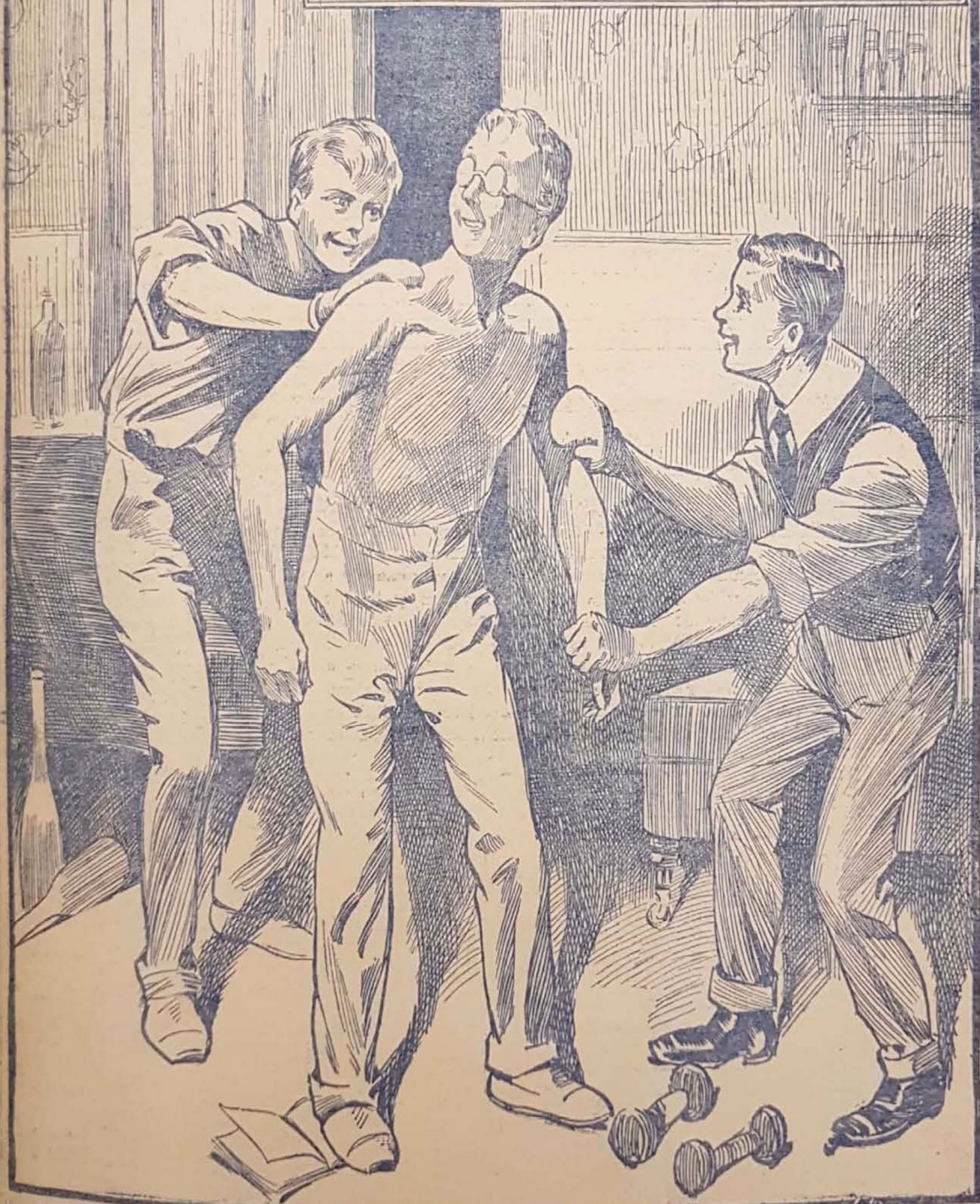


# PLUCK

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Captain Ferrett, Detective.



SPECS SIGHED. "I'D JUST LIKE A LITTLE BIT OF SKIN LEFT, IF IT'S ALL THE PAIN TO YOU, DICK!" (See page 1.)  
NO. 135. VOL. 6. NEW SERIES.

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# THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

## BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

When Pat Nugent arrives at St. Kit's an election is taking place for the captaincy of the school between Arthur Talbot and Eldred Lacy. Talbot gains the victory. Pat is thrown into a cupboard by some juniors, and falls asleep. On waking up he hears voices—the voices of Eldred Lacy and his brother, Rupert Lacy, the squire of Lynwood: "You must ruin and disgrace Arthur Talbot, and drive him from the school. He is a menace to me—to both of us. But ruined and disgraced, driven forth into poverty and obscurity, I shall no longer fear him!"

Pat becomes great chums with Blagden and Greene; and the three resolve to "look after" Arthur Talbot. However, their united efforts fail. For one day a tramp named Black comes to the school, at the instigation of the two Lacy's, and claims Talbot as his son. As Arthur has never known his parents, he does not know what to do; but Black is warned off the place by one of the masters. The headmaster advises Talbot to resign the captaincy of the school for the time being.

Lacy at once puts his name up as a candidate; and Brooke, Arthur's chum, opposes him. Talbot and Lacy quarrel; and the latter gets Talbot to promise to fight in a wood close to St. Kit's, a condition being that there shall be no witnesses. Lacy arranges this as he has managed to get Dunn, his friend, to promise to creep up behind and attack Arthur Talbot. All the boys of St. Kit's are offended at the manner in which the fight is to be kept secret: (Now go on with the story.)

### The Fight—Foul Play.

At Lacy's refusal to tell where the fight was to take place the seniors marched off in high dudgeon.

Pat whisked away to the end study, and burst in upon his startled chums like a hurricane.

"Up with ye, kids! Come on!"

"I haven't finished my—" began Greene.

"I haven't finished my—" commenced Blagden.

Pat, with a sweep of the hand, sent their books flying.

"Have you gone off your giddy rocker?" demanded Blagden. "You wild Irishman, we've got to do our beastly prep."

"Blow prep!"

"Yes, that's all very well to-night, but what about the Stoney bird in the morning? I don't want two on each hand, if you do!"

"You'll have two hundred on each hand for all I care, lid. There's no time for preparation now; don't whisper the beastly word. I hate it."

"Yes, that's all very well, as I said—"

"If ye said it once, you don't want to say it again," interrupted Pat. "And sure I've no time to listen to you, though you talk like a gramophone. I'm on the track."

"What track?"

"Ass! Duffer! I've just come from Talbot's study, and he's getting ready to go and meet the Lacy bounder!"

"How do you know? He didn't tell you so, I suppose?"

"I know, my boy, because I've got more brains in my head than you've got in your little finger," said Pat, commencing to make bulls, as he always did when he got excited. "No, I don't mean that," he went on hastily, as Blagden chuckled. "I've got more little fingers in my brain—"

"I mean, I've got more little brains in my finger—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop your cackling, Blaggy! It sounds like a cockatoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure, and I've got no time to listen to your giggling," said Pat. "Do you want to see that fight, or don't you, you spalpeens?"

"Rather! If that's what you're driving at, blow the prep. I don't mind fifty lines, or a caning in the morning if it's for that. But are you sure?"

"Sure!" howled Pat. "Hark at the doubting Thomas! I tell you Talbot may go out any minute. They've kept the rendezvous a secret from all the Sixth, and they're not going to have any seconds even on the spot. What do you think of that?"

"Looks as if they want to keep it awfully dark," said Blagden.

"That's so," added Greene. "I suppose they don't want to be seen by half the school, but I should think they'd have seconds."

"Well, they're not going to, and the idea is Lacy's."

Blagden gave an expressive whistle.

"My hat! Does that mean that there's something afoot, Paddy old dear?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Pat emphatically. "Of course, Lacy doesn't want to be seen when he gets his hiding. That's only natural. But I shouldn't wonder if there was something more than that in it. I don't see how he could work in any foul play, I admit; but if he got half a chance, he would do it."

"That's the kind of brute he is, certainly; but I don't see—"

"We've got to see, that's all. Talbot is under our protection, isn't he?"

Blagden grinned.

"Oh, yes, rather! He's under our giddy wing!"

"Very well, then. If he's under our protection, we've got to protect him. That's logic and common-sense. We made him captain of St. Kit's, didn't we, and did our best to prevent him from resigning?"

"Without much success, Tipperary, you must admit." "Never mind that. All the more reason for looking after him now. We've got to see the fight. Of course, we wouldn't go and see it from sheer curiosity."

"Of course not," said Blagden and Greene, winking at each other.

"It's simply from the duty we owe Talbot."

"Exactly—the duty we owe Talbot."

"Oh, stop that giggling! Now, we've got to be awfully careful, for Talbot wouldn't be a bit grateful for our loving care if he found us on the track. He wouldn't give us credit for our splendid intentions."

"No; he would be more likely to give us the toe of his boot for our splendid cheek."

"I'm willing to risk that in the sacred cause of duty, yo grinning spalpeens. Now, I'm going to shadow Talbot to the meeting-place, and you two bounders are to keep an eye on Lacy. If he escapes, I'll knock your heads together afterwards."

"We'll track him like a blighound."

"Mind you do. Now, as Lacy is going to keep this affair such a deadly secret, I'm pretty certain that he'll meet Talbot outside the walls of St. Kit's—a good distance outside them, most likely."

"Very likely; but what does that lead to?"

"It leads to this, ass—that we can go out first, and watch for them to come out. If we followed them out of the gate, even old Talbot would suspect what we were up to, though he never suspects anybody of anything as a rule."

"You've got a head on you, Paddy. It's not very pretty to look at, but I will say that—"

"Rats! Come along!"

NEXT SATURDAY: "BIG BILLY'S TRANSFORMATION."

A Hot-Tail Tale (Extra Large),

By Jack North.

"THE GOLDEN KEY."

AND A Splendid Tale of the Messenger

Boys.

IN "PLUCK," 1<sup>st</sup>.

The chums hurried away. It did not take them more than a couple of minutes to get out of the gate of St. Kit's. The summer evenings were drawing out now, and looking-up time was later. Most of the fellows were on the cricket-ground, but Pat noted in passing that neither Talbot nor Lacy had appeared there. Under the trees, within easy view of the big bronze gates of St. Kit's, the chums of the intended combatants to appear, about ten minutes later Eldred Lacy came out of the gates, and strode away towards the village of Northley.

Pat nudged his companions: "There goes your man. Keep him in sight, but mind he doesn't see you. Better keep on the inner side of the hedge."

"Right-ho!" said Blagden. And he and Greene darted off, on the track of the unsuspecting prefect. Pat resumed his watch alone. As he anticipated, it was only a few minutes more before Talbot appeared. The captain of St. Kit's, without a glance round him, strode away up the lane towards Lynwood, the opposite direction to that taken by Lacy.

Pat Nugent was puzzled for a moment. But it was only for a moment; the next, a smile of comprehension broke over his face. Talbot had gone in a direction different from that taken by Lacy, intending to change his route afterwards, and meet the prefect at the appointed spot. The ruse was evidently to throw off the track any curious fellow from St. Kit's who might be keeping an eye on his movements. But the keen junior was not to be so easily hoodwinked.

He started off on Talbot's track, taking care to keep out of the sight of the late captain of St. Kit's. This shadowing was not exactly work to Pat's taste, and under ordinary circumstances he would have had to admit that it was mean. But the circumstances now were not ordinary.

The end study had taken Talbot under its protection, without consulting him in the matter it is true, and Pat had a real suspicion that Lacy had some underhand game to play. It would not be played with success if the chums of the end study could prevent it.

Talbot kept on at a vigorous stride which rather taxed Pat to keep up with it, but a considerable distance on the other side of Lynwood he turned off into a footpath through the fields. He followed this for some distance, and then turned into another, which led directly towards Northley through the sombre shades of the North Wood.

Pat smiled to himself. It was all as clear as daylight now. The rendezvous was under the trees in the North Wood, and Talbot had covered a mile and a half to reach a spot less than half a mile from St. Kit's. The meeting was at hand.

Talbot had not once glanced behind him. He entered the shades of the wood, and passed out of sight under the big trees that overhung the footpath with thick foliage. On the grassy path through the wood Pat was able to approach nearer to his quarry, and the junior was now highly excited. At any moment he expected to see Lacy, and he was more on his guard than ever.

He suddenly popped behind a tree, Talbot had stopped, and there was a sound of voices ahead. It was Lacy speaking.

"I am here first."

Talbot looked at his watch.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting. I am just on time, I think."

"Oh, that's all right!" said the prefect carelessly. "Are you ready?"

"Quite; but on the footpath here, surely—"

"Oh, no; let us go into the wood!"

There was a sound of brushing twigs. Pat ran on; the two seniors had disappeared into the wood. But the pathward. They had evidently been close behind Lacy, and they fought Pat just as he caught sight of them.

"Here you are, then," whispered Pat. "Don't make a sound. They're gone into the wood, and we've tracked 'em down first rate. They came different ways, the bouncers, of Sundays. Quiet; and follow your leader!"

"Get on, then, or they'll be gone," said Blagden.

"Hush!"

Pat led the way cautiously into the wood. The three juniors trod silently, and parted the low branches before them, and made hardly a sound as they advanced. Lacy and Talbot were not so careful, of course, and so the juniors were able to follow them by the sound they made in the thick underwood. Pat suddenly stopped his companions.

"Ware now!" he whispered.

The sounds ahead had ceased. The chums crept forward slowly and cautiously; they knew that the two seniors had stopped.

In a couple of minutes the juniors reached the narrow glade. Big trees shut in a strip of soft, level green sward. Tall grasses and ferns grew among the green wall on either side of the glade.

In the thicket the three chums stopped. Talbot stood out in the open, removing their jackets. The sunset sent a clear light into the glade through the tops of the tree-tops.

"Quiet now!" whispered Pat. "I didn't expect we should get guinea stalls like this. Mind you don't show yourselves."

And the chums, lying low, prepared to watch the contest. Talbot threw his jacket upon a bush, and his coat followed, and he hitched his braces round his waist. Lacy followed his example. The prefect's face was calm and cool, and the juniors wondered as they watched Was Eldred Lacy a more courageous fellow than they had deemed him? Was he really facing the music without a tremor? Pat was puzzled, but it certainly looked like it.

"Are you ready, Talbot?"

"I am ready."

"I suppose," said the prefect slowly, "that it's no use telling you that, if you like to apologise, this affair can go no further?"

Talbot's eyes flashed.

"As you are wholly and solely to blame in this matter, I can hardly expect an apology from me," he said. "I am not at all sure that I should be prepared to even apologise."

"You will not be put to the test," said Lacy deliberately. "I am hardly likely to apologise to such as you, my dear fellow."

Talbot flushed red.

"We need waste no time in words," he said coldly. "You have made a cowardly and cruel use of this misfortune that has fallen upon me. Blackguard as Seth Black is, he never has claimed me as his son before all St. Kit's, has he? You not planned it, and bribed him to do that cowardly action."

"Perhaps not; yet, as you are his son, I don't see any reason why the truth should not be known," said the prefect with a sneer.

"I do not expect you to see any reason; a decent fellow would see one soon enough, but I have never expected Eldred Lacy to play the game."

"I play the game with my equals. If the son of a tramp gets into a decent school by false pretences, it's a fellow's duty to show him up."

"Even if I were the son of a tramp, as you say, it would be cowardly of you to throw it in my teeth," said Talbot.

"You are a cur! I have always despised you, but never so much as at this moment; and I would rather be the son of Seth Black, ay, or of any criminal in a slum, than I would be Eldred Lacy!"

The prefect winced at the biting scorn in Talbot's words and tone.

"So you say," he sneered. "But you might change your mind when the time for you to be kicked out of St. Kit's comes—as come it will."

"We need not discuss that. Are you here to talk or to fight?"

"To fight, certainly, and to give you a licking."

"I am willing to take all the lickings you can give me," said Talbot scornfully. "Let us waste no more time in words; get to business."

They faced each other on the level greensward.

"Now look out for skyrockets," murmured Pat, sitting down comfortably in the thicket, watching through the green opening. "Gentlemen, this is where we commence our high class and select entertainment, which—Bogorra, they'll do it!"

The combatants were indeed "at it," as Pat expressed it. Talbot was in no mood for trilling; his nature, slow to anger, had been roused to a white-heat of indignation by Lacy's taunting insults. He commenced his fight in a business-like style, and in a few seconds his right hand home on Lacy's cheek, and his left followed it to the prefect's mouth.

Lacy started, confused by the sharp rap-rap, and his wild, losing his guard, and before he could recover Talbot struck out fiercely, and he reeled back. Back to the prefect, for the moment advantage of it.

Talbot had he chosen to take advantage of it. Talbot had he chosen to take advantage of it. Talbot had he chosen to take advantage of it.

But Talbot stood still, waiting for him to recover himself. Lacy took two or three steps backwards, and saved himself without falling, astonished to find that he was given a chance.

Pat growled in the green thicket.

"The silly omadhaun! He's too good for Lacy—the bouncer giving him such a chance. Why didn't you knock him flying?"

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"I like the old chap all the better for it," said Blagden. "Never a suspicion of not playing the game about old Talbot."

"So do I; but it ain't business."

"Talbot will lick him, never fear."

They were at it again in a few moments. Lacy was far from being touched by his rival's generosity in sparing him when he could have struck with terrible effect. His rage was fed by the thought of the extent of his inferiority to his foe. Had he gained such an advantage, he would never have spared Talbot. But he could not gain it; he had no chance of that.

Talbot, in spite of his anger, was cool and careful, and his boxing was masterly. Lacy was a good boxer, but by no means so careful or cool, and besides that, the prefect lacked the fearless determination of the captain of St. Kit's.

Once or twice the prefect's fists came home upon Talbot's face or chest, but twice as often, and twice as hard, Talbot struck home. The prefect was growing short and hard of breath, and his face showed very visible signs of the punishment he was receiving. One of his eyes was closing, his nose was red and swollen, and his lip was cut. Bruises were forming on cheek and chin. Still he fought on, savagely, desperately.

There were no rounds; no rests. The fight was a test of strength and endurance, and it was plain all through that Talbot could stand the test better than his opponent. And at length a fierce right-hander, straight from the shoulder, laid Eldred Lacy flat upon his back on the grass. He lay there for some moments, blinking and gasping.

Talbot stood waiting for him to rise. The late captain of St. Kit's was breathing hard, and his face was flushed with exertion, but he was by far in better condition than Lacy.

Pat gave an inaudible chuckle.

"Lacy would give his Sunday hat to get out of it now, I fancy," he murmured. "Talbot would let him off with that little bit if he confessed himself licked."

"He will when he's had a little more," said Blagden. "I wonder how long Talbot's going to let him lie there resting? I say, Paddy, I'm afraid we misjudged Lacy a bit. He's fighting as fair as you could want, and there's no sign of foul play."

"No; even Lacy isn't as black as he's painted," said Greene.

Pat caught Blagden by the shoulder.

"Look there!"

He pointed through an opening in the thicket. Blagden followed the indicated direction with his eye with a look of wonder.

"What is it? What are you pointing at? I can see Talbot and Lacy all right."

"I mean, across the glade. Look at the thickets on the other side."

"Well, what is there to look at in them?"

"Close by that hawthorn—don't you see? It's a cap!"

"By Jove, so it is! And a St. Kit's cap, too!"

"And there's a head in it, though we can't see that," said Pat sagely. "There's some other fellow watching this affair on the other side of the glade."

"And not a junior, either," said Greene. "That's a senior's cap."

"Hallo! They're starting again."

Talbot had waited patiently for Eldred Lacy to rise. The prefect was on his feet again now, his face sullen and savage, and a desperate gleam in his eyes. The combatants faced each other again.

"If you think this affair has gone far enough, I am satisfied, Lacy," said Talbot quietly.

"Come on, hang you!" said Lacy, between his teeth.

"I am ready."

Lacy attacked savagely. So fierce was the onslaught, that Talbot was compelled to fall back a few paces, and twice Lacy's blows reached his face. He struck out hard in return, and Lacy winced under the blows, but still came on. Again Talbot's fists got home on the prefect's face, and a sudden cry broke from Lacy: "Oh, oh, oh!" Then, like a tiger, he hurled himself at Talbot, and, unheeding two sharp blows, closed with him in a desperate grapple.

The signal had been heard. From the thickets behind Talbot a creeping form emerged, with a face pale as death but set with savage determination, and fists clenched hard. It was Dunn, ready to do his treacherous work.

While Talbot struggled with the furious prefect, Dunn crept quickly and noiselessly behind him.

The juniors' eyes were fastened upon the combatants, and it was not till Dunn was close behind Talbot that they observed him. Pat Nugent started with amazement.

"Hallo, there's that fellow we saw! It's Dunn! But, my hat, what's he doing?"

"He's going to hit Talbot!" cried Blagden, forgetting to lower his voice in his surprise and excitement.

"Impossible! He— Why, the hound!"

Pat sprang to his feet with blazing eyes.

Dunn, far from dreaming that three pairs of amazed eyes were watching him, had suddenly sprung behind Talbot. His clenched fist was raised, and it descended with terrific force, catching the captain of St. Kit's on the side of the temple. Talbot gave a faint cry and fell to the ground.

Lacy, who was clutching him, went with him, and fell heavily on top of the captain of St. Kit's. His savage blows rained upon Talbot's face.

Dunn darted back into the thicket as quickly as he had appeared.

Talbot lay dazed, the prefect's furious blows raining on him. Pat, mad with rage, ran like the wind to reach the spot, his chums at his heels. With a yell that startled the prefect nearly out of his wits, Pat sprang upon him and dragged him off Talbot. Lacy went with a crash to the ground, and three active juniors jumped on him before he could rise, and pinned him where he fell.

Talbot, dazed and dizzy, staggered to his feet.

#### Lacy Takes His Licking.

Lacy was struggling furiously in the clutch of the juniors. But the chums of the end study held him fast. They forgot for the time that he was a senior and a prefect; they remembered only that he was a coward whom they had caught in the midst of his treachery.

Pat gripped his hair with both hands. Blagden sat astride his chest, and Greene took care of his legs. Between them they pinned him to the ground, and Lacy's struggles only exhausted him, and made him feel as if his hair was being dragged out by the roots.

"You infernal whelps, let me go!"

"Not much!" panted Pat—"not much, you cowardly hound!"

Talbot passed his hand over his brow. He had no very clear idea of what had happened, for he had not seen Dunn, and he imagined that the blow which had felled him had been struck by Lacy, though he could not quite make out how it was so.

"Nugent," he gasped, "how came you here? Let Lacy alone!"

"We came to see fair play," said Pat sturdily, "and we're doing it."

"What do you mean? He was hitting me when I was down? Yes; but you had no right to interfere. I order you to—"

# THE RETURN OF THE MESSENGER BOYS.

(Joe, Jim, and "Hairpin.")

See next Saturday's issue of **PLUCK.**

NEXT SATURDAY: "BIG BILLY'S TRANSFORMATION."

A Real Tale (Extra Long).

By Jack North.

AND "THE GOLDEN KEY."

A Splendid Tale of the Messenger

Boys.

IN "PLUCK." 10.

# Your Editor's Corner.

All letters should be addressed, "The Editor, PLUCK, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London."

"Oh, rats to all that!" said Pat cheerfully. "He was hitting you when you were down; but that wasn't all, or the worst. It was Dunn that knocked you down!"  
 "Let me get up!" snarled Lacy.  
 "Shan't! Don't you understand, Talbot? The bound got you to meet him here without witnesses so that his friend could tackle you from behind if you got the best of it."  
 Talbot understood. His look of scorn made the prefect wince.

"So that was you game, Lacy? I never suspected even you of anything like that. You cur! You coward!"  
 "You had better tell these confounded whelps to let me get up!" grated the prefect. "I'll skin them alive for this!"  
 "Let him get up, boys."  
 "He isn't safe," said Pat. "Better let us hold the brute. We—"

"Let him rise. I've not done with him yet!"  
 Pat understood the captain's significant tone.  
 "Jump up, kids!" he exclaimed. "Let the bouncer alone! We'll just stand by and see fair play. Lacy's got to stick it out now without anybody to help him."  
 Lacy rose unsteadily to his feet. If looks could have killed, Pat would certainly have fallen dead at the feet of the enraged prefect. As it was, he simply smiled at Lacy's glare of hate and rage. The prefect's tempest of passion did not trouble the junior at all. He was not afraid of Lacy.

Fear as well as rage was working in Eldred Lacy's breast. As Talbot stepped towards him, he cast a hurried look round. His plot had failed, owing to the unexpected intervention of the chums of the end study. His confederate was gone. His rascality, his guilt, were known, and would be blazoned forth to all St. Kit's.

He was disgraced for ever now. If he attempted denials, who would believe him? And, worse than that, because more immediate, was the fact that here he was, with Talbot before him, ready to finish the fight—here he was, compelled to go on, on fair terms now.

There was no escaping now. Talbot was in no humour to allow him to do so. Yet the prefect slunk back as the late captain of St. Kit's advanced upon him with flashing eyes.

Talbot was feeling the effects of the cowardly assault severely, but anger seemed to have nerved him to new strength.

"Hang you!" snarled the prefect. "I am done! I—"

"Coward!" Lacy bit his lip hard.

"Coward! If you do not face me, I will make known your villainy to all the school."

**[To be continued in next Saturday's issue of PLUCK.]**

"BIG BILLY'S TRANSFORMATION."  
 Our next issue will contain a really splendid school tale by Jack North. There are some startling incidents in this latest tale of this popular author, and you will fully enjoy the many changes from grave to gay that alternate through the story.

## THE RETURN OF THE UNIVERSAL PURVEYORS OF MESSAGES!

I have another very pleasant announcement to make concerning the contents of our next issue—to wit, the return of Joe, Jim, and Jeremy. This latter is perhaps better known as

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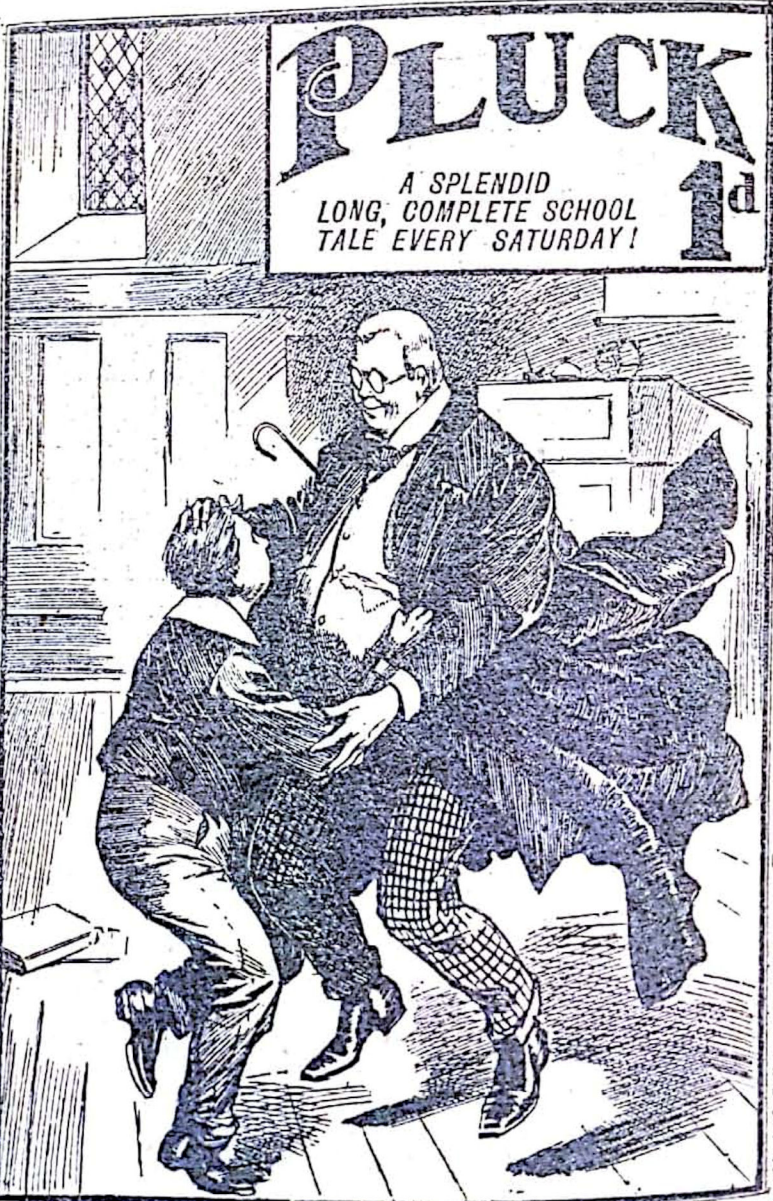
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A Splendid Long Complete School Tale, by Maurice Merriman.

Have you seen this week's issue of "The Gem Library"? If you have not, then exchange that old halfpenny of yours and strike the bargain at once, for No. 12 of "The Gem Library" contains a splendid NEW long complete school tale dealing with Tom Merry—a schoolboy you will like! The tale in question is entitled "The Terrible Three," and you should not fail to read it.

**YOUR EDITOR**



This picture depicts an amusing incident from "Big Billy's Transformation," by Jack North, one of the two complete tales in next Saturday's PLUCK. 32 pages. Price 1d.