said Levison coolly. "You can slang me as much as you like. Why don't you call me a meddling cad, as Tom Merry would?"

"I believe you mean well," said Talbot, "but I'd really rather you didn't say anything to me about Crooke. I understood he was your friend, too!"

"So he is—my dear pal, the kind of pal who leaves you in the lurch when you're in a scrape. Not that I blame him for that. I'd do as much

# STARTING A STAMP FASHION!

We are the most active critics of the commemorative stamp, says our expert, but we started the fashion.

IT'S a great pity that stamp-collectors so often kick against the hosts of commemorative stamps which tend to flood our albums. Generally they're handsome stamps, with a novelty of subject which seldom fails to fire the imagination.

Oddly enough, though we Britishers are the most active critics of the commemorative, it was our own country which started the fashion. Fifty years after the introduction of penny postage by way of our classic Penny Black (itself the first recognised official adhesive stamp) our Post Office decided to honour the occasion. Accordingly, a special postcard was issued in 1890, which, though needing only a penny stamp to frank it, was sold at sixpence a time. The handsome profit thus made was handed over to a fund for postal workers.



Newfoundland celebrates the three hundredth anniversary of its colonisation.

## FOLLOWING OUR LEAD.

So successful and, frankly, so praiseworthy was this venture that other countries quickly followed our lead in various ways, with the result that by the close of the nineteenth century few stamp-issuing countries had not tried attacking the public's pocket by way of the commemorative postage stamp.

Incidentally, Russia accidentally let herself down on one exhibition commemorative a few years back. It showed a powerful farm tractor, not of the pure-bred Russian variety, but a Fordson, the product of the factories of that American engineering genius, Henry Ford.

for him. Look here, Talbot, you've just said I'm clever. Won't you tell me what it is; and let me give you my opinion? I know there's something on your mind, and that it's in connection with Crooke."

"I wish——"

Talbot paused.

"You wish I'd mind my own business!" Levison finished for him.

"Well, yes."

"I'm not going to, all the same," said Levison coolly. "Then you won't tell me?"

"No."

"You're thinking out some giddy problem, and looking like a boiled owl, and it's in connection with Crooke," pursued Levison calmly. "You say you're not in trouble yourself, and your word's as good as gold. Has Crooke stuck some of his own troubles on your shoulders?"

"Really, Levison——"

"He can't be borrowing money of you——"

## COMMEMORATIVES AND PICTORIALS.

Though personally I don't think the distinction matters two hoots, some collectors draw a very strict line between commemoratives and pictorial stamps generally. (This is usually to enable them to kick the much detested commemoratives out of their albums with an easy conscience.)

A stamp, they say, is only a commemorative when its introduction is made to commemorate some person, place, or thing, rather than to fulfil a specific postal need. If a pictorial fills a real postal need, no matter how like a commemorative it is, it doesn't matter.

If commemoratives attract you, however, our Newfoundland specimen is one of a series you certainly should include in your collection. These items commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of our oldest possession's colonisation through the offices of the London and Bristol Company.

Lord Bacon, brilliant contemporary of Shakespeare, headed the company, and we see his sole stamp portrait on the six cents stamp. John Guy, who, in his ship the Endeavour, "did the real work," is recalled on the 3 and 4 cents specimens.

Equally interesting, also, are the two Brussels exhibition items of Belgium of 1897. They show St. Michael giving the knock-out blow to Satan. Notice the "Sunday" tags to these stamps. These tags, which in French and Flemish read "Don't deliver on Sunday," were for the convenience of the Sabbatarian people who didn't want the postman to work on their behalf on the Sabbath. If you weren't so particular you tore this tag from your stamp, and your mails would receive Sunday delivery.

"Look here——"

"Is he in a scrape, and has he asked you to squeeze him out of it?" Levison watched Talbot's clouded face keenly. "That would account for his spoofing you about being friendly!"

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Levison," said Talbot, compressing his lips. "You'd better say no more. I'm off!"

The Shell fellow walked away quickly.

Levison's eyes glinted for a moment, and then he laughed and walked out of the gates.

"What the dickens is it?" he muttered. "He's as close as an oyster. Crooke has spoofed him, but he can't spoof me. What is he pretending to be friendly for, and what was Talbot worrying over? Crooke's planted some trouble on him—what? Ernest, my son, this is where you keep your eyes wide open. This is where you chip in and frustrate somebody's knavish tricks. Ha, ha, ha! Quite in your line!"

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With this stamp of St. Michael defeating Satan, Belgium commemorates the Brussels Exhibition of 1897.

And Levison laughed aloud as he went down the lane.

Meanwhile, Talbot had gone into the School House.

Levison's talk had disturbed him in spite of himself. It was true enough. Crooke had laid a trouble on his shoulders; the scrape the cad of the Shell had fallen into was weighing on Talbot's mind.

Crooke was in danger—in deadly danger of reaping the reward of his own rascality.

The Toff did not say to himself that it was no business of his; he felt that it was his business. He had made friends with his cousin, and he felt bound to help him out of that scrape if he could; all the more because Crooke had said that he was trying to reform and seemed to have given proof of it.

Talbot was thinking, too, of a bronzed old soldier home from India and the blow it would be to him if his nephew was expelled in disgrace from the school.

It was a problem for the Toff to think out—how Crooke was to be saved from the danger his own folly and rascality had led him into.

Crooke himself seemed helpless in the matter, but what was to be done?

## CHAPTER 7.

### Shearing the Wolf!

“VERY glad to see you, Master Levison!”

Mr. Lodgey spoke with great affability.

Levison shook hands with him in the garden of the inn.

“Master Crooke all right—wot?” asked Mr. Lodgey.

“Oh, blooming!” said Levison, laughing. “You haven't seen him lately?”

“Not lately, Master Levison. I 'ope to see 'im again,” said Mr. Lodgey, looking curiously at the Fourth Former of St. Jim's. “I rather thought 'e'd come with you to-day.”

“Something else on,” smiled Levison. “Crooke has taken to spoofing in his old age. At present he's on the reform tack.”

“He, he, he!” cackled Mr. Lodgey.

“Of course, it's only a game,” said Levison.

“He will be round again soon.”

“What ho!” said Mr. Lodgey, laughing. “I know he will. Young gentleman I admire very much—is Master Crooke. Arter my own 'eart, he is.”

“By the way, I've heard something about you, Lodgey.”

Mr. Lodgey scowled.

“The Toff again—what? He can't let a man alone—what?”

“You knew Talbot?” asked Levison curiously.

“I knew the Toff,” growled Mr. Lodgey. “Precious young rascal he was in them days, 'im and old Captain Crow, his father, and Hookey Walker, and the Professor, and the rest—a precious gang! I never knew what become of him arter Captain Crow was dead. You could have knocked me down with a feather when I found 'im 'ere, settin' up as a schoolboy! He, he, he! Ain't he robbed the safe yet?”

Levison's eyes glittered for a moment.

“Talbot's the straightest fellow in the school,” he said.

“Yes, that's his game at present,” said Mr. Lodgey. “It beats me, him being let into the

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school at all! Punched a fellow's face, too, as if a fellow wasn't as good as him any day!”

“Punched your face, did he?” said Levison, laughing.

Mr. Lodgey rubbed his chin.

“P'r'aps he'll be sorry for it yet,” he said. “I ain't the man to be punched and say nothin'. Not Jim Lodgey. Let him look out! He won't carry his 'ead so high arter I'm done with him!”

The hatred and spite in the man's coarse face struck Levison.

It was evident that Lodgey was a bitter enemy of the reformed Toff.

A swift suspicion shot into Levison's mind. He was sure that Crooke was spoofing Talbot with the intention of doing him harm. For the first time it came into his head that Mr. Lodgey had a hand in the matter, that the two enemies of the Toff had plotted together against him.

Mr. Lodgey's threatening words seemed to hint as much.

“So you're in it, Lodgey?”

“In what, Master Levison?”

“In Crooke's little game.”

“Has Master Crooke told you—” began Lodgey.

“Naturally, as I'm his pal and I back him up all along the line,” said Levison calmly. “He has made friends with Talbot and taken him quite in.”

“And the Toff doesn't suspect nothing?” said Mr. Lodgey curiously.

“Nothing at all.”

“The Toff was always keen,” smiled Mr. Lodgey, “but p'r'aps he ain't so sharp as Jim Lodgey!”

Levison breathed hard. His suspicion was confirmed. Lodgey was in the plot, whatever it was, against Talbot!

But what was it? What did it all mean? He felt that he had to tread warily.

Mr. Lodgey was too cute to give anything away.

“I rather think you and Crooke together will be too much for him,” he said, smiling.

“You bet we will,” said Mr. Lodgey. “So Master Crooke told you? He's made friends with the Toff?”

“Oh, they're quite chums now!”

“Ha, ha, ha! And he's done the trick?”

Levison paused.

He had no idea what the trick in question was, and if he betrayed his ignorance it was certain that the rascal would close up like an oyster.

“The trick?” he repeated. “Oh, ycs!”

“He's done it?”

“Yes.”

“Good!” Mr. Lodgey rubbed his hands. “I wonder he ain't been to tell me. Then the Toff's been 'ad up?”

“Had up?” repeated Levison.

“Ave the police been called in?” asked Mr. Lodgey eagerly.

“No.”

Mr. Lodgey looked disappointed.

“I suppose they'll keep it dark to save the disgrace?” he said.

“That's it,” muttered Levison.

“But he'll be kicked out, and that's good enough for me. But 'ow did it come out, Master Levison? Tell me exactly!”

That was exactly what Levison could not do. He was fishing for information. He had no information to give. His hesitation caused Mr. Lodgey to give him a very suspicious look.

“Look here, Master Levison, you ain't pullin' my leg, I s'pose? Master Crooke 'as told you



straight? I know he's your pal. But if he ain't told you—by gum!" exclaimed Mr. Lodgey, as Levison did not speak. "You've been foolin' me!"

Levison laughed.  
 "You may as well tell me the whole yarn now," he said. "I'm Crooke's pal, you know; it's quite safe."

"I dessay; but if Crooke wanted you to know he'd tell you himself!" said Lodgey sourly. "I've let my jaw a bit too loose. If you've come over for a 'undred up, Master Levison, I'm your man!"

"But whar about Talbot?"  
 "Never mind that!"

"Look here, Lodgey—"  
 "I ain't jawin'!" said Mr. Lodgey, in a tone of finality. "You've been spoofing me! You ain't gettin' nothin' out of me, and that's flat!"

"Course, I trust you, Master Levison. I know you're a pal. But least said, soonest mended. Wot about billiards?"

It was evident that there was nothing more to be gained from the rascal. As Levison was Crooke's pal, Mr. Lodgey naturally did not suspect his devotion to Talbot. That was an idea that did not enter the rascal's mind for a moment. But he was cautious, and he did not mean to talk.

Levison shrugged his shoulders, and followed the sharper through the open french window into the billiards-room.

"Quid on the game?" asked Mr. Lodgey.  
 Levison nodded.

"You didn't mind me asking you for that three quid, Master Levison? I was rather pushed, you know—"

"Not at all. The gee-gee lost, and I was ready to pay up," said Levison coolly. "A pal lent me the money. I'm going to clear you out at billiards, Lodgey!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Very likely! I ain't much of a player," said Mr. Lodgey genially.

Mr. Lodgey's real opinion was that the schoolboy was not likely to have much chance against him. He did not know Levison, or the amount of time he had devoted to billiards. He had that yet to learn.

Levison adopted a boastful air for the especial purpose of drawing Mr. Lodgey on. He had told Talbot that he was going to "shear a wolf," and he had no doubt that he could do it.

Levison did not much resemble most of the "pigeons" whom Mr. Lodgey lived by plucking. That was another discovery the sharper had yet to make.

"But I'm really rather good at billiards," said Levison. "I wouldn't mind putting a fiver on the game."

"I'm your man!" said Mr. Lodgey cordially.  
 "A fiver, then?"

"Cert'ly!"  
 They played.

Mr. Lodgey gave a miss in baulk, and Levison began.

He made a six, and then Mr. Lodgey ran easily to twenty, and then clumsily missed an easy shot.

Lodgey's plan, as usual, was to allow his unsuspecting opponent to keep within measurable distance of his score, and, indeed, to affect clumsiness at times, to encourage the intended victim.

At the finish he would run out a little ahead and win.

But Levison knew the sharper's game as well as he knew it himself.

They progressed towards the hundred, Levison

getting ahead at fifty, and Mr. Lodgey overtaking him, and then keeping ahead.

Mr. Lodgey was at eighty when Levison's turn came again, and Levison had thirty to get.

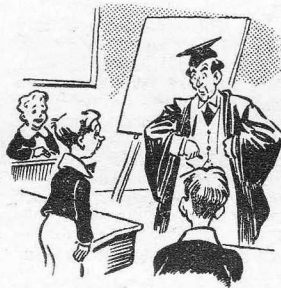
Mr. Lodgey expected him to get about ten or twelve. To his surprise, Levison proceeded with a steady break up to the hundred.

Mr. Lodgey's expressive face grew longer and longer as he watched him.

It dawned upon him that he was dealing with a young rascal whose skill was as great as his own.

His face was a study when Levison ran out.  
 "Not so bad for a kid—what?" said Levison jovially. "You owe me a fiver, Lodgey!"

Mr. Lodgey's first impulse was to bid Levison go to Jericho, and seek his fiver there. But he hoped to make a good deal out of the black sheep



Teacher: "If you have ten shillings in one pocket and fifteen in the other, what have you?"  
 Boy: "The wrong trousers!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Coleman, 24, Manbey Road, Stratford, London, E.15.

of St. Jim's and his friends, and open cheating was evidently not the method. So he paid up with as good a grace as he could.

"Another game?" smiled Levison.  
 "I got to see a man," said Mr. Lodgey.

"Another time, Master Levison."  
 "Right-ho! I owe you your revenge, you know."

Mr. Lodgey looked queerly after Levison when that cheery youth quitted the place.

He had been beaten at his own game by a schoolboy, and he did not enjoy the experience. But he had the prospect of getting his money back on "gee-gees," and at the worst Crooke would pay for the loss.

Levison smiled as he walked back to St. Jim's. He looked into Talbot's study as soon as he arrived at the school.

Crooke of the Shell was there with Talbot. He started and scowled as Levison came in. Talbot coloured a little.

"Hallo! Talking secrets?" grinned Levison.  
 "Mind your own business!" growled Crooke.

"What is it, Levison?" Talbot asked quietly.  
 "What do you want?"

"Nothing. I've come to settle up."  
 Levison laid three pounds on the table.

"I told you I'd settle, Talbot. There's your three pounds!"

"Thank you!" said Talbot  
 "So you're in funds!" sneered Crooke. "You may as well settle up my quid; it's rather an older debt than this one, I fancy."

"There's your money!" said Levison, throwing a pound note on the table. "It's worth it to hear the last of it!"

"My hat! You're settling your debts, and some chap said the age of miracles was past!" sneered Crooke, as he took up the note.

Levison left the study without replying.

### CHAPTER 8.

#### Talbot's Task!

**G**EORGE GORE came into the study, his bat under his arm, his face ruddy.

"Hallo! What about getting some tea?" exclaimed Gore.

Crooke rose to his feet savagely.

"We can't talk here!" he muttered.

"Eh? You can talk if you like," said Gore. "I'm going to get tea. I told that idiot Skimpole to have the table laid! Where is he?"

Skimpole blinked in.

"My dear Gore, I left the study, as Crooke wished to speak privately to Talbot."

"Silly ass!" said Gore. "Get the table laid! Aren't you ready for tea, Talbot? What on earth are you jawing to Crooke about? Is he going to stagger humanity with his wonderful cricket?"

Talbot rose.

"I'll come in later, Gore," he said.

And he followed Crooke from the study.

"Shan't leave you any of the eggs!" bawled Gore after him.

Talbot did not heed.

The Terrible Three came along the passage and hailed him at once.

"You missed the cricket, you slacker! Come in to tea! We've got a spread!"

"Talbot's coming to tea with me," said Crooke angrily.

"Oh, all serene!" said Tom Merry. "Look here—both of you—we've got a spread!"

"Three kinds of jam!" said Manners impressively.

"And saveloys!" chimed in Lowther.

"Blow the saveloys! Talbot's coming with me!"

"You'll excuse me, Tom——" began Talbot.

Tom Merry laughed.

"All serene, old son! Keep your wool on! Ta-ta!"

The Terrible Three went into their study.

Talbot looked inquiringly at Crooke.

"Racke's in my study," muttered Crooke.

"We can't talk there."

"Is it anything important?" asked Talbot.

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"You said you'd help me out of my scrape, if you could."

"I'll do anything I can, certainly!"

"I've thought of a way."

"Good! I'll help you, if there's anything I can do."

"It's something you can do, and that nobody else can do. We can't talk here. There's that inquisitive rotter Levison watching us at the end of the passage. I believe he suspects something already," muttered Crooke uneasily.

Talbot was silent.

"It—it's got to be settled for to-night," Crooke muttered.

"For to-night," repeated Talbot.

"Yes; if you'll do it for me. But we can't talk here," said Crooke hurriedly. "Hush!"

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"What does this mean, Crooke?" asked Mr. Railton. "What muttered Crooke. "You might alarm him." "What?" "The—"

Kangaroo, Glyn, and Dane came along the passage. "Look here, let's take a stroll to the old tower. It's safe there."

"Just as you like."

The two Shell fellows left the School House.

The old tower was some distance from the school buildings, and it was a solitary spot—especially at tea-time.

Levison's keen eyes watched them from the window. They disappeared round the gym, and Levison sauntered from the House.

Crooke led the way into the old tower, and stopped in the lower room.

Talbot waited for him to speak.

The cad of the Shell seemed to have some difficulty in beginning.

"It's safe enough to speak here," said Talbot at last. "Nobody can hear us, Crooke. I don't quite see what you're so nervous about. None of the fellows would give you away, even if they knew about the letter from Lodgey."

"You can't be too careful," muttered Crooke. "You haven't said a word about it, of course?"

"Not a word."

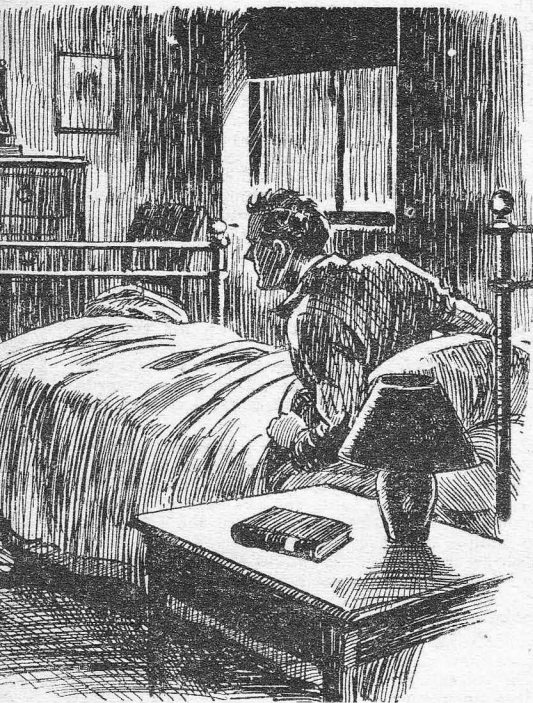
"Not even to Tom Merry?"

"Of course not. I told you I should say nothing."

"That's all right, then. I can't help feeling nervous. Look here, you—you said you'd help me."

"I'm ready to help you, if I can," said Talbot patiently.

"Think of old Lyndon," said Crooke. "He doesn't like me as much as he does you, but—"



re you doing out of your dormitory?" "Hush, sir!" exclaimed the amazed Housemaster. "Alarm whom?"

his desk locked, and keeps the key about him. You're not thinking of breaking open the desk, I suppose?"

"Of course not."

"Then what's to be done?"

"You could help me, if you like," said Crooke sulkily.

"I don't see—"

"You can open any lock you like. You know what you were before you came here."

Talbot's face crimsoned.

"Crooke!"

"I don't want to rub it in," said Crooke. "But that's the fact. You were brought up as a cracksmen, and you could open any lock you liked, without leaving a trace behind. You could sneak down from the dormitory to-night, and go to Linton's desk, and take out the letter. You needn't take the book—just take the letter from it, and leave the book there."

Talbot paled.

"Crooke! Mr. Linton keeps money in that desk, and valuable things. What would he think if he found me—"

"He'll be in bed, fast asleep, at twelve o'clock. There's no risk. It's not even in the study, either. It's in the Form-room. You could do the whole trick in ten minutes, and I should be safe."

"I—I can't!"

"You won't, you mean!" snarled Crooke.

"You don't seem to know what you're asking," said Talbot, his voice unsteady. "You're asking me to break open Mr. Linton's desk in the middle of the night—like a burglar!"

"It's not a question of breaking it open. You can pick the Head's safe, if you liked."

"I know it, but—"

"You needn't leave a trace behind—"

"It's not that. It's doing the thing!" exclaimed Talbot passionately. "Suppose, by some chance, somebody should wake up, and I should be spotted, I couldn't give you away, I suppose? They'd believe that—that I was picking the lock to steal. They couldn't think anything else. There's money in the desk—everybody knows it."

"You mean you're afraid—"

"I'm afraid of being supposed to be a thief. I suppose anybody would be afraid of throwing away his good name."

"You won't do it?" muttered Crooke. "You won't, because of a little risk? Where's the risk? Who's likely to go to the Form-room in the middle of the night? Everybody will be fast asleep. To-morrow Linton may get hold of that letter, and I'm ruined! Old Lyndon—nice news for him to get—his nephew sacked in disgrace. And—and my mater—" Crooke broke off.

Talbot's face changed.

He did not tell Crooke that he should have thought of all that before he acted like a rascal. It was useless to tell him so.

Could he do what was asked?

There would be no real harm in it. It was to save a fellow from black disgrace and ruin—a fellow who had given promise of reform. It was to save an old soldier from a shock, from a scandal that he would feel keenly, and never forget. And Crooke's reference to his "mater" went straight to Talbot's heart. He had no mother.

After all, why not? There was nothing wrong

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but it would be a shock to him if I got sacked. And—and it's hard on me, too, when I've chucked up that kind of game. You admit that?"

"I do think so, Crooke. I'd do anything I could. I—"

"Hold on! I heard somebody!" muttered Crooke. He ran to the shattered casement, and looked out quickly.

There was no one to be seen.

"Dash it all, Crooke, this is ridiculous!" exclaimed Talbot sharply. "I wish you'd come to the point!"

Crooke turned back.

"It's all right. I thought I heard something. If Tom Merry—"

"Tom Merry would not listen, and you know it. He wouldn't even if he were curious, which he isn't," said Talbot coldly.

"Yes, I—I know; but I'm nervous. You know what's at stake. If Linton opens that book he's got locked up in his desk, he will see Lodgey's letter. I remember it was folded with the signature outside. He may look at the book, he might open it by chance, or the letter might drop out—in fact, he's bound to come across it."

"It might be safer to own up to Mr. Linton, and—"

"And ask for the sack?" said Crooke, with a sneer. "That isn't the kind of help I want—thanks! I want that book out of Linton's desk, with the letter in it."

"It's impossible, Crooke! Mr. Linton keeps

in it. Mr. Linton did not even know the fatal letter was there. And to the Toff the lock of the desk was nothing. To open it without leaving a trace behind was child's play to the fellow who had once been called the prince of cracksmen.

Crooke watched his face anxiously, as he did not speak.

"You offered to be my friend!" muttered Crooke. "So that's what your friendship's worth! At the first test, you back out! I might have known it! I've no right to ask you. I know that. Of course you won't do it. You'd rather see me sacked. I dare say you'd like to see me sacked. We've never been friends—"

"You're mistaken, Crooke. I will do it," said Talbot quietly.

"You mean it?"

"Yes."

"And—and when—"

"To-night. Leave it to me. You can sleep soundly. I shall hand you the letter in the morning!"

Talbot turned and left the tower without another word.

When he was gone, the shade of anxiety dropped from Crooke's face like a mask. He grinned.

"My hat!" he muttered. "My hat! Lodgery was right! Lodgery knew him! To-night—to-night! And to-morrow—to-morrow the sack—the merry sack! That will be the finish for the cad! He won't cross my path again!" And Crooke was still grinning as he followed Talbot, and he walked away quite jauntily.

When he was out of sight there was a movement in the masses of old ivy beside the shattered casement. The thick leaves and tendrils parted, and a form emerged into view—if there had been any one to see.

Levison of the Fourth stepped out of the ivy, and shook the dust from his clothes. Levison was pale, and his eyes were glittering.

"So that's the game," he muttered—"that's the game! And Talbot's number's up unless somebody chips in to-night! And if I told him what I think—what I know—he would call me an eavesdropping cad, and take no notice!"

Levison laughed.

"It's Lodgery's game. Crooke hadn't the brains to think it out. Of course, there's no letter in the book, but there's money in the desk, and Talbot will be caught burgling the desk at midnight. The Toff broken out again! Once a thief, always a thief! And the sack, and perhaps prison! And only an eavesdropping cad, a shady blackguard, to stand between him and all that!"

And Levison laughed again as he sauntered away. He did not think of warning Talbot. He knew that Talbot would not believe for one moment that his cousin was still his relentless enemy, or that he was capable of so base a plot.

Talbot's reply to such a warning would be bitter, scornful words—perhaps a blow. And then he would go to his doom just the same. He would know the truth too late! But if he was to be saved, there was only one who could save him, and that was Levison of the Fourth, the blackguard of the school.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Levison Takes a Hand!

**T**OM MERRY noticed that Talbot was very thoughtful that evening, though he little guessed what was in the Toff's mind.

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The junior whose past had been so strange and chequered had food for thought. He had made up his mind to do, as Crooke asked him—to save the black sheep of the Shell, and let him have another chance. But he knew the risk.

The risk of being caught in the Form-room was not great. It was not likely that anyone would wake and visit the Form-room at such an hour. But if, by an untoward chance, he were discovered, he knew what he had to expect.

It was not risk of punishment, but of bitter disgrace and utter ruin. He could not explain, he could not betray Crooke to save himself, and he did not believe that Crooke would own up if he did.

The cad of the Shell was more likely to deny having asked him to do as he had done. For, though Talbot was striving to be his cousin's friend, he was not deceived as to Crooke's character. He knew him to be mean and disloyal and false, as of old. That Crooke was striving towards better things he believed, but a great change did not come in a day.

If there were discovery, he had to face it alone—to be suspected of the very worst, and to endure in silence. That was the risk he had resolved to run for Crooke's sake, for the sake of Colonel Lyndon, for the sake of loyalty to the fellow he had sought to make his friend.

Crooke gave him an anxious look when the Shell fellows went to their dormitory that night.

Talbot nodded to him without speaking, and Crooke went to bed reassured.

Talbot did not join in the talk of the juniors before they went to sleep.

The voices died away at last; slumber descended on the dormitory.

Talbot lay wakeful, listening to the hours as they struck dully from the clock tower.

Twelve rang out on the night air, and he waited still.

It was not till the boom of one o'clock had sounded that the Toff stirred.

At that hour the last door had long since closed, the last light was extinguished.

Talbot got quietly from his bed and dressed in the darkness.

There was no sound save that of the steady breathing in the long, dark dormitory. For a moment it came bitterly into Talbot's mind that Crooke was sleeping peacefully, while he was plunging into deadly risk to save him.

Little did he suspect that the cad of the Shell was wide awake and alert, and peering towards him in the gloom, watching and listening.

The Toff trod softly to the door. He had put on rubber shoes, and he made hardly a sound. The big door closed behind him noiselessly.

Then Crooke sat up in bed.

His heart was thumping. Talbot was gone, and Crooke also had work to do that night.

Talbot paused to listen in the passage. All was silent. His task, after all, was easy. He was at home in the darkness, from old habit. To slip quietly down to the Form-room, to do his work there, to return—a quarter of an hour would cover it.

He trod cautiously down the passage.

Suddenly he stopped.

There was a faint footfall in the darkness, and he heard a hurried breath.

Who was stirring at that hour?

The Toff stood quite still, his heart beating hard.

(Continued on page 22.)



# In Town To-day

## Introducing Monty Lowther to the Microphone. By a B. B. C. TALENT SCOUT.

INTERVIEWER: It's a real pleasure to welcome the famous humorist of "Tom Merry's Weekly," Lowther.

LOWTHER: And it's nice to be described as famous, Mr. Interviewer. I know some chaps—Crooke, for instance—would make it the infamous humorist of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

INTERVIEWER: I suppose a humorist never lacks critics?

LOWTHER: No, Mr. Interviewer. I may run out of ideas, or run out of ink, but the critics always have plenty of ideas—unpleasant ones—and lots of ink to express them with. The other day I went out for a stamp, when I ran into Grundy of the Shell. "Where are you going?" demanded Grundy. "I'm going to Sandwich," I replied. "Sandwich?" exclaimed Grundy. "Yes; to sandwich these coppers in the stamp machine," I explained.

INTERVIEWER: Was Grundy satisfied?

LOWTHER: "Oh, no! Having chewed on it and failed to understand, he asked where I was really off to. "Brighton," I answered. "Brighton?" repeated Grundy. "Yes, brighten your wits," I replied.

INTERVIEWER: And was Grundy bright enough to see it?

LOWTHER: Bless you, no! He said Brighton was much too far, and I should be late for call-over. So I said it was quite the opposite direction to Northampton. "What is?" asked Grundy, looking quite bewildered. "Southampton," I said. I don't think Grundy has got there yet.

INTERVIEWER: Grundy is rather slow, isn't he?

LOWTHER: But a good chap at heart. Sometimes a fellow's heart is oke, Mr. Interviewer, but so, unfortunately, is his head. Solid oak, in fact. Like Gore.

INTERVIEWER: Is Gore another of your critics, Lowther?

LOWTHER: Did you hear about the dictator who never went to the circus because he was afraid he would laugh?

INTERVIEWER: That's a new one on me.

LOWTHER: Gore is like that. He used to be junior captain, you know—and he still dreams of recovering the position from Tom Merry.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any chance of that, do you think?

LOWTHER: Not the faintest. Any fellow who suggests that there is a better chum or a finer skipper than Tom Merry deserves to be crowned—with a cricket stump!

INTERVIEWER: You have been friendly with Tom Merry ever since he came to St. Jim's, haven't you, Lowther?

LOWTHER: Yes. And it seems hard to remember what Study No. 10 was like before Tom came. Manners and I would stand by our leader through anything—and that's meant quite seriously. We've already had our ups and downs together.

INTERVIEWER: Such as?

LOWTHER: Well, there was the time Figgins thought he would challenge Tom Merry for the junior captaincy. The New House mapped out a big sports programme—the idea being that, if they won, Tom Merry should resign.

INTERVIEWER: And how did Figgins' plan go?

LOWTHER: Not according to programme. In fact, after we had licked the New House bounders nearly off the map, even Figgins had to admit he had taken the wrong turning and got badly fogged by our vigorous opposition.

INTERVIEWER: Was that when you took the title of the Terrible Three?

LOWTHER: I think that title just happened. I don't ever remember feeling very terrible—except one day when I got a duck against New House bowling! As Tom Merry himself only scored a single and Manners got a duck like myself that day, at any rate, we really felt we were the "terrible three."

INTERVIEWER: It's something to find three chums who can appreciate a joke against themselves!

LOWTHER: By the way, that reminds me. Gore told me that if I came out with a pun to-day, he'd give me the licking of a lifetime.

INTERVIEWER: Then you are "for it"!

LOWTHER: No; the licking he promised me is like the story of the three-ha'penny stamp.

INTERVIEWER: What about that?

LOWTHER: It won't come off. Well, here's to all listeners, Mr. Interviewer. May their ears be like the telephone receiver that the hyena swallowed.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to that?

LOWTHER: It just kept ringing with laughter!

"Talbot!"

It was a whispering voice, and Talbot started violently as he recognised the tones of Levison of the Fourth.

"Levison!"

There was a soft chuckle.

"Yes."

"What are you doing here, Levison?"

"What are you doing, if it comes to that?"

"Nothing that concerns you!" said Talbot sternly. "Is it possible that you have been watching for me?"

"Quite possible! You know that I am an inquisitive cad!" said Levison coolly. "But I've got something to tell you—something you must hear!"

"How did you know—"

"Never mind that. Come with me!"

"I've no time to waste!" muttered Talbot.

"Neither have I. But you must come and hear what I have to say," said Levison calmly. "If I raise my voice there'll be trouble."

Talbot trembled with anger.

"Levison, you dare interfere with me!"

"Yes. I'm a cheeky rotter, you know!" Levison laughed softly. "You'll come to my study and hear what I have to say, or I shall see that somebody wakes up!"

"You can speak here!"

"I can't. I've got my reasons."

"Leave me alone!" muttered Talbot savagely.

"Mind your own business! What are you meddling for?"

"Because I'm a meddler, I suppose. But if you don't do as I ask I shall raise my voice."

Talbot clenched his hands hard

"Levison, you rotter!"

"Pile it on!"

"I'll come with you," muttered Talbot. "I shall have something to say to you about this to-morrow!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Levison. "This way, my pippin! I'm master of ceremonies now."

He slid his arm into Talbot's and led him.

The Toff submitted silently, with deep anger in his breast. But he was in Levison's hands. What the Fourth Former's object was he could not even guess. But a raised voice meant the failure of his plans for that night, and he went with Levison quietly, but with his eyes gleaming.

They reached the Fourth Form passage, and Levison opened the door of his study.

"This way," he muttered

Talbot stepped into the study.

"Now, what—" he began.

Click!

The door closed suddenly; the key turned.

Talbot spun round with a furious exclamation.

The key was in the outside of the lock, and he was locked in the study.

"Levison!" His voice was suppressed, but vibrating with anger.

There was a faint chuckle in the passage outside, then stealthy footsteps died away.

Levison had not even replied.

Talbot grasped the handle of the door and tried it; but he knew it was locked. He could not fathom why Levison had played this trick on him, and he realised that he must not call out to the junior. He stood quivering with rage. Levison had evidently led him intentionally to the study to trap him there.

The key had been placed outside the door in readiness. Why?

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It was inexplicable. But a grim smile came over Talbot's face in the darkness.

Levison had forgotten that the light-fingered Toff was not like other prisoners. The lock did not make him a prisoner, as it would have done any other St. Jim's fellow. It meant only a few minutes' work to the Toff.

His hands were quickly busy. In two minutes the door was unlocked, and Talbot pulled at it, but it did not open more than half an inch.

Talbot's teeth set hard, and he drew a deep, savage breath.

Levison had not forgotten, after all! There was a cord stretched from the handle of the door to the door opposite and tied, and the door was held shut, although the lock had been picked.

The Toff was a prisoner until Levison chose to let him out.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Black Treachery!

LEVISON grinned in the darkness as he stole away on tiptoe.

The strange game he was playing was exactly in accordance with his peculiar nature. His motive was good, but everything that was deep and tortuous was enjoyment to Ernest Levison.

Talbot was furious now, but he would thank him on the morrow if all went as Levison suspected. True, it was the duplicity of Levison's own nature that helped him to see so clearly through Croke's plan. A better fellow than Levison would never have fathomed it. But Levison had no doubts. All he wanted was proof—proof that would save Talbot from another scheme from the same quarter.

The junior, silent but swift hurried back to the upper passage. Unless he was mistaken, Croke would follow the Toff from the dormitory; he would wait till he believed Talbot had reached the Form-room, that was all.

For, unless Croke had planned that the Toff should be discovered at work, Levison had found out only a mare's-nest; and if Croke had planned to betray Talbot, it was only by giving information that he could contrive the discovery.

That Levison was not mistaken was soon proved. He had not been waiting a couple of minutes in the dark passage when the dormitory door opened softly and a figure glided out.

The door closed again.

Levison held his breath.

In the deep darkness, as he crouched against the wall, he caught sight of only a moving shadow. He knew that it must be Gerald Croke, but there was no chance of recognising him.

Almost inaudible footfalls died away down the passage. Quite inaudibly Levison followed the creeping Shell fellow down the stairs till the moving shadow stopped at the door of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

Tap!

Croke knocked softly—very softly—and opened the door.

"Mr. Railton!"

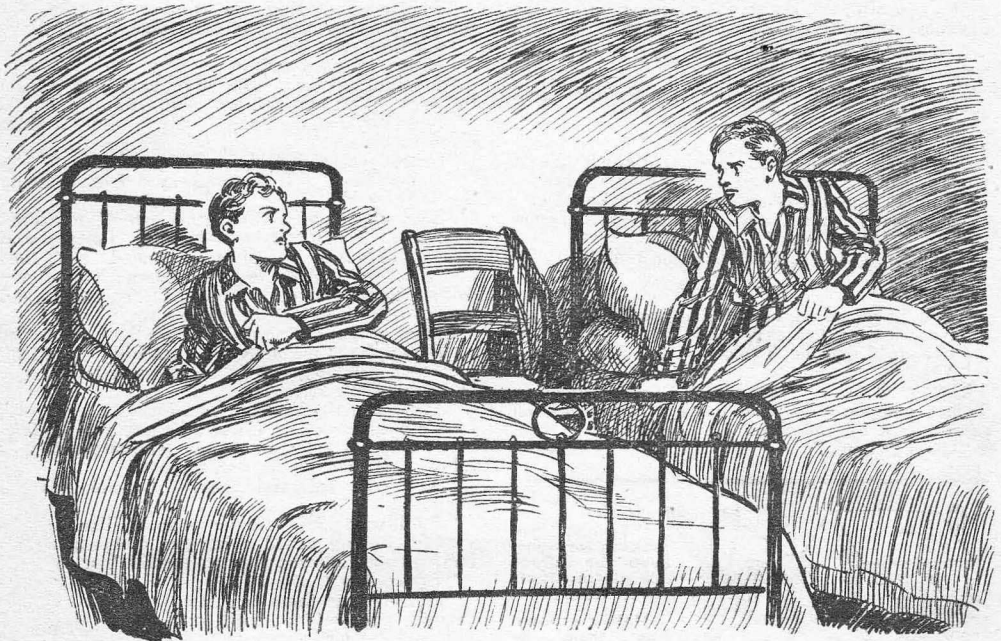
It was Croke's voice, shaken with suppressed excitement.

A startled voice replied from the darkened room.

"What? Who is that?"

"It—it is I, sir."

"Is that Croke?"



There was a startled, breathless exclamation from Crooke as Talbot got into bed. "Is—is that you, Talbot?" "Yes," replied the Toff. "But—but—what—how—?" Crooke broke off. How had Talbot escaped the Housemaster in the Form-room?—That was what the cad of the Shell was fiercely asking himself.

"Yes, sir."

"What does this mean, Crooke? What are you doing out of your dormitory?"

"Hush, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"I—I thought I ought to call you, sir," faltered Crooke. "There—there's something awfully wrong."

There was a movement as the amazed Housemaster turned to put on a bedside light.

"Don't put on the light, sir; it may alarm him."

"What? Alarm whom?"

"The—the burglar!"

"Do you mean to say that there are burglars in the House, Crooke?"

"Yes, sir!" whispered Crooke. "I—I thought I ought to call you, sir."

"Certainly you ought to call me if that is the case," said the Housemaster dryly. "But it is probably only a nervous fancy. Have you seen anyone?"

"I've heard him, sir."

"Tell me exactly what has happened."

Mr. Railton had stepped from his bed, and he was groping for a dressing-gown in the dark.

"I—I woke up, sir, and—and heard somebody creeping in the passage outside the dormitory," faltered Crooke. "It—it sounded to me as if the dorm door had been opened. I—I listened, and heard footsteps creeping away—"

"Probably a foolish fancy."

"I—I thought I ought to get up, sir. I got out of the dormitory, and—and heard him go downstairs."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir. I followed him, and he went into the Shell Form Room."

"Bless my soul! If you are quite certain, Crooke—"

"I am certain, sir."

"It may be only a boy who has gone down for some reason. However, I shall certainly see into the matter. You say you thought your door opened? That may have been some boy leaving the dormitory."

"I—I didn't think of that, sir. I—I don't think it was. What should a fellow go down for—"

"Certainly it will need explaining."

"Shall—shall I call Kildare, sir?"

"Certainly not. There is no need to give the alarm unless there is real occasion for it. I shall soon ascertain whether there is anyone in the House."

"He—he might overpower you, sir."

"You may leave the matter to me, Crooke. Go back to your dormitory."

"Very well, sir."

Crooke's work was done. He was glad to go back to his dormitory. Even Crooke was not equal to facing Talbot, when the unfortunate junior was caught in the act of opening Mr. Linton's desk.

Levison of the Fourth crouched back in an alcove as the Shell fellow passed him.

He heard the hurried breathing of the cad of the Shell.

But Levison did not move.

He waited.

There was a rustle as Mr. Railton, in dressing—

gown and slippers, came out of his room in the darkness and hurried down the stairs.

A sound above told that the door of the Shell dormitory had closed on Crooke.

The slight sound made by Mr. Railton died away.

Then Levison stirred.

Noiselessly he hurried to the Fourth Form passage, and stopped outside his own study.

"Talbot!" he breathed through the keyhole.

"You cad!" came back Talbot's voice from within. "Let me out."

"I'm going to. Quiet! Railton's up!"

"Railton?"

"Yes."

"You have called him?" muttered Talbot.

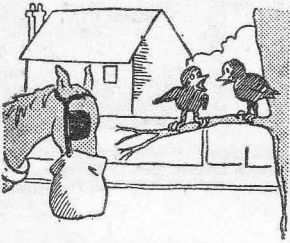
"No. Crooke has called him."

"Crooke!" panted Talbot.

"Yes."

The cord was released, the door opened. Talbot stepped into the passage, and Levison caught him by the arm.

"Quiet! Look!"



"Things are looking serious—even the horses are getting their respirators!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. Portman, Fairfield House, Fairfield Road, Halesowen.

He drew Talbot to the passage window.

Below was the wide window of the Shell Form Room. From the window below a blaze of light suddenly came streaming out into the darkened quadrangle. It showed Mr. Railton in dressing-gown, with a poker in his hand, in the room.

Talbot stared at the Housemaster in the Form-room, dazed.

Levison pressed his arm.

"Suppose you had been at Linton's desk?" he muttered.

Talbot did not answer—he could not. His brain was in a whirl.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Foiled at the Finish!

TALBOT panted.

There was a soft chuckle beside him—the peculiar elfin chuckle of Levison of the Fourth.

The Shell fellow jerked his arm away.

"Levison!" He found his voice at last. "Levison! What does this mean? What is Railton in the Form-room for?"

"Looking for the burglar!"

"The—the burglar—"

"You!" said Levison softly. "Now you know why Crooke sent you there, with a yarn of an incriminating letter in Linton's desk. Now you know why I shut you up in my study."

"You—you knew—"

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"I listened outside the window in the old tower this afternoon," said Levison coolly.

"Levison—you cad!"

Levison laughed softly.

"I expected that. But I've saved you from the sack. You can call me what you like."

"I—I don't understand. How did Railton come to be up?"

"Crooke called him," Levison replied.

"Impossible! It prevents me from getting the letter—"

"You silly chump, there's no letter!" muttered Levison. "Don't you understand? Lodgey and Crooke arranged it between them—I got that much out of Lodgey to-day. There's no letter—it's a lie to get you to burgle Linton's desk, and for Railton to catch you in the act."

Talbot staggered against the wall.

"It's a lie!" he muttered thickly. "It's impossible! Levison, this is one of your tricks—one of your rotten tricks!"

"My rotten tricks have saved your neck," said Levison, unmoved. "I don't expect you to take my word. I tell you I was on the watch. I followed Crooke to Railton's room."

"You—you followed him? Crooke left the dormitory?"

"I followed him, and he woke Railton, with a yarn of having heard a burglar creeping about, and having followed him to the Shell room—"

"Impossible!"

"He sent him there to make the discovery. He thought you were at work on Linton's desk. I tell you I heard every word he said to Railton. Railton was to catch you in the act."

"I don't believe it—I can't believe it! I know you are a liar," said Talbot, between his teeth. "You awakened Railton yourself, and came to me with this yarn about my cousin—"

"And that's your thanks?" said Levison, still smiling in the darkness. "Luckily, I didn't expect gratitude."

"Gratitude! You villain!"

"You'd better get back to the dorm," said Levison calmly. "I'm going. Railton won't find a burglar, but he's sure to look round to see whether any chap is out of bed. Don't take my word for what I've told you—ask Railton who awakened him."

"That will prove that you have lied!" said Talbot fiercely.

"Yes, if I have lied! He is sure to come to your dorm to see if any fellow is out of bed—ask him then."

"I will—I will. And if you have lied, I—"

"Never mind what you will do. Get back to the dorm, and don't let Railton find you out of it. He would ask questions."

Levison glided away in the darkness.

After the alarm given by Crooke, Mr. Railton was certain to make a round of the junior dormitories, to ascertain that no juniors were out of bed, after he had assured himself that there was no burglar in the house.

In less than a minute more Levison was in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory, grinning in the darkness.

Talbot stood rooted to the floor when the Fourth Former had left him.

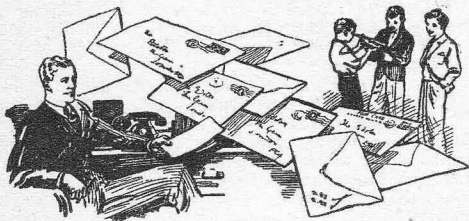
But he started as the light in the Shell room was suddenly blotted out.

The Housemaster had evidently finished in the Form-room.

Talbot hurried away to the Shell dormitory.

His brain was in a whirl. He had fiercely





## THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

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

**H**ALLO, Chums! The Armaments Stamps race goes on apace. One lap has already been completed, and now, with to-day's issue of stamps, the second lap comes to an end. On page 2 you will find full details of which set of stamps you are required to send in this month for the second prize-giving.

I hope you are all still in the race, and collecting as many stamps as you can. A ripping Hercules bike, or a cricket bat, or a camera are prizes well worth winning.

There is one more lap to go, and this will be completed at the end of July, when the remaining five bicycles and 2,000 other prizes will be awarded. Keep pegging away, chums, and don't forget that our popular companion papers, "Magnet" and "Modern Boy," are also printing Armaments Stamps.

### "THE MYSTERY CRICKET COACH!"

A thrilling yarn of sport and mystery at St. Jim's awaits you in next week's grand number. The story

resented Levison's accusation against Croke. He did not believe it. Yet there was a growing doubt in his breast. For, false as Levison was, he had never been false to Talbot.

What if he had spoken the truth? What if Talbot, that night, had had a very narrow escape of shame and ruin? He reached the Shell dormitory silently. It took him but a few moments to throw off his clothes and plunge into bed.

Whether Levison had lied or not, it would not do for his absence to be discovered. Awkward questions would have followed.

There was a startled, breathless exclamation from Croke's bed.

Croke was sitting up, peering through the darkness with startled eyes.

"Who—who is that?"

"It is I," said Talbot quietly.

"Talbot!"

"Yes!"

"But—but—what—how—" Croke broke off. Talbot drew the bedclothes over him, his heart heavy as lead. Why was Gerald Croke so startled? There was no reason why he should be surprised or startled.

The Toff did not speak again. Would Croke question him as to the success of the enterprise? Whether he had obtained the letter from Mr. Linton's desk, the letter which Levison declared did not exist?

Croke did not ask a single question.

The return of Talbot to the dormitory had utterly confounded him. How had the Toff escaped the Housemaster in the Form-room? That was what Croke was fiercely asking himself.

deals with the peculiar advent of a new cricket coach and his amazing adventures at St. Jim's.

It's in rather desperate and strange circumstances that Tom Merry & Co. first meet Bob Bradshaw, for the man, it seems, is being hunted by enemies, and the juniors help him to escape. Who the enemies are, and why they are after him, are mysteries which Bob Bradshaw keeps to himself.

Nevertheless, Tom Merry & Co. like the man, especially when they learn that he is an old county and England cricketer. It is on his fame as a player that Mr. Bradshaw secures the job of cricket coach. But he's an enigma—a curious personality, and he has some queer ideas about cricket—as the St. Jim's fellows discover when they are all ordered to play left-handed! Readers will enjoy this great yarn immensely. Look out for it!

### "GREYFRIARS VERSUS ST. JIM'S!"

Always the cricket match of the season is the meeting of the friendly rivals Harry Wharton & Co. and the St. Jim's juniors, and this is the theme of the sparkling story which Frank Richards provides for you next Wednesday. It is the turn of the Greyfriars chums to visit St. Jim's, and there is a good deal of speculation as to who will be chosen to make the long journey into Sussex. Billy Bunter is not one of the lucky ones, but he makes sure he's in the party—and he causes no little fun en route to St. Jim's!

All the other popular features of the GEM—"Laugh These Off," the stamp article, "In Town To-day," etc.—will be well up to their usual high standard, completing another tip-top number.

My last item of news this week concerns that popular Library, the "Schoolboys' Own." Three magnificent numbers, price 4d. each, are now on sale, and they contain splendid book-length yarns of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and St. Frank's Schools. If you have not yet tried the "Schoolboys' Own," take my advice and treat yourself to-day.

All the best, chums!

THE EDITOR.

Even if Mr. Railton had not found him there they should have met in the passage. He could not have returned from the Form-room without passing the Housemaster. Had he not been to the Form-room at all? Croke was at a dead loss. But he could not command his voice sufficiently to speak. Did Talbot know? Had he guessed?

There was a step in the passage, and a light gleamed under the door.

The door opened.

Mr. Railton stood there, lamp in hand, looking into the dormitory.

Talbot lay silent, with closed eyes.

Several of the juniors awakened as the light gleamed into the room.

Tom Merry sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes.

"What the dickens— Ah, Mr. Railton!"

"Do not be alarmed," said the Housemaster quietly. "There is nothing the matter. There has been a false alarm, that is all."

"Yes, sir," said Tom wonderingly.

"Has any boy been out of this dormitory, Merry?"

"I don't know, sir. I've only just woke up."

"Apart from Croke, I mean. I know Croke has been out, as he called me."

Talbot shivered.

"Croke called you, sir?" said Monty Lowther.

"Croke's in bed now, sir."

"Yes; Croke fancied he heard burglars in the house," said Mr. Railton. "You have awakened me for nothing, Croke. I have been in the Shell Form Room, and there was no one there and no trace of anyone. You must have been mistaken in thinking you heard someone go into that room."

Croke tried to speak, but he could not.

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"Possibly some boy left the dormitory, and that was what you heard," went on the Housemaster. "Yet I cannot understand why you should have thought that he went to the Shell Form Room. You told me distinctly that you followed him and heard him go into that room. I trust, Crooke, that this is not a foolish joke—what you would call a jape—played on your Housemaster," said Mr. Railton sternly.

"I—I thought—" stammered Crooke helplessly. He was asking himself savagely how Talbot had escaped. Did the Toff have old Harry's own luck? "I—I'm sorry, sir. I certainly thought—"

The Housemaster's keen eyes searched his face. The possibility that the junior had been pulling his leg from a mistaken sense of humour was more than enough to make Mr. Railton angry. It was no joke—from a master's point of view, at least—to be called out of bed in the middle of the night for nothing.

"If this was a foolish prank, Crooke—"

"It—it wasn't, sir," stammered Crooke, in dismay. "I—I'm sure I heard something, sir."

"It is very odd that you should have supposed that you followed someone to the Shell Form Room when you did nothing of the sort," said Mr. Railton dryly.

"But—but he was there. I mean—I thought that—" Crooke hardly knew what he was saying in his confusion and dismay. "Are—are you sure, sir, you—you didn't pass him in the passage—"

"Don't be ridiculous, Crooke! I should hardly be likely to let the fellow escape unseen if he were really in the House. There was no one, and, as far as I can ascertain, no boy but yourself left his bed. You have had a foolish, nervous fancy, Crooke, if you were not guilty of the impertinence of a foolish practical joke upon your Housemaster. I will give you the benefit of the doubt, as I should be sorry to be unjust. But I am not satisfied with you, and I warn you to be more careful!"

Crooke stammered out something—he hardly knew what.

"Good-night, my boys," said Mr. Railton. "I am sorry you have been disturbed."

"Good-night, sir!"

The Housemaster quitted the dormitory, and the door closed.

Nearly all the Shell were awake now, and there was at once a chorus of questions addressed to Gerald Crooke.

"So you dreamed burglars and had the cheek to go and call Railton, Crooke?" asked Kangaroo.

"You smoked too many cigarettes before going to bed," chuckled Monty Lowther. "Bad for the nerves, Crooke, old son!"

"What the dickens made you think the giddy burglar went to the Form-room?" asked Tom Merry. "Did you think he wanted to burgle our Latin grammars?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or Gussy's book out of Linton's desk?" chuckled Manners

"Or the blackboard?"

"Or Linton's petty cash?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Were you pulling Railton's leg, Crooke?"

"Why don't you speak, you image?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Crooke. "I'm going to sleep!"

"Go easy on the smokes next time, old scout!"

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"And don't take it for a merry burglar next time you hear Manners snore."

"Why, you silly ass!" said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows settled down to sleep again. Crooke did not sleep easily. He lay sleepless, furious, and apprehensive. His plot had somehow gone awry. He knew that. Talbot had heard every word. Talbot knew that Crooke had sent the Housemaster to the Form-room to catch him there, opening the Form-master's desk. Talbot knew!

Why had he not spoken? Why had he not revealed the cowardly trick to the whole Form? What was Talbot thinking? What would he do the next day? The wretched schemer shivered as he thought of that.

He slept at last, though very uneasily.

When the rising-bell rang Crooke turned out of bed, heavy-eyed, and almost haggard in the morning sunshine. He glanced at Talbot, but the Toff did not seem to see him.

Talbot's face was calm and set. He knew all. He could not fail to know. Yet he did not speak.

But when Crooke, anxious to get away from the chipping of the Shell fellows, left the dormitory first, Talbot followed him.

Crooke hurried on, his heart almost failing him. He had hoped that the morning light would dawn upon Talbot, a prisoner in the punishment-room, awaiting disgrace and ruin.

The plot had failed, and Talbot was not likely to be tricked again. The game was up. Crooke knew that. In the quadrangle Talbot joined him. "Stop a minute, Crooke!" he said, very quietly.

Crooke stopped.

"I suppose you know that I know the whole game now?" Talbot's quiet, scornful voice cut like a lash, and Crooke shrank under it. "I very nearly walked into the trap—very nearly! Why did you do it?"

Crooke pulled himself together. His eyes glinted as he looked at the Toff, his lip curled in a bitter sneer.

"Well, you know it!" he said. "How you dodged out of it I can't understand. Why did I do it? To show you up in your true colours. To get you sacked from the school, hang you! Now you know!"

"There was no letter in the book?"

Crooke laughed scornfully.

"Did you think I should be such an idiot as that? You fool! It was Lodgey's scheme from the beginning! And I'm not sorry for it. I hoped to see the last of you, and I'm only sorry it failed—and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it! And if you give it away to the fellows I shall deny every word."

"I don't think you'd be believed," said Talbot quietly. "I think that if I told the story you would be cut by every fellow in the school. But I shall say nothing. I shall not touch you. You're not fit to touch. You have tried to ruin me, and I shall be on my guard now. I called the fellow a liar who told me what you were doing. I couldn't believe it. Don't speak to me again, you make me sick!"

Talbot did not meet Levison of the Fourth till after lessons.

When they met Levison looked at him with a satirical smile.



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PEN PALS COUPON

25-6-38

"Well, are you still going to call me a liar?" he queried.

"I'm sorry I did so last night, Levison. I couldn't believe it then; but it was true." Talbot's voice trembled a little. "But for you, Mr. Railton would have found me opening Mr. Linton's desk, and even if I had chosen to give Crooke away there was no letter in the desk to bear out the story. It was a lie from beginning to end."

"Rather neat of Crooke, wasn't it?" said Levison cheerfully. "It really was a pity to chip in and spoil such a really clever game. Don't you think so?"

Talbot laughed.

"I'm glad you did. I should have been turned out of the school as a hardened thief if you hadn't. Nobody could have believed what I

really went to the desk for—not even my chums, I'm afraid."

"I should have believed in you, and I'm not your pal," said Levison. "Even an eavesdropping cad is more use than a real pal at times. What? All serene! I don't mind what you said. Hard words break no bones, and soft ones butter no parsnips!"

"It's the second time you've done me a really good turn," said Talbot. "If ever my turn comes you can rely on me."

"It may come one day," said Levison.

And he walked away whistling.

(Next Wednesday: "THE MYSTERY CRICKET COACH!"—a powerful yarn of mystery and sport, featuring a strange new-comer to St. Jim's. Order your GEM early.)

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## ELEVENTH HOUR SENSATION IN THE MYSTERY OF THE ANONYMOUS LETTER-WRITER OF GREYFRIARS!



In a moment the three juniors fastened on the enraged Bulstrode. He was whirled off his feet and sent with a crash into the ditch that bordered the road.

### WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

An anonymous letter, containing an insulting message about Mr. Quelch, master of the Greyfriars Remove, is sent to Dr. Locke, the Head. It seems fairly evident that a member of Mr. Quelch's Form is the culprit, and suspicion immediately falls upon Bulstrode, the bully.

When taxed with the matter by his Form-fellows, Bulstrode is very offensive, and fights with Wharton. The juniors take this as a sign of guilt, and the Remove bully is sent to Coventry.

(Now read on.)

### A Bad Time for Bulstrode!

**B**ULSTRODE, the bully of the Remove, jammed his hands into his pockets and strode away towards the gates of Greyfriars. He was in a savage and restless mood—ready at a moment's notice to break into a fury.

The blow had fallen upon him heavily, and though his angry pride would not allow him to take a single step to set himself right in the eyes of his Form-fellows, he felt it none the less keenly. He had hardened his heart against his former friends, but he suffered all the same.

Near the gates Trevor and Desmond and several more Remove fellows were talking. They pointedly ignored Bulstrode as he came by. The burly Removeite swung round on them savagely.

"You cads!"

"Faith and I—"

"Shut up, Desmond!" muttered Russell.

"Sure, but I—"

"Don't speak to him—he's barred!"

"Begorra, and it's right ye are! You can go

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# Barred by the Remove!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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

on, Bulstrode, but I'm not going to speak to ye at all."

"You ass!" growled Trevor, while the others grinned.

"So you're going to keep this up?" he snarled.

No reply.

"I suppose you think I'm going to sneak round asking you to speak to me. If you do, you're jolly well mistaken."

Dead silence.

"You—you rotten cads!"

Silence.

Bulstrode quivered with rage. Any sort of ragging he could have met, but this deadly silence disconcerted and baffled him.

"You—you rotters! I'll take on any two of you!" he roared.

Trevor walked away and the others followed him. They did not look at Bulstrode.

The big Removeite stood looking after them, his hands clenching and unclenching. He was inclined to rush after them and tackle them then and there—the half-dozen of them.

Several Upper Fourth fellows were standing near, and they looked curiously at Bulstrode. They had noticed during the last day or two that something was "up" in the Remove, but they did not know what it was. Temple, Dabney & Co. exchanged glances and came towards Bulstrode. He swung round and glared at them.

"Nice cheerful face, isn't it?" said Temple. "A thing of beauty and a joy for ever—I don't think!"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"The kids are quarrelling among themselves," said Fry, shaking his head. "I really think it's about time we waded in and gave the Remove a Form licking. They have needed it badly all the term."

Bulstrode only glared and turned away. The Upper Fourth Formers were surprised. They had expected an outburst, and they could not understand it at all. The bully of the Remove strode out of the gates.

Temple gave an expressive whistle.

"Something wrong with his lordship," he remarked.

"Oh, rather!"

"Let's follow him and cheer him up," suggested Fry, with a grin. But Temple shook his head.

"Let him alone! He looks as if he's having a bad time."

Bulstrode was having a bad time. He strode

## YOU'LL ENJOY EVERY WORD OF THIS GRIPPING YARN TELLING HOW THE CULPRIT IS EXPOSED.

out of the gates, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the ground.

He almost ran into three Removites who were coming towards the school from the village. They were Ogilvy, Morgan, and Skinner. They stepped quickly aside, as if his touch would contaminate them, and that seemed to give the finishing touch to Bulstrode's rage.

He turned upon them like a tiger.

"Put up your hands!" he shouted.

"Oh rats!" said Ogilvy. "Come on, chaps!"

Bulstrode planted himself in their path.

"I've had enough of this," he said, between his teeth. "Put up your hands!"

"Oh, ring off!" said Skinner. "We know you can lick any one of us—but your bullying days are over. If you don't keep to yourself we'll chuck you into the ditch. Do you think you're going to bully us into speaking to an anonymous letter writer?"

"Don't talk to him," said Ogilvy.

Bulstrode struck out furiously. Ogilvy reeled back from a savage drive in the face. His blood was up, and he sprang at Bulstrode—but the lad from the Highlands, strong as he was, was no match for the burly Removite. He went down in the road with a bump. He was up again in a twinkling, and the three juniors fastened on Bulstrode. He was whirled off his feet, and sent with a crash into the ditch that bordered the road.

Fortunately for Bulstrode, the ditch was a dry one. But it was deep, and choked with bracken and fern, and there was a deposit of yellow ooze at the bottom. Into that the Removite plumped, and the others walked on and left him there. Bulstrode scrambled up, with scratched hands and face, and his clothes caked with mud in three or four places.

By the time he struggled out into the road, the juniors had gone in. Bulstrode ground his teeth helplessly.

His great strength had given him a power over the Form, and he had not failed to use it. But his day was evidently over. The Removite tactics they did not hesitate to use force. Two or three could always stop any bullying by combining against him. They had a bond of union in their agreement to bar him out. Force would not serve him now.

Sore and sulky and simmering with rage, Bulstrode walked on down the road and plunged into the wood. Through the wood a footpath ran down to the shore by the walls of Cliff House.

Bulstrode followed the footpath, and the wide, blue sea suddenly burst upon his view through openings in the trees. He strode on to the shore and flung himself down in the shadow of a rock. There, with a savage, sullen gaze bent upon the rolling sea, he tried to think the situation out.

"Hang it!" he broke out at last. "What shall I do?"

He looked up the next moment; there was a soft footstep on the sand. Bulstrode started as he caught the glance of Marjorie Hazeldene of Cliff House School. The girl had just come round the big rock, and came upon the Greyfriars junior unexpectedly.

Bulstrode rose awkwardly and raised his cap.

Marjorie gave him a nod and a smile. She did not like Bulstrode; she had seen too much of the unpleasant side of his character. But as she looked at his face now, she saw the lines of

trouble there. Marjorie's heart was very tender, and it softened.

"I—I hope I didn't startle you, Miss Hazeldene."

Marjorie laughed.

"No; that's all right."

Her eyes were on his face. Bulstrode knew that the girl read there that he was in trouble, and that she was sympathetic. It crossed his mind to confide in Marjorie. But he dismissed the thought at once.

Marjorie gave him a pleasant nod and walked on, a thoughtful shade on her face. Bulstrode looked after her till she disappeared among the rocks.

### A Friend for Bulstrode!

"MARJORIE hasn't come yet," Bob Cherry remarked as he poured out a third cup of tea from the teapot.

Harry Wharton & Co. were just finishing tea in Study No. 1 after a pleasant hour or two at cricket practice.

"No," said Harry. "I understood she was coming over on her bicycle to see Hazeldene. But—"

Tap!

Bob Cherry knew that gentle tap. He jumped up in such a hurry that his knees caught the table and made that jump, too, and rushed to the door. He was careless of the fact that his cup of tea had been upset into Billy Bunter's plate of toast and sardines. Bunter sat almost speechless with wrath, staring at it.

Bob Cherry dragged the door open.

A pretty, flushed face looked into the study. The juniors were all on their feet in a moment to greet Marjorie Hazeldene.

"Just in time for tea!" exclaimed Nugent, too excited by the visit to remember that the tea was nearly gone. Bunter was finishing the sardines, and there was only a suspicion of stickiness left in the jam-pot.

But Marjorie shook her head.

"Oh, no thank you! I had tea at Cliff House."

"Just a cup of tea, though," urged Nugent. "You must need a little tea after a bike ride, you know."

Marjorie smiled and nodded.

"Very well, thank you! Just a small cup."

"What-ho! Hand over a cup, Inky."

"The handfulness is great, my worthy chum."

Nugent proceeded to pour out the tea. He started a little as he saw the fluid that came from the spout of the teapot. It was absolutely colourless. Hot water had been added to that pot twice for the juniors' tea, hence its weakness.

"Do you—do you like your tea weak?" he stammered.

"Oh, yes, please!"

"Shove the kettle on," whispered Wharton.

"Make some more."

"Can't," muttered Bob in reply. "There isn't any tea left."

"Oh!"

"I'm afraid this is rather weak," said Nugent. "It wouldn't take five minutes to make a fresh pot, Marjorie."

"Oh, you frabjous ass!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"No, thanks!" said Marjorie. "This will do nicely."

Nugent hastily added milk, so that the true colour of the tea should not be too apparent, and passed the sugar basin to Marjorie. The girl sat down and sipped the tea, and sipped again.

"You mustn't mind if I don't finish it," she said, with a bright smile. "I've had tea, you know."

"I'm afraid it's rather weak. I really wish you would let me make you a fresh pot," said Nugent.

"Oh, no, not at all!" Marjorie rose to her feet. "I've been talking so long to Peter, that I can't stay a minute. The porter will be locking the gates."

"Then we'll come down to the gates with you, anyway. Where's your machine?"

"My brother put it in the bicycle-shed."

"I'll get it," said Bob Cherry hastily, and he rushed out.

Marjorie followed rather more slowly with the juniors. Bunter remained in the study, finishing up whatever was left on the table that was eatable.

Wharton noticed that the girl's face was unusually serious as they crossed the Close. Marjorie turned to him suddenly.

"I really came to your study because I wanted to speak to you, Harry." Nugent and Hurree Singh dropped a little behind. "Of course, you know about Bulstrode."

"Bulstrode!" said Harry, in surprise.

"Yes. I met him on the shore about an hour ago, and he seemed to me to be in great trouble of some sort. I felt sorry for him. I asked Peter about him just now, and he told me that Bulstrode had been sent to Coventry for writing an anonymous letter about Mr. Quelch to the Head."

"That's it."

"My brother seems to have no doubt about it," said Marjorie slowly. "But—but is it quite certain that Bulstrode did it, Harry?"

Wharton's face clouded a little.

"I don't know," he said. "It looks pretty black against him. Quelch had been ragging him only the day before about his bullying a kid, you know. Bulstrode bears malice; he can't get over a jaw like other chaps. Then this letter was written to the Head. We haven't seen it, but it's a letter abusing Quelch in some way, and Quelch says he's certain that it was written by a boy in our Form. The fellows all think it was Bulstrode."

"But you?"

"Well, I don't know what to think. Bulstrode has gone the worst possible way to work if he wants to clear himself. He seems to think he can carry the matter off by bullying and bravado, and the Form isn't likely to stand that—from him."

"I don't think he did it, Harry."

"No?" said Wharton, in astonishment.

"But—"

"He isn't that sort of boy, I think, Harry. I know he's not a nice boy; but though he has done mean things, I should never have thought him mean enough for an action like this. Writing an anonymous letter is the act of a weak and cowardly nature, and Bulstrode hasn't that."

"I was thinking something of the sort myself,

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Marjorie. But the whole Form has made up its mind on the subject. I thought I might look into it, though."

"I think you ought to, Harry, as captain of the Form. It must be terrible for Bulstrode, if he is really innocent. And I cannot help thinking that there are boys in the Remove who are more likely to have written that letter."

Wharton nodded thoughtfully.

"That's true enough, but they are all down on him. A fellow like Snoop would be about the likeliest, I should say, after the mean trick he played on Linley, but he has been as loud as any in denouncing Bulstrode."

"The guilty boy might do that to divert suspicion from himself."

"My hat, he might!"

"It is horrid to suspect any boy of being so mean," said Marjorie. "But it ought to be made clear who is guilty. I felt very sorry for Bulstrode."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I've been feeling rather sorry for the brute myself," he said. "But he's such a surly beast you don't know how to take him." Wharton checked himself abruptly. It came into his mind at that moment that he had been described in those very words himself in his first days at Greyfriars. "I'll look into it, Marjorie," he said hurriedly. "I'll do my best to clear the matter up."

Bob Cherry came running up with the bicycle. He had another machine in his other hand. It was Wharton's bicycle, but it was evidently not for Wharton to use.

"Hazel is riding back with me," said Marjorie, with a smile. "He has permission."

"The roads aren't very safe," said Bob Cherry. "There was a tramp locked up the other day for—for stealing chickens. I shouldn't like you or your brother to come to any harm, you know. I'd better come, and then I can look after Hazeldene on the way back."

"Thank you!" said Hazeldene, as he wheeled his machine up. "I can look after myself all right."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you, old chap?" said Bob Cherry quite affectionately, though, as a rule, he was not fond of Hazeldene. "We'll have a jolly spin back."

"Oh, rats!" said Hazeldene.

"Or I'll tell you what," said Bob, with the same heartiness. "I'll see Miss Hazeldene back to Cliff House, and you needn't bother to come out at all."

"More rats!"

They wheeled their machines out of the gates. Gosling had come out to lock up, and Wingate of the Sixth came in just in time. He stopped and raised his cap to Marjorie.

"You kids going out?"

"I am," said Hazeldene. "I've got a pass from Mr. Quelch."

"And you, Cherry?"

"Nice warm evening, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry, trying to wheel his machine past Wingate without answering the question.

The big Sixth Former caught him by the shoulder.

"Have you a pass, Cherry?"

"A— a pass? Can't you give me one, Wingate?"

"Then you haven't one?"

"Well, no, not exactly."

"You young rascal! Go in!"

"Oh, Wingate!"

The disappointment in Bob Cherry's face was so keen that the Greyfriars captain melted. He wrote on a leaf of his pocket-book and tore it out.

"Mind—back in half an hour!" he said.

"Oh, thanks, Wingate! You're a sport!"

"Oh, get off!"

And the three cyclists disappeared down the road.

### The Investigators!

MR. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, was sitting in his study by the window with a book in his hand. But the hand holding the book had fallen on his knee. He was not reading. A shadow was on his face—a shadow of deep thought.

He started out of his reverie as a knock came at the door of the study.

"Come in!" he said quietly.

He looked a little surprised as three juniors presented themselves. Harry Wharton came in first, and then Nugent, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh brought up the rear, with an unusually serious expression on his dusky face.

"Well, my boys," said the Form-master in a kindly tone. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, sir. We—" Wharton hesitated and then plunged boldly into the matter. "It's about the anonymous letter."

The Form-master's face clouded over.

"Have you come to tell me that you've discovered the writer of it, Wharton?"

"No, sir; but that's what we want to do. The Form suspects one fellow, but I have my doubts. It's important to get it cleared up, sir."

"That's very true."

"We want to do so, if possible."

"So we thought you wouldn't mind letting us see the letter, sir," said Nugent, taking up the tale. "We think we might be able to tell something from the fist, sir—ahem!—I mean the handwriting."

"The tellfulness would be great, esteemed teacher sahib."

Mr. Quelch wrinkled his brows slightly.

"There is no reason why you should not see the letter," he said, after a pause. "There may be something in your suggestion. I know the hand of every boy in the Form, but this is written in capital letters. You may be able to see more in it than I can, from your more intimate knowledge of the habits of your Form-fellows."

"That's what I thought, sir."

"You may have the letter. Return it to me later."

Mr. Quelch took a letter from a drawer in his table and handed it to Wharton.

"Thank you very much, sir."

The juniors retired from the study and went to their own quarters. Billy Bunter was there, eating peanuts. Nugent took the fat junior by one of his fat ears.

"Travel!" he said.

"Oh, really, Nugent! I'm not going to be turned out of my own study in this way."

Wharton tossed the fat junior a sixpence.

"Go and eat tarts," he said, laughing.

"Of course, that alters matters. Will you have this sixpence back out of my postal order to-morrow morning, Wharton?"

"If you like, Bunter—or you can leave it to me in your will. It's just the same, and I'm not particular."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Nugent pushed the fat junior out into the passage and locked the door.

"Now to business," he remarked.

"Right-ho! Here's the letter."

Wharton laid the letter on the table. The three juniors looked at it eagerly enough. This was the anonymous letter that had caused so much trouble, but would it give them a clue to the writer?

The letter was written on common notepaper, without a heading of any sort. The writing was in Roman capitals, evidently for the purpose of thoroughly disguising the identity of the writer.

The letters were crude, but easily readable, and the whole communication ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR.—WHY DON'T YOU GET A NEW MASTER FOR THE REMOVE? WE'VE HAD ENOUGH OF QUELCH. HE'S A ROTTER! NOBODY LIKES HIM, AND THE FORM WOULD BE GLAD TO GET RID OF HIM. IT'S ALL ROTTEN FAVOURITISM IN THE REMOVE.

YOURS FAITHFULLY,

DISGUSTED."

"P.S.—GET A NEW FORM-MASTER."

Harry Wharton looked angry as he read the precious effusion.

"The cad!" he said. "It's all untrue. We all like Quelch—all the decent fellows in the Form, at all events."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Nugent. "He does drive a little hard at times; but hang it all, the Remove would walk over him if he didn't. I thought we were all sportsmen, and could take a little roughness along with the day's work."

"The cadfulness of this esteemed letter-writer is terrific," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur, with a gesture of disgust towards the letter. "I should have great pleasurefulness in getting within the lengthfulness of the arm of his honourable nose."

Wharton's eyes were glittering.

"The fellow is some cad whom Quelch has been down on," he remarked.

"Do you think it's Bulstrode?"

Wharton shook his head.

"I can't think so. Bulstrode would be sulky in class and rude to Quelch, but I can't imagine him sitting down in his study to labour through this. And then, too, Bulstrode is a bully; but he's got pluck, and as a rule he hasn't been afraid to face the music after anything he's done. But this rotter must have spent a long time in covering up his tracks."

Nugent wrinkled his brows.

"But then—who?"

"That's what we've got to find out. It's a fellow in the Lower Fourth, but that gives us nearly forty to choose from, including ourselves." Wharton laughed. "But I think we could make up a list

## Right or Wrong?

There are six errors in this week's Spelling Bee.

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of half a dozen at most who could be mean enough to do a thing like this—perhaps only three or four.”

“Good! If we made a list of possible guilty parties we could investigate all in turn, and perhaps hit on the right one that way.”

“It’s a bit rough on a chap to include his name in such a list,” Wharton said slowly. “But we shall keep it to ourselves, and say nothing about it. We must get at the truth; the Form’s under a cloud till the matter’s cleared up. Now, I can think of only three fellows who could possibly have done it—Snoop, Stott, and Skinner.”

“What price Bunter?”

“Well, he might have been put up to doing it, but he’s such an ass he would have let it out to us, and he hasn’t.”

“True! We have three on the list, then, though I can hardly think Skinner would do it. Snoop’s the likeliest. You remember the caddish trick he played in Linley’s case—sneaked to the Form-master, and threw the blame on Linley, and let him be sent to Coventry. A fellow who would do that would write an anonymous letter.”

Wharton nodded.

“Very likely. But we’ll keep an open mind on the subject, and not forget the possibility that it’s Bulstrode all the time.”

“How are you going to begin?”

“Well, I haven’t studied the methods of Sherlock Holmes or Sexton Blake,” said Harry, smiling. “But I suppose we’d better begin by studying what evidence there is.”

“The letter doesn’t tell us much, except that the cad’s in the Remove.”

“True! But there’s the envelope.”

“Ah! I forgot that.”

Wharton turned the envelope over in his hands. It was of the same common paper as the letter, and was addressed to the Head of Greyfriars in the same print letters. Wharton could imagine the surprise it had caused Dr. Locke to receive a letter addressed in such a way.

“The postmark is Wednesday night,” he remarked. “I should say it was posted in the school-box, and, as we know, it was delivered here Thursday morning. There’s a five o’clock collection at the school-box, and a nine o’clock collection. That letter might have been posted any time between five and nine.”

“A jolly wide margin.”

“The marginfulness is terrific,” said Hurree Singh. “I remember that our honourable chum Cherry posted a letter at a quarter to nine that esteemed evening.”

“Good!” exclaimed Wharton.

Nugent stared.

“You don’t think Bob—”

“Ass! He went to the post-box late. Now it stands to reason that the cad who sent the anonymous letter would leave it till after dark before posting it, so as not to be seen near the pillar-box. Bob may have seen him.”

“Yes, by Jove!” said Nugent, with interest. “It gets dark late now, and there isn’t much interval between dark and the collection at the school-box. I wish Bob would come back, and we could ask—”

Bump!

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” roared a voice through the keyhole. “What’s the blessed door locked for?”

“Talk of angels,” grinned Nugent, as he rose and unlocked the door. “It was to keep silly

duffers out, Bob; but we make an exception in your favour. Did Marjorie get home all right?”

“Of course she did,” said Bob. “It was a lovely ride. I had a scorch back from Cliff House, and nearly fagged Hazeldene off his bike. Ha, ha, ha!”

“You posted a letter the other night, Bob?”

“Yes, I believe I have done such things—”

“Don’t be funny—we’re investigating. You posted a letter about quarter to nine on Wednesday evening?”

“Yes; I cut down there before the collection went. What about it?”

“Did you see anybody hanging about the pillar-box—anybody who had posted a letter, or was going to do so?”

“Yes; a chap was posting a letter just as I got there.”

“Who was it?”

“Bulstrode!”

### Bulstrode Cuts Up Rusty!

THE investigators looked at one another blankly.

They had undertaken the investigation with the idea of proving Bulstrode’s innocence, if possible, and the only result had been to make the case blacker against him.

Bob Cherry stared at them in amazement.

“What on earth’s the matter?” he asked.

“Why shouldn’t Bulstrode post a letter if he wants to?”

Harry Wharton explained, and Bob’s face became grave as he listened. He gave a long, low whistle.

“My hat! It looks rotten for him. Still, it may mean nothing,” he remarked. “It’s curious that Bulstrode should be posting a letter then, but it’s probably only a coincidence.”

“You saw no one else?”

“No one.”

“If it’s a coincidence it proves nothing,” said Wharton. “But it closes that line of inquiry. What’s the next move?”

The juniors shook their heads hopelessly. They had hoped for the moment, but Bob Cherry’s reply had, as Wharton said, closed inquiry in that direction. There was evidence enough against Bulstrode already, and they wanted to find out if somebody else was guilty.

Nugent drummed his hands on the table, thinking. He looked at the letter again and spoke abruptly:

“Don’t you think it’s likely that the cad who wrote that may have practised that kind of lettering a bit before he wrote the letter? I shouldn’t wonder if he made two or three trials before finally writing the letter. He would want to satisfy himself that his hand was unrecognisable in it, and—”

Wharton’s face brightened.

“It’s possible—quite possible.”

“But he would chuck the paper into the fire, surely, when he had finished,” said Bob Cherry. “He wouldn’t be idiot enough to leave it in existence.”

“But there are very few study fires going at this time of the year,” said Nugent quickly. “The letter was almost certainly written about tea-time, too, to be posted late. There mightn’t have been a fire handy. He might just tear up the paper and chuck it away—into the grate, or the wastepaper-basket.”

“Last Wednesday,” said Bob. “There wouldn’t be much left of it now.”



"I don't know," said Harry. "The maid isn't always thorough, you know. I know our wastepaper-basket sometimes fills up for a week before it's emptied."

"True enough."

"It's worth looking into, anyway. We'll see Bulstrode first, though. I couldn't go nosing into a fellow's study without letting him know. If Bulstrode refuses permission, we shall know what to think, and we shall be justified in calling Wingate into the matter."

"And if we draw his wastepaper-basket blank?"

"We'll go next to Snoop's."

"Good! I—"

Bob Cherry broke off suddenly and ran to the door. There had been a slight rattle of the handle, as if someone listening at the keyhole had knocked his head accidentally against it. Bob Cherry dragged the door open and looked out into the passage.

The passage was dimly lit. There was no one in sight. If someone had been listening at the door, he had vanished in remarkably quick time.

Bob Cherry heard a footstep. He looked along the passage again and saw Wun Lung, the Chinese junior, advancing from the direction of the box-room. But it could not have been Wun Lung at the door; the Chinese was no eaves-dropper.

Bob stepped back into the study.

"Anybody there?" asked Harry.

"No. But I'm almost certain someone was listening. Somebody has got scent of the fact that we're looking into the matter."

"We were seen to go into Mr. Quelch's study, I suppose." Wharton's brow darkened. "It might have been any curious cad—very likely Bunter. He'll have eaten all his tarts by this time, and I know he was curious to learn why we turned him out of the study."

"Of course; I didn't think of Bunter. It was our prize porpoise, of course. We may as well get to business; no need to lose time, especially if Bunter knows anything about the matter."

"Come on, then."

The four juniors went in search of Bulstrode. They found him in the Junior Common-room.

The burly Removite was sitting by himself, his legs stretched out and his hands in his pockets, and a sullen scowl on his face.

There was a wide space round him; no one cared to be a neighbour of the junior who was barred.

He looked up sullenly as Harry Wharton came up with his friends. The other fellows looked on from a distance.

"I want to speak to you, Bulstrode," said Harry, "and I want you to understand, first of all, that I speak as a friend."

An ugly sneer came over Bulstrode's face.

"What's the little game?"

"It's no game, Bulstrode. I want to help you. I don't think you sent that anonymous letter."

"Thank you," said Bulstrode sneeringly.

"That's very gratifying, but it comes rather late in the day, after setting the Form against me."

"Oh, what's the good of bothering about the brute?" exclaimed Bob Cherry impatiently.

"Let him rip! Come on!"

"Look here, Bulstrode, we've taken this matter up to sift it, and if you're innocent we want to help you," said Wharton. "Don't you understand that?"

"I don't want any assistance from you."

"Listen to this. We've got what we consider

a clue. Have you any objection to a search being made of your study?"

Bulstrode's face flamed.

"Yes, I have. If you come searching my study I'll throw you out!"

"It's for your own sake."

"Oh, don't give me any humbug!"

Wharton's face set hard.

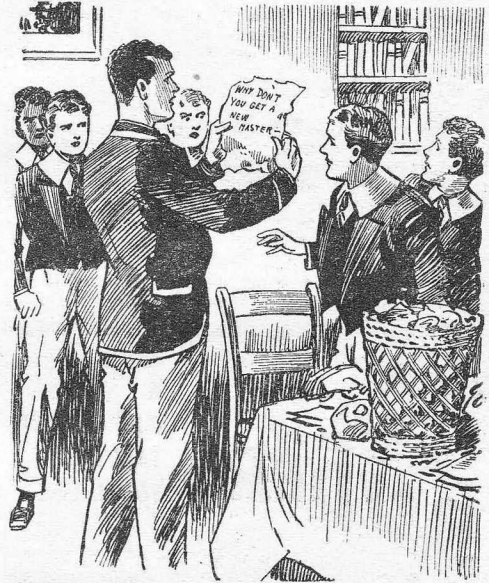
"Very well. Your study's going to be searched whether you like it or not. Will you keep watch on the study, you chaps, and see that nothing's muddled with, while I go and speak to Wingate?"

"What-ho!"

Bulstrode rose to his feet.

"I'm going to my study now," he said. "Anybody who pokes his nose in there will go out on his neck!"

He strode away. Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh followed him, and reached the study at the same time. There was no doubt



"What's this?" exclaimed Wingate, as he held up a sheet of exercise paper which he had taken from the wastepaper-basket. On the crumpled sheet was scribbled in capitals: "WHY DON'T YOU GET A NEW MASTER—"  
It was part of the wording contained in the anonymous letter sent to the Head!

in their minds now as to Bulstrode's guilt, and they were determined that he should not have an uninterrupted minute in the study to get rid of any possible traces.

"Get out of my study!" roared Bulstrode, as they followed him into the room.

"Nice evening, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry.

"Will you get out?"

"Jolly good weather for the time of the year."

"Are you going?"

"But I shouldn't be surprised at a shower in the morning."

Bulstrode, without speaking again, rushed at Bob Cherry. The three juniors grasped him

and rolled him over on the carpet. His head struck a wastepaper-basket near the table, and sent it rolling. It was crammed with old papers and exercise sheets. Bob sat on Bulstrode's chest, and Nugent on his legs.

"Now you'll wait till Wharton comes," said Bob cheerfully.

And pinned down helplessly, Bulstrode had to wait.

### The Culprit!

WINGATE, the captain of Greyfriars, strode into the study a few minutes later with Harry Wharton. There was a stern expression on the big Sixth Former's face. He looked at the prostrate Bulstrode, gasping with rage under the weight of the two juniors, and signed to them to let him rise. Bulstrode staggered to his feet, dusty and furious.

"Wharton has told me how this matter stands, Bulstrode," said Wingate. "You've refused to have a search of your study, and have tried to keep these fellows out of it by force."

"I won't have my room searched."

"Why not?"

"Do you think I'm going to be watched and searched like a thief?" said Bulstrode, choking with rage. "You all believe that I wrote that caddish letter. Well, believe it, then; I don't care! I won't take a step to prove I'm innocent! I won't be searched like a thief! This is my room! Get out of it!"

"At any other time, Bulstrode, I should give you the licking of your life for speaking to me in this way," said Wingate quietly. "But I

can make allowance for the state of your feelings. If you're innocent, I'm sorry for you. But this wilful pigheadedness is the worst possible thing for you." You've got to give what assistance you can towards clearing up a disgraceful matter. Mind, you're dealing with the head of the Sixth now, and I'm not going to have any nonsense. Stand where you are while I turn out this rubbish!"

Bulstrode was white with rage; but there was no arguing with the captain of the school. He stood, biting his lip, and casting furious glances at Harry Wharton, while Wingate picked up the wastepaper-basket and placed it on the table.

"When was this cleared out last, Bulstrode?"

"I don't know."

"Was it cleared out to-day or yesterday?"

"No; not since Sunday, anyway."

"It looks like it," said Wingate.

He dragged some of the rubbish out of the wastepaper-basket. Suddenly he gave a cry:

"What's this?"

He held up a sheet of exercise paper, scribbled over in Roman capitals. The sheet had been crumpled; he smoothed it out.

The chums of the Remove looked at it, and so did Bulstrode. The latter went pale. For this is what was scribbled on the paper:

"WHY DON'T YOU GET A NEW MASTER—"

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "It's plain enough. That was written for practice, before he wrote the letter."

"The plainfulness is terrific!"

Wingate fixed his eyes on Bulstrode.

"What have you to say to that, Bulstrode?" he demanded.

"It's—it's a conspiracy!" stammered Bulstrode. "I never wrote that! It's been placed there to make out I'm guilty! It's a plant! Wharton must have put it there!"

Harry went scarlet; but Wingate made him a sign to be silent.

"You can hardly expect me to believe such an accusation against Wharton, Bulstrode. These other fellows would have to be in it, and it's simply absurd to suppose four juniors with good characters would join in such a plot."

"I don't care! I never wrote that paper!"

"You see what it is—the same writing used in the anonymous letter has been practised here. The letter was written in this study."

"Hazeldene may have done it."

"You cad!" broke out Wharton. "Hazeldene never wrote that letter, and you know it!"

Bulstrode gritted his teeth.

"I didn't write it! I never saw that paper before!"

"Fetch Hazeldene here!" said Wingate.

Nugent hurried from the study, and in a few minutes he returned with Hazeldene, who looked very startled and uneasy. Wingate held the paper out to him, so suddenly that it was impossible for him to be on his guard.

"Have you seen that before, Hazeldene?"

The junior shook his head. The strange writing evidently puzzled, but did not alarm him. He was amazed.

"No, Wingate."

"Look at it again. It's a fragment of a rough draft of the anonymous letter sent to the Head."

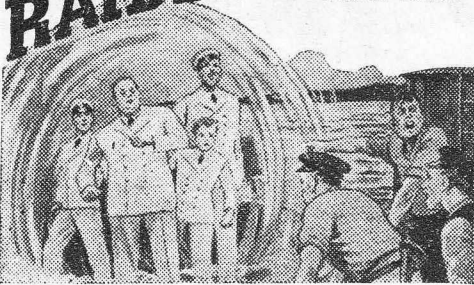
Hazeldene changed colour.

"Wingate, you don't think I—"

"No, I don't!" said Wingate grimly. "You

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would have given it away at once. But—"I say," broke in Hazeldene, "there's some mistake here. You say this is part of a rough draft of the anonymous letter?"

"Yes."  
"But the anonymous letter was written at least two days ago. This was written to-day, and lately, or I'm much mistaken."

"What!"  
Wingate looked at the fragment again. He had not noticed it at first, but it was undoubtedly true. The writing on the fragment was fresh—the ink unfaded. It was evidently written at a later time than the anonymous letter. In all probability it had not been written an hour.

"My hat!" said Wingate.  
"I told you so!" shouted Bulstrode. "Didn't I say they wrote it to plant the letter on me? They put the thing here, and then pretended to come and find it."

The chums of the Remove were utterly aghast. There was no foundation, of course, for Bulstrode's wild accusation, but, at the same time, there was no doubt that the fragment had been recently written. It was not a draft of the anonymous letter. Yet the wording, as far as it went, was the same.

The captain of Greyfriars looked grimly at the Famous Four.

"This is very strange," he said. "It's certainly a plant, as Bulstrode calls it. This paper has been put here lately, to make his guilt seem clear. Who did it?"

Before anyone could speak, there was a sudden bump at the door. Bump, bump, bump! again, and Wingate threw open the door with angry impatience. Two forms, locked in a close embrace,

rolled into the room, and then Wun Lung sprang to his feet. The other remained gasping on the carpet—it was Snoop of the Remove!

Wingate stared at them angrily.  
"What does this mean?"  
The little Celestial grinned.  
"Me tellee. Me knowee."  
"You know what, you young duffer?"  
"Me knowee 'boutee 'nonymous letter."  
"What! You know who wrote it?"  
"Me knowee."  
"Who was-it?" exclaimed three or four voices.  
"Snoopee!"  
"It wasn't!" gasped Snoop, struggling to his feet. "It's a lie! I never saw it. I don't know anything about it."

He was sidling towards the door, but Wingate swung him back. Snoop sank into a chair, with a face like chalk.

"Now, Wun Lung, tell us what you know—quick!"  
"Me comee down ffrom box-loom," explained the little Chinese. "Me see Snoopee listen at door of Study No. 1."

Bob Cherry uttered an exclamation.  
"Ah, it was Snoop, then!"  
"It was Snoopee. Me tinkee he up to some dlick—Snoopee gleat lotter. Me follow him. Snoopee goee study. He look velly whitee 'boutee face. Me tinkee muchee. Me lookee through key-hole—Snoopee wlitee something on paper—then he comee out. Me buzz off lound corner. Snoopee lookee this way—and that way—no see Wun Lung. Then he goee to Bulstlode's study."

"Here?"  
"Yes," grinned Wun Lung. "Me follow—me  
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watchee. Me see him puttee paper in wastepaper-basket. What you tinkee?"

"It's a lie!" gasped Snoop hoarsely.

"After he whitee letter, he blottee on blotting paper," said Wun Lung. "P'l'aps you findee markee on blotting paper. What you tinkee?"

Snoop staggered to his feet. But Wingate barred his way to the door.

"No, you're not going to get a chance at that blotting paper," he said. "Don't trouble to tell any lies, Snoop. You wrote this to plant the anonymous letter on Bulstrode. You knew that Wharton was coming to search the wastepaper-basket in this study, and you planted this ready for him. You wanted to make Bulstrode out guilty. Why? To cover up your own tracks, I suppose?"

Snoop sank into the chair again. He was caught in his own trap, and there was no use in further falsehood. He was at the end of his lies.

### In Next Wednesday's Great Number :

## "THE MYSTERY CRICKET COACH!"

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And now, in response to Wingate's merciless questions, the wretched story came out. He had seen Wharton go to Mr. Quelch's study; he had listened at Wharton's door, and learned the proposed line of investigation. His fears had been aroused and, in deadly terror lest Wharton should discover something that would reveal his guilt, he had resolved to turn the present suspicion against Bulstrode to a certainty.

He had had no idea that the cunning little Chinese was on his track. Wun Lung had not known all that was passing, but he had known enough to act, and he had collared Snoop and bundled him into the study to answer for his misdeeds. Snoop was answering for them now; he looked a wretched object, and even Bulstrode pitied him.

Wingate lifted him from his chair with an iron hand on his collar.

"You'll come with me to Mr. Quelch," he said. "Bulstrode, you're cleared. But you owe it all to Harry Wharton and Wun Lung, and nothing of it to yourself. Come with me, Snoop."

He left the study with the wretched Snoop. There was a curious expression on Bulstrode's face. For some moments there was grim silence; then the burly Removite held out his hand to Wharton.

"I'm much obliged to you," he said, with an effort, "and I'm sorry for what I said just now. I suppose I've played the giddy ox over this matter."

Wharton gave him a handshake.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm jolly glad it's cleared up, but most of the credit is due to Wun Lung. I don't know how it might have ended but for him."

"Velly plenty allee light," grinned Wun Lung.

Meanwhile, Wingate had marched Snoop into the Remove master's study. Mr. Quelch listened quietly to his explanation, and the culprit was left alone with the Form-master. The anonymous letter lay on the table. Snoop's eyes, almost glazed with fear, wandered from it to Mr. Quelch's face.

"Snoop!" The Form-master's voice was very quiet; there was none of the anger the wretched boy had expected. "Dr. Locke has left this matter entirely in my hands, to deal with the culprit as I think fit. You know what you've done; you know that to be expelled would hardly be a sufficient punishment for your baseness."

Snoop licked his dry lips.

"Oh, sir, I—I—"

"I have always tried to be just and fair to my Form," went on Mr. Quelch. "I have tried to make the boys like and respect me. I believe most of them do. You have made a brutal and utterly unprovoked attack on me, in the meanest possible way, by writing an anonymous letter. What have you to say?"

What could Snoop say? He said nothing, but stood looking at the grave face of the Form-master with wide, fearful eyes.

"Your punishment is in my hands," went on Mr. Quelch. "I am glad of that, because it enables me to give you a chance—a chance, to become better, to learn to act like a decent English boy. You may go."

"But—but—"

"I pardon you," said Mr. Quelch. He took up the anonymous letter, and tore it across and across again, and threw it down. "The matter is ended. I hope you will come to have a better opinion of me in the future, and, at all events, learn to act more decently. You may go."

And Snoop went.

(Look out for another ripping yarn of the Greyfriars chums next week, telling of their fun and adventure en route to St. Jim's to play cricket against Tom Merry & Co.)

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