

BILLY BUNTER APPEARS EVERY WEEK IN-

The
**Penny
Popular**

No.
263.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



BUNTER SUFFERS FOR HIS MISDEEDS!

(A Humorous Scene from the Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
contained in this Issue.)

BUNTER THE DETECTIVE!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Mystery of Billy Bunter.

"TEA'S ready!"
"Bunter!"
"Tea's ready!"
Billy Bunter neither answered nor stirred.

He was sitting in the armchair in Study No. 1 at Greyfriars, his fat knees clasped in his fat hands, and a deeply thoughtful frown upon his fat brow.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, who had the honour of sharing Study No. 1 with the fat junior, stared at him.

They stared at him blankly. Bunter had not taken part in getting tea ready. Bunter was the laziest fellow in the Remove certainly, and never took part in any work if he could help it. But he did not regard the preparation of meals as work. That was a pleasure to Bunter—a pleasure only exceeded by eating them when prepared.

The chums of the Remove had been surprised to see him remain in the armchair while they were cutting bread-and-butter, opening tins of sardines, and frying eggs. Even the smell of the frying failed to rouse him.

There was evidently something the matter with Billy Bunter, and the Removites did not disturb him. They could only conclude that he must be extraordinarily fatigued if the smell of cooking did not even make him look up.

But when tea was announced as ready, and still he failed to respond, their surprise changed to blank amazement.

But it was no dream. Twice had the warning that tea was ready been reported, and Bunter had not even raised his head, and the deep frown upon his brow had not relaxed.

The juniors exchanged glances. Nugent tapped his forehead solemnly. There seemed to be no other explanation. Billy Bunter was "off his rocker."

Harry Wharton tapped the fat junior gently upon the shoulder.

"Bunter! Billy Bunter!"

"Eh?"

"Tea's ready!"

"Oh, tea!" said Bunter indifferently.

"He must be ill," said Nugent softly.

"The illfulness must be terrific," murmured Hurree Singh, "or else the honourable Bunter is completely off his esteemed rocker!"

Harry shook the fat junior.

"Wake up, Bunter! Tea's ready! Tea! Eggs! Sardines! Cake!"

It was enough to make Billy Bunter jump up like a jack-in-the-box at any other time. Now he simply looked bored.

"Tea! Oh, all right!"

"Aren't you hungry?" asked Nugent, in an awed voice.

"Hungry!" said Bunter absently.

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"Ye-es, come to think of it, I'm a little peckish! Yes; I'll have some sardines!"

"It's a jape," said Nugent; "he's putting this on! It's utterly impossible for Bunter to forget a meal-time. We've known him too long to be taken in like that!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Look here! What's the little game, Billy?"

"Game!" said the fat junior vaguely.

"I say, you fellows, what's the time? My watch has stopped, I think!"

The juniors grinned. Bunter's watch had stopped several terms ago, and had not gone since. Wharton looked at his own.

"A quarter-past six," he said.

Billy Bunter gave a jump.

"A quarter-past six! My only hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"I must be off!"

And Bunter clutched up his cap and rushed to the door.

"You must be off," agreed Nugent—"off your rocker! What's the row?"

"Can't stop to explain now!"

"You haven't had your tea!"

"No time for tea!"

That was too much. The chums of the Remove were simply floored. When Billy Bunter said that he had no time for tea, the world must be coming to an end. Nothing short of that could possibly account for it.

They stared at the fat junior blankly as he tore open the study door and rushed out into the passage.

"I say, he must be dotty!" said Nugent. "He oughtn't to be allowed out in that state, you know!"

"By Jove, no!" exclaimed Wharton.

He dashed after the fat junior. Billy Bunter heard his footsteps in pursuit, and broke into a run. He had a good start, and he streaked rapidly for the stairs.

The passage was clear of juniors, but one study door was open. It was the study where Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, Hazeldene, and Tom Brown, the new boy from New Zealand, dwelt together in more or less of harmony.

Harry Wharton uttered a shout:

"Brown! Tom Brown! Stop him!"

If Tom Brown had been in the study he might have darted out in time to stop Bunter. But apparently he was not there, for there was no reply to Wharton's shout, and the New Zealand junior did not appear.

Bunter was going strong, and he reached the stairs in a few seconds, and dashed down them at a reckless speed.

At the bottom of the stairs a group of juniors were standing, chatting. They were Bulstrode, Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, and one or two more boys, by no means on the best of terms with Harry Wharton & Co.

Bulstrode glanced up the stairs as Billy Bunter came pounding down.

"Hallo, Bunter!"

In a spirit of pure mischief, he planted himself in the fat junior's way, because he saw that Bunter was in a hurry.

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles, and slackened speed.

"Lemme pass!" he gasped. "Wharton's after me! Lemme pass!"

"Oh, Wharton!"

The chance of giving Wharton trouble was too good to be lost by Bulstrode and his friends. They opened to allow Bunter to pass, and he whisked out into the Close in two seconds, and disappeared.

Wharton came racing down the stairs.

"Collar him!" murmured Bulstrode.

"What-ho!"

As Wharton dashed by, the juniors closed up in his way. He came in contact with Bulstrode, with a crash that made them both reel.

"Oh, you dummy!" gasped Wharton.

"Yah! You ass!"

Bulstrode grasped Harry, as if to save himself, and Skinner and Stott bumped against them, and all four went to the floor together.

Harry Wharton was underneath—Bulstrode & Co. took care of that—and he gasped and struggled under their weight.

Athletic as the captain of the Lower Fourth was, he had no chance against the three of them, and they pinned him down by sheer weight.

"Oh! Bunter Wharton. 'Lemme gerrup, you asses! I'm in a hurry! Chuck it!"

"What did you run into us for?" demanded Bulstrode, getting up as far as to spit on Wharton's chest, instead of sprawling across him.

"I didn't! You got in my way on purpose, you rotter!"

"Same old Wharton!" said Bulstrode, grinning. "Same old nerve; same old cheek! Bump him for his clumsiness!"

"You'd better not! I—"

"Bump him!"

"Rescue!" shouted Wharton.

Bob Cherry and Mark Linley, of Study No. 13, were coming into the House. They ran to the rescue at once. In a few seconds Bulstrode & Co. were rolled off their victim, and Wharton staggered to his feet.

"You cads!" he gasped.

The two parties drew together, and a general conflict was imminent, when the door of Mr. Quelch's study opened. Mr. Quelch was master of the Remove, and he didn't approve of "roving" indoors.

"Cave!" muttered Bob Cherry.

Wharton swallowed his rage.

"Right-ho!" He turned away from the grinning Bulstrode. "Did you see Bunter a few minutes ago, Bob?"

Bob Cherry nodded.

"Yes; he just passed us in the Close, running for his life, I should say, from the spot he was putting on."

"Thanks!"

Harry Wharton dashed out of the Hatch. He searched high and low for the fat junior, but Bunter was nowhere to be seen. He had completely disappeared.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Missing!

"WHERE'S Bunter?" Several fellows asked that question of Harry Wharton & Co., when, their prep done, they descended to the Common-room. Bunter's movements seemed to be exciting unusual interest in the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars.

"Where's the beast?" demanded Ogilvy.

"Which?" asked Wharton genially. "If you mean Bulstrode, he's over by the window! If you're alluding to yourself, here you are!"

"I mean Bunter! Where is he?"

"Then I'll jolly well watch for him to come in, that's all!" said Ogilvy. "He's been at my plates again. He asked me if he could have six plates for his blessed camera, and I told him he couldn't—and now there are six missing. He's taken them!"

"Phew!"

"I suppose it's photography again," Nugent remarked, as the wrathful Ogilvy walked away.

Wharton shook his head. "I don't know! Even Bunter wouldn't go out to take photographs after dark, I should say."

"Hallo! Here's Bob Cherry on the warpath!"

Bob Cherry rushed up to them.

"Has that fat burglar come in?"

"Bunter? No!"

"He's taken my lantern!" howled Bob. "My duck-lantern! He asked me to lend it to him, and I refused, and now it's gone. You know how he looks after things he borrows. I shan't see it again—or, if I do, it will be wrecked. I'll scalp him!"

"You can boil him if you like!" said Nugent.

The chums settled down to play chess.

Morgan of the Remove came along, and tapped Harry Wharton on the shoulder. Harry did not look up.

"Check!" he said, moving his rook.

"Where is Bunter, look you?" demanded Morgan. "He has been in my study. He asked me for the Guy Fawkes mask I kept for the Fifth, and I told him he couldn't have it. Now it's gone!"

"A Guy Fawkes mask? My hat! He's making a collection of some sort, I suppose!"

"I am going to slay him, look you!"

"Slay him, and welcome!"

There was evidently a storm waiting to burst on Bunter as soon as he returned. Carberry, the most unpopular prefect at Greyfriars, looked into the Common-room as the school clock chimed half-past nine.

"Bed, you rats!" he said, in his unpleasant way.

Wharton rose from the chess-table. He had not finished the game, and only a few more moves were required, but it was of no use to say that to Carberry.

"Never mind," said Nugent, as he swept the pieces into the box; "it was practically a checkmate old chap!"

"Good!" said Wharton. "I had you fixed and no mistake! I only had to clear off the bishop and shove the queen forward. I suppose you say it?"

Nugent stared.

"What are you talking about? I mean it was practically a mate on my side. I was going to fix you with the knights."

"The knights! Why, your knights were nowhere!"

"I had you just on the point—"

"Now look here Nugent—"

"Why, as for your queen—"

"Bedtime!" said Carberry unpleasantly. "You can finish that jabber in the dormitory. Are all you young rascals here?"

"There are more rascals here now than there were a minute ago," said Bob Cherry agreeably; and then he dodged a lunge from the prefect.

The Remove formed up to go to bed, and Carberry's angry eye noted that two were wanting. Two of the Remove who should have been there were missing.

"Where are Brown and Bunter?"

Harry Wharton started. He had known that Bunter was still out of doors, but it was news to him that Tom Brown of Taranaki was absent. No one replied to the prefect's question.

"Oh, no; I haven't seen him!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

Bunter came into the Common-room. The fat junior was clasping his hands together hard, and his fat face was contorted. Carberry stared at him.

"What's the matter with you, Bunter?"

"Ow, ow, yow!"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I've been in to the Head! Ow! I've been out, you know, and—Mr. Quetch refused to accept my explanation. Ow!"

Carberry grimed.

"You young ass! Get to bed!"

Bunter was mumbling and growling all the way up to bed. He had evidently had some strong proofs that the Head disapproved of juniors breaking bounds.

He nursed and clasped his hands with deep groans as he sat on his bed.

"Ow! I say, you fellows, the Head



Harry Wharton gasped and struggled under the weight of Bulstrode & Co. "Lammie gorrup, you asses!" he panted. "I'm in a hurry!"

Carberry raised his voice angrily. "Where are Brown and Bunter?"

"I'm here!" said a cheery voice in the passage, and handsome, sturdy Tom Brown of Taranaki came in. He looked a little dusky and a little flushed, as if he had walked fast. The prefect stared at him.

"Have you been out?"

"Yes," said Tom Brown quietly.

"You had a pass, I hope?" said Carberry grimly. "Otherwise it will be my painful duty to march you in to the doctor by the scruff of your neck!"

"Yes, I know how painful the duty would be to you, Carberry," said Tom Brown. "I had a pass. Here it is!"

Carberry looked scrutinisingly at the pass. It was signed by Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, and was quite in order.

"Do you know where Bunter is?" he asked.

"No," said Tom Brown. "Is he out?"

"Wasn't he with you?"

can lay it on!" he gasped. "I believe he goes in for exercise, you know, to bring his muscles up before he starts on us, Ow!"

"You young duffer!" said Harry.

"What did you go out for?"

"Ow, yow!" mumbled Bunter, apparently not hearing the question.

"What did you break bounds for, ass?"

"Ow, yow! This does hurt, and no mistake!"

Carberry looked into the dormitory. The juniors scuttled into bed, and the prefect turned out the gas and slammed the door. Then a dozen voices were heard at once, all demanding an explanation of Bunter.

"Bunter! Bunter!"

"Where have you been?"

"What's the little game?"

"Oven up, you ass!"

From Billy Bunter's bed came a deep and unmusical snore. Merely that and nothing more!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Silly Night.

"BUNTER!"

Shore!

"Billy Bunter!"

Sno-o-ore!

"He's fallen asleep jolly soon!" said Bob Cherry suspiciously. "Bunter, old man, wake up, before I squeeze a sponge down the back of your neck!"

Shore!

Bob Cherry stepped out of bed, and fumbled at the washstand in the dark. There was a sound of quick movement in Bunter's bed.

"Here, hold on! Don't you jolly well squeeze a sponge over me, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You've woke up, then!"

"You—you woke me up!"

"Aren't you hungry, Bunter?" asked Nugent, with great solicitude. "Remember, you missed your tea—a thing you have never done before."

"Well, I had a snack in the village—I mean—"

"So you've been to Friar-dale?"

"Friar-dale?" exclaimed Tom Brown.

"I've been to Friar-dale, too, and I didn't see you, Bunter. You must have been there at the same time, too."

"Curious, wasn't it?" grunted Billy Bunter.

"And what have you been to Friar-dale for?" demanded Wharton. "What's the little game, if you're not off your silly rocker? We're getting alarmed about you, Bunter. It seems to me that the inevitable has happened at last, and you're right off your crumplet."

"Oh, really, Wharton! I—I went to Friar-dale for—a walk, you know."

"And you had to bolt off and miss your tea—for a walk!" said Nugent.

"Well, you see—"

"I see that you're telling whoppers!" said Wharton bluntly. "I can't see what you're making a mystery about. I can't understand why you broke bounds and took a licking."

"There are lots of things you can't understand, Wharton."

"Why, you young swinep—"

"Perhaps I'll let you into it some day," said Bunter. "Perhaps there's a mystery, and perhaps there isn't. Perhaps I'm on the track, and perhaps I'm not. You fellows make game of me. You'll see one of these days!"

"Oh, sheer off!" said Bob Cherry.

"It's touched his brain, missing his tea, you know. The question is whether we ought to get him a strait-jacket."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Let's rag him, and make him explain!" suggested Skinner.

"Oh, let him alone; he's not worth it!"

Bob Cherry tumbled back into bed. The fat junior was rather glad that he was not worth ragging. He was soon snoring in earnest; but it was some time before Harry Wharton went to sleep.

He was thinking for some time about the mysterious conduct of the Owl of the Remove, but he fell asleep at last. He woke again, a little later, with the impression that somebody was moving about in the dormitory.

He sat up in bed.

At once the thought occurred to his mind that Bunter might be sleep-walking again, and he peered through the gloom of the dormitory in the direction of the fat junior's bed.

A ray of moonlight through one of the high windows fell upon the bed, and Wharton started as he noted that the clothes were thrown back and the bed was empty.

"The young ass! He's at it again!" murmured Harry.

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He stepped quietly out of bed. The dormitory was dimly lighted by the glimmer of the moon at the windows, and his quick glance soon discovered the fat junior.

Billy Bunter, in his pyjamas, was standing beside Tom Brown's bed, and bending over the chair upon which the New Zealand junior had carefully arranged his clothes.

Wharton suppressed an exclamation.

He had no doubt that the somnambulist was "at it again." He could see all Bunter's actions with sufficient clearness, and he saw that the fat junior was going methodically through Tom Brown's pockets.

Wharton hesitated a moment. He knew that it was dangerous to suddenly awaken a sleep-walker, and he wondered what he had better do.

If Bunter tried to leave the dormitory, he determined that he would stop him. The passages and staircases were too dangerous for a somnambulist. But so long as he remained there it was possible that he would return to bed at any moment, and so Harry decided to wait and see.

He watched the fat junior curiously.

Bunter had his spectacles on, and there was a glimmer of moonlight upon them, and he looked as if he were awake; but Wharton could not see his eyes.

The Owl of the Remove went through pocket after pocket, carefully folding up the clothes after he had examined them.

Suddenly a faint exclamation broke from his lips. He had taken a folded paper from the breast-pocket of his jacket.

Wharton was surprised. In the previous attacks of somnambulism, he had never known the fat junior to make a sound.

Billy Bunter unfolded the paper, and fixed his eyes upon it, as if to read it, and Harry marvelled more. The sleep-walker was going through all the actions of a waking person. But if Bunter had been awake, the dormitory was too dim for reading.

The fat junior lowered the paper again, and seemed to hesitate.

Finally he slipped the paper into the pocket of his pyjamas, and moved away towards the door of the dormitory.

It was then that Wharton resolved to interfere. He stepped quickly towards the door, and put his foot and hand against it. His idea was that Bunter would try to open it with the handle, find it impossible and give up the attempt.

To a sleep-walker, Wharton himself would have been invisible all the time.

But, strangely enough, as he crossed the fat junior's path, Billy Bunter halted, and stared straight at him, as if he were broad awake.

A surprised exclamation left his lips.

"Wh-Wh-what—"

"Bunter! You're awake!"

Harry Wharton uttered the words sharply, and advanced quickly towards the fat junior. Billy Bunter stared at him as if he were a ghost. He seemed rooted to the floor with terror.

"Wh-Wh-Wharton!"

"Yes, it is I."

"You—you—you—"

"I've been watching you," said Harry.

"I thought you were sleep-walking and playing your old tricks again in your sleep. But—"

"But—but—but what?"

"You're awake!"

"I—I—I'm awake now, certainly," stammered Bunter. "Ye-es, I'm awake."

"What have you been through Brown's pockets for?" demanded Wharton scornfully.

Bunter seemed to make an effort to recover himself.

"I—I—have I been through Brown's pockets?" he stammered.

"You know you have."

"I don't know. I—I woke up. I—"

"I didn't know I was out of bed. You—you know I'm a sleep-walker, you know."

"I thought so, but—"

"You woke me."

"I didn't make a sound."

"Well, I woke you. What do you think I should do through Brown's pockets for?" asked Bunter, recovering some of his old manner. "Oh, really, Wharton, I'm surprised at you!"

"Well, I don't think you're a thief," admitted Harry; "and, as far as I could see, you took nothing but a bit of paper."

"I'm willing to believe that you were sleep-walking, and that you suddenly woke up."

"Let's get back to bed," said Bunter, with a shiver. "It's jolly cold standing here."

"Right you are! But the paper?"

"The paper?"

"The paper you took out of Brown's jacket. You must put it back."

Billy Bunter shifted uneasily.

"I suppose it doesn't matter about putting an old bit of paper back," he said peevishly. "Brown might wake up, too, and misunderstand."

"It might be a letter or something."

"Oh, stuff!"

"Anyway, you're going to put it back," said Wharton grimly. "It's Brown's property. Put it back at once, while I see you, or I'll wake Brown and leave him to settle it with you."

Billy Bunter shivered.

"You ass! That would ruin everything you—I mean—"

"Blessed if I can guess what you mean. But put the paper back at once, or I'll call Brown and explain to him."

"Oh, all right! I don't know where it is," mumbled Bunter, fumbling in his pocket.

"Strike a match, you see, so that I can see that it is the one."

Wharton looked steadily at him.

"You weren't asleep," he said. "You tried to read it when you took it out of Brown's pocket."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And you dared not strike a light here, for fear of waking us, so you were going to take it outside the dorm, and strike a match there to read it."

"I—I—I—"

"Now you want a light to read it by, and not to identify it!" said Wharton angrily.

"You young cad! It's a private letter, and you're poking your inquisitive nose into it. By Jove, I've a good mind to give you a licking on the spot!"

"Oh—oh, really—"

"Put that paper back at once!"

Billy Bunter made no further demur. He fumbled for the paper, took it out, and unwillingly retraced his steps to Tom Brown's bed.

There he fumbled with Brown's jacket, and restored the paper to the pocket he had taken it from. Then he blinked peevishly at the captain of the Remove.

"I hope you're satisfied now?" he grunted.

"Yes; get back into bed."

"Look here, Wharton—"

"Get into bed, you worm! For two pins I'd give you a spanking now," said Wharton in disgust. "I don't believe you were asleep at all. You were simply spying into Brown's private concerns."

"Oh, really—"

"Shut up, and get to bed."

Billy Bunter turned in. His fat face was very angry and disappointed as he pulled up the bedclothes round him.

"Now, look here," said Wharton, "I'm going to sleep. But I shan't sleep very soundly, and I shall wake up if any body moves about. No more of your mean tricks to-night, Bunter."

"I'm going to sleep."
"You'd better!"

Billy Bunter was soon fast asleep. Harry Wharton, too, dropped off into slumber, but he woke up several times that night, and each time he took a glance up and down the dormitory.

But nobody was stirring. Billy Bunter, once fairly asleep, was not likely to wako for anything short of a cannon-shot, and Harry was reassured at last.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Mystery of Tom Brown.

DIRECTLY after lessons the next morning, Harry Wharton waited for Tom Brown in the passage.

Tom Brown was passing him when Harry tapped his arm. Brown started. In his preoccupation he had not noticed the captain of the Remove.

"I want to speak to you," said Harry. Tom Brown coloured, and then laughed.

"And I want to speak to you," he said. "Go ahead!"

"I want to give you a warning."

The New Zealander started. "My hat! What's the row? You—"

He paused. "I think you had better be careful how you leave any papers or letters about," said Wharton, "especially in your pockets, of a night."

"What?"

"There are prying chaps in the Form, who aren't above reading another fellow's correspondence," said Wharton bluntly.

"My hat!"

"As a matter of fact, I know it has been tried on; but I don't want to give the rotter away," said Harry. "He's more fool than rascal. But I thought I'd mention it to you, so that you can take care of your things."

"Thanks awfully!" said Tom gratefully. "It's jolly good of you! Not that I've got anything I should mind anybody seeing."

He paused, and his colour deepened.

"I say, Wharton, will you—will you do me a favour, if you can?"

"Certainly!"

"I'm short of tin," said Tom, his face scarlet now. "I—I've had a run on my money, you know, and—and I want some. I've got a postal-order coming on Saturday—"

Wharton stopped, and burst into a merry laugh. "That sounds like Bunter, doesn't it?"

Wharton laughed, too. "Yes; but I know your remittances are real ones," he said. "That's all right. As it happens, I'm in funds now, and I can lend you some tin, if you like."

"You know I'm not a borrower as a rule," said Tom, colouring again. "I don't like it. But this is an exceptional case. I want a sovereign badly."

Wharton gave a low whistle. "I'm afraid you've stumped me, old chap," he said. "My uncle is pretty liberal with pocket-money, but I haven't many sovereigns knocking about. They don't grow very plentifully in the Lower Fourth, you know."

Tom Brown laughed ruefully. "I—I—express no aid."

"But it's all right. I can raise it," said Wharton quickly. "I can raise half myself, and I will raise the rest in Study No. 1. Wait a minute till I speak to Nugent and Inky."

"You're awfully good!"

"Bosh!"

Wharton ran off, and found Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh going on to the football-ground. He was not gone long, and Tom Brown waited for him at the door of the School House. Wharton returned in a few minutes.

"Here you are!" he said. He had a half-sovereign, three half-

crowns, and some small silver in his hand. He slid it into Tom Brown's hand.

"Thanks!" said Tom awkwardly. "This is jolly decent of you. I'll make it all square on Saturday."

"That's all right!"

A weight seemed to be lifted from the New Zealand junior's mind as the money jingled into his pocket. Wharton looked at him curiously.

"Coming to the footer practice?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" said Brown brightly. "We're getting up a scratch match this afternoon," said Wharton. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Greyfriars.

"Bob Cherry is going to captain one side, and myself the other. We're picking the best men for the Form team. It will give you a chance to show what you can do in the Soccer line, Brown."

Brown coloured again. "I—I sha'n't be able to play this afternoon," he said awkwardly.

Wharton stared at him. "Why on earth not?"

"I—I've an appointment." Harry Wharton looked very serious.



BILLY BUNTER IN A THOUGHTFUL MOOD.

"Well, I don't want to interfere with your appointments," he said, "but you oughtn't to miss a match like this, at the beginning of the season, too. It may have some influence on whether you go into the Form eleven or not."

"I'm sorry."

"You can't put off your appointment."

"Oh, impossible!" said Tom hastily. "Well, that settles it!"

And Wharton said no more on the subject. They went down to the ground, and Tom Brown threw himself heartily into the practice till it was time to go in for dinner. While they were kicking and passing, a fat junior sat on a bench under the elm, blinking over a pocket-book, in which he was making notes.

Bunter, the detective, had had his eye on the two, and had contrived to hear most of what they said. As a matter of fact, they had not lowered their voices, having no idea that an eavesdropper was at work.

Bunter's notes ran as follows:

"T. B. borrowed a pound of Wharton. Borrowed a half-sov. of Wun Lung yesterday. Usually flush of money, and never borrows."

"T. B. is cutting the match this after-

noon. Usually very keen on football, and won't miss a match for anything. Important appointment."

"General deduction; and T. B. mixed up with gambling, races and bookmakers—in debt, probably blackmail—expelled if found out."

And Bunter read over his notes, grinned with satisfaction over them, then snapped the book shut, and jammed it into his breast.

"Good!" he murmured. "I rather think I shall be on the track this afternoon, when Brown keeps his appointment. Where did he go last night? I was on their track after the meeting in the lane, for over an hour, and I lost sight of him. That was because it was dark. I shall have a better chance in the daylight. I rather think Brown won't escape this time."

Bunter pursed up his lips thoughtfully. And when he had found Brown out in all his iniquity, what then? That was the next thought in the fat junior's mind.

It would prove his ability as a detective to give the New Zealander away, and have him expelled from the school. But Bunter was not ill-natured. He would tell a few fellows the facts, in justice to himself, and then he would let Brown off lightly.

Brown was usually flush with money, and Bunter was the reverse. A vision of a long succession of free fees in the school shop rose before Bunter's mind and dazzled him.

Bunter, the detective, felt that he was going strong!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
A Defiant Outcrop.

DIRECTLY after dinner that day Tom Brown left the school alone, and walked down the lane towards the woods. There was not a fellow in sight as the New Zealand junior left the gates. It was a fine afternoon, and most of the juniors were on the football-ground.

Tom Brown was not keen on footer that afternoon, and neither was Billy Bunter, the fat junior. Bunter had more important work on hand for that afternoon.

The Owl of the Remove left the school about five minutes after Tom Brown, and strolled in the same direction as the New Zealand junior.

Quite unaware that he was being followed, Tom Brown went on his way. Billy Bunter kept a safe distance in the rear, and out of sight of the fellow he was following.

Through the woods Tom Brown wended his way, and at length came to the Black Pike. The New Zealand junior strode on up the rugged steep of the Pike as though it was level ground.

Billy Bunter, however, was compelled to slacken his pace somewhat. He stuck to the trail gamely, however, but suddenly he gave a grunt as he discovered that Tom Brown had disappeared from his view.

Where was the New Zealander? It looked as if the earth had suddenly swallowed him up—and, indeed it had, in a sense.

Bunter, pushing on cautiously, came out upon the verge of a huge hollow in the side of the hill, where an abrupt slope led downwards.

There the trees and even the bushes gave way to hard stone and barren earth. The sudden slope was bare of vegetation.

Bunter crouched in the last bushes, and looked ahead.

It was impossible to follow the Maori down that slope without betraying himself to the most careless glance if Tom Brown should happen to turn his head.

"Crumbs!" muttered Bunter. "What a rotten shame! It looks to me as if the least has come this way on purpose. I—I'd like to punch his beastly head!"

He blinked down the slope. It extended for a dozen yards, and was very steep. Loose stones rolled to the bottom as Tom Brown tramped down.

Bunter uttered a suppressed exclamation of glee. Another figure beside Tom Brown's was visible in the hollow.

The stranger made a step forward as Tom Brown came down the slope. "Hallo, Tom!"

It sounded like a youthful voice. "Hallo!" called out Tom cheerily in reply.

Then he joined the stranger. That was all Billy Bunter heard. The fat junior strained his ears to hear more, and a murmur of voices came to his ears as the two conversed in low tones; but that was all. He could not catch a word.

"The beasts," murmured Bunter—"the beasts!"

The Greyfriars detective seemed to consider that it was the duty of his quarry to do their talking within his hearing, so that he could become cognisant of their secrets. He blinked and scowled at them.

But suddenly he gave a start, and his eyes gleamed.

Tom Brown was fishing in his pockets, and as his hand came out there was a gleam of gold and silver in the sun. "Money!"

The coins were passed to the stranger, and Bunter thought he made out the words, "Thank you, Tom, old man." But he was not quite sure.

Money had passed between the two again.

Then a paper was handed by the stranger to Tom Brown, who smiled, and thrust it into his pocket.

Billy Bunter's heart beat faster. Money had passed again, and another mysterious paper. If he could only get a sight of that paper.

What a dark secret it might tell him! Probably it contained some clue to the secret transactions of Tom Brown, whether in the line of crime or of betting on horse races.

He was being blackmail, or was this stranger an agent for laying his bets on the races?

In either case, the facts becoming known would be sufficient to get him sacked from the school.

"I've got him!" murmured Bunter. "I've got him in the hollow of my hand!"

The two had resumed conversation, and Bunter would have given one of his ears to hear what they were saying.

In his eagerness to do so he leaned out in view of the talkers, if they had turned their heads in his direction.

Suddenly a stone slipped under his foot, and rolled down the slope. The noise it made startled the two talkers, and they started away from each other and looked round.

Billy Bunter gave a start, too, and over-balanced himself. The next moment he had lost his footing, and was following the rolling stone to the bottom of the steep slope.

As the Owl of the Remove rolled down the slope, amid the clatter of stones and roots and dirt, Tom Brown stared at him in blank astonishment, and Tom Brown's friend turned suddenly away, and plunged into the nearest bushes.

It was pretty clear that he did not want to be seen, but Billy Bunter had no chance of noting that circumstance or any other now.

He rolled to the bottom of the slope, and came to a stop in a sitting posture.

in a pool of water left in the soft soil by the last rainfall.

Muddy water splashed up round him, as Bunter sat dazed, and snorting and gasping like a grampus.

Tom Brown, standing alone now, stared at him.

"Bunter!" "Ow!" "How did you get here?" "Ger-or-or-or-or-or-or!"

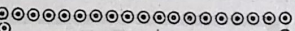
"Get up!" "Ow, ow! Yow!" "You're sitting in a puddle, you ass!"

"Ow! I'm nearly killed! Yow! I've broken my neck—I mean, my leg! I've dislocated my shoulder-blade, and put my backbone out of joint. Ow!"

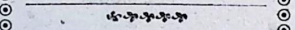
"Eh, ha, ha!" Bunter glared at him. "You—you unfeeling beast! I'm dying!"

"You're making a jolly lot of row for a dying grampus," said Tom Brown, laughing. "Get up! You're worth dozens of dead pigs yet!"

"Oh, really, Brown—"



*When
You have Finished
Reading the Stories
in
This Issue
hand
this copy to your
chum!
He will be grateful
to you for it!*



Tom Brown helped the fat junior to his feet. Bunter leant against the slope of the hollow, dripping with water, and gasping for breath.

"Ow! I'm nearly dead!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "Yow! It was all your fault, you beast!"

"My fault?" said Brown, staring. "How on earth do you make that out? By the way, how did you come to be here?"

"I—I—I came, you know," said Bunter feebly.

It occurred to him that it would not be wise to let Tom Brown know too much. But the New Zealand junior was already guessing a great deal.

His brow became very stern. "Bunter! You've followed me!"

"I—I— Oh, really, you know—"

"You're the chap who's been trying to pry into my affairs, too!" exclaimed Tom Brown, understanding now in a flash that it was Bunter whom Harry Wharton had been alluding to in that strange warning.

Bunter gasped, keeping a wary eye on the angry Colonial.

"Oh, really, Brown, if Wharton has been telling you that I—"

"Wharton did not mention you to me. He warned me to be on my guard against a chap who might spy on me, that's all."

"I—I—I—"

Tom Brown advanced closer to the fat junior. Billy Bunter slunk away, blinking nervously. The sturdy young Colonial looked very savage.

"You've been spying on me, Bunter!"

"Well, you wouldn't go in for gambling and horse-racing and blackmail," said Billy Bunter defiantly. "I've lately taken up detective work as a hobby, and I've run you to earth. I've solved the mystery now."

"Are you mad?" "No; I'm jolly well not mad!" said Bunter indignantly. "You're a blessed rascal, that's what the matter is; and it's through you I've got that beastly fall and sprained both my ankles!"

"I'm a—a—a what?"

Tom Brown seemed scarcely able to believe his ears.

"A blessed rascal!" said Bunter. "I've been keeping an eye on you. I don't mean to say that I'm going to show you up."

"Show me up!"

"That's it! But I'm going to keep an eye on you, I promise you. I know your little games, and I could get you expelled from Greyfriars with a word."

Tom stared blankly at him. "So you'd better jolly well mind your p's and q's," said Billy Bunter. "It's no good trying to pull the wool over my eyes, either. With my splendid abilities as an amateur detective—"

"You utter fool!"

"Here, I say—what—"

"I've a jolly good mind to give you the licking of your life, you mean, prying, silly young ass!" said Tom Brown, in a concentrated voice.

"You'd better not lay a hand on me!" said Bunter, in alarm. "I'll jolly well show you up at Greyfriars, if you do, and let the fellows know what I've found out?"

"Found out! What have you found out?"

"Everything!"

"You cad! I—"

"Oh, hard words break no bones, you know!" said Billy Bunter, with a grin. "I don't mind 'em. I've found everything out—about your dealing with book-makers, giving 'em money on the quiet—paying blackmail!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, you can cackle if you like," said Bunter nettled. "But you'd jolly well cackle to another tune if I told it all at Greyfriars."

"You young ass! I won't worth it, I won't lick you now. But if you begin any more of your rotten spring I'll give you a thick ear. Bear that in mind!" And Tom Brown turned and strode away.

Billy Bunter blinked after him for some moments in astonished silence—astonished that the culprit, whose guilt he had discovered, should venture to treat him in this cavalier fashion.

"I say, Brown, come back!" he shouted at last.

Tom Brown did not turn his head.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Accused!

HARRY WHARTON came off the football-field with red glow of health in his cheeks and a sparkle in his eyes. Tom Brown was standing outside the pavilion when the Removites came off.

"Good game?" he asked.
 "Yes, rather!"

"The goodfulness was terrific," remarked Hurre Janseter Ram Singh. "Has the honourable Brownful chum been watching the gameful sport long-timefully?"

Tom Brown laughed.
 "No; I've only just got in. If any of you chaps are standing tea, I'll come along; I'm stony this afternoon."
 "Has he coloured a little," he met Wharton's eyes. "Only that afternoon the captain of the Remove had lent him a sovereign."
 "Right-ho!" exclaimed Nugent. "Tea in Study No. 1. 'We've got rather a decent spread, owing to the amazing fact that Bunter hasn't been raiding the grub the last day or two. It seems to have gone off gorging a bit.'"
 "He's gone off his rocker, I think," said Tom Brown.
 "Very likely. But why?"
 "I've just met him on the Black Pike, and he seems to me to be a babbling idiot," said Tom. "He says he's taken up some detective bosh, or something."
 "Ha, ha! One of Bunter's new wheezes."
 "Bunter, the detective!" grinned Bob Cherry. "My hat! He grows richer and richer! This beats the hypnotism business, and even the boxing."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "We're going to have tea as soon as we've changed, Brown," said Harry Wharton. "We'll be glad for you to join us. Wait a bit!"
 "Right! I'll wait here."
 The somewhat dishevelled and perspiring footballers proceeded to clean themselves and change into ordinary attire, and Tom Brown leaned on a post and waited. There was a frown of thoughtfulness on his boyish brow.
 A tired and dusty figure came limping in at the gates of Greyfriars.
 It was Billy Bunter—hot, tired, thirsty, and in about the worst temper it was possible for a fat and fatigued youth to be in.
 Tom Brown grinned a little as he saw him.
 Bunter seemed to have paid pretty dearly for his shadowing. That fat junior sighted him. He stopped only to take a draught of water at the fountain, and then came over towards Tom Brown, with a truculent look upon his face.
 "I say, Brown, I've found you, then."
 "I haven't been hiding," said the New Zealand junior contemptuously. "Don't bother me, Bunter! I don't want to hit you, but I'm not in a humour to stand any more of your rot, so I warn you!"
 "You've got to stand it!"
 "What!"
 "Better listen to me. If you raise a finger I'll yell for help, and get the whole yarn before the whole school," said Bunter savagely.
 Tom Brown could only stare at him.
 "I'm thirsty," said Bunter, "and I'm hungry. I want a feed. I want plenty of ginger-pop, and the best spread that we can get at Mrs. Mibble's."
 "I hope you'll get it."
 "You're going to see to that."
 "I?" said Tom Brown.
 "Yes, you."
 "You must be dotty!" said the New Zealand junior, in wonder. "Go and lie down for a bit."
 Bunter snorted.
 "You can try to carry it off by cheek, if you like, but I'll make you squirm, my fine fellow. You—you gambling rotter!"
 Tom Brown's eyes glistened, and he made a swift step forward, and caught Bunter by the scruff of the neck.
 "Ow! Leggo! Yow!"

Shake, shake, shake.
 "Ow! Help! Help! Help! Help!"
 Harry Wharton & Co, having changed their clothes, came out. They looked on in astonishment at the spectacle of Billy Bunter being shaken like a rat by the angry New Zealander.
 "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Is our friend Brown adopting Buströde's persuasive methods?"
 Tom Brown turned scarlet, and let go the fat junior. Billy Bunter staggered away, gasping for breath.
 "What's the row?" asked Harry wonderingly.
 Tom breathed hard.
 "You'd better ask Bunter. He's got something to tell you."
 "And—and I'll j-j-jolly well—well tell him, too!" spluttered Bunter. "You—you beast! I'll make you wriggle!"
 "Don't be an ass, Bunter!"
 "I—I say, you fellows—"
 "Oh, come along and have tea!" said Harry Wharton.
 "He's got something to tell you," said

"I've tracked him down," said Bunter. "He—he's been gambling, and a bookmaker is blackmailing him, and I saw him give the man money. Serve him jolly well right if I gave him away to Dr. Locke or Mr. Quelch—"
 "Shut up!" whispered Bob Cherry suddenly, as he caught sight of Mr. Quelch coming round the corner of the building.
 But Bunter was too excited to heed. "I say he'd be expelled if I told Mr. Quelch about his gambling and betting with bookmakers—"
 "Cave!"
 But it was too late! Mr. Quelch stopped and looked fixedly at the juniors.
 "What is that, Bunter?"
 "Oh-h-h-h-h!"
 "Bunter! Repeat your words!"
 "Oh-h-h-h!"
 "Were you alluding to Brown?"
 "Oh-h-h-h-h!" stammered the terrified Bunter.



"I say, you fellows, the Head can lay it on!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I believe he goes in for exercise, you know, to bring his muscles up before he starts on us. Ow!"

Brown, with a hard face. "Let the young cad get it off his chest."
 Wharton looked uneasy. He guessed now that the Greyfriars detective had been at work again.
 "Oh, never mind!" he exclaimed.
 "Bunter—"
 "Let him speak."
 "Oh, all right, if you prefer it. What is it, you fat duffer?"
 "Oh, really, Wharton—"
 "Get to the point, or shut-up!"
 "I'm jolly well going to show that cad up!" spluttered Bunter. "Ow! He's nearly dislocated my neck! I was going to let him off lightly, if he—if he—"
 "If I stood him a feed at the tuck-shop," said Brown, with a scornful laugh.
 "Well—oh, really, I—"
 "Go on, porpoise!" said Bob Cherry.
 "Hurry up; we can't stand here the rest of the evening, you know!"

"Yes, sir, he was!" said Tom Brown, meeting the Form-master's stern eyes fearlessly. "He has got a silly notion into his head that I have been gambling, and dealing with bookmakers—why, I don't know."
 The Form-master frowned.
 "This must be sifted out," he said.
 Tom Brown coloured deeply.
 "I'm not afraid of an investigation, sir," he exclaimed.
 "Very good! Now, Bunter—"
 "I—I—I don't want to say anything against Brown, sir," stammered Billy Bunter. "I—I don't wish to be the cause of a chap's being expelled, sir."
 "What you wish has nothing to do with the matter," said the Remove-master sternly. "You will do as I tell you."
 "Ye-e-e-es, sir!"
 "Now tell me what your accusation against Brown is founded upon!"
 THE PENNY POPULAR—No. 253.

"Certainly, sir. I—I discovered that Brown was playing a deep game, sir. It was owing to my splendid abilities as an amateur detective—"

"Keep to the facts, please, Bunter!"

"But—but that is a fact, sir."

"Dear me! The boy is very stupid!"

"Not at all, sir. You don't understand, that's all. I have lately taken up amateur detective work as a hobby, and the case of Tom Brown is the first I have investigated. I found out that he was being blackmailed by a bookmaker—"

"Blackmailed!"

"At least, he was paying money out to somebody, sir. He borrowed a half-sov. of Wun Lung, sir, and a sovereign of Harry Wharton."

"Is that correct, Brown?"

"Quite correct, sir!"

"Did you pay the money to a bookmaker?"

"No, sir!"

"How do you know it was a bookmaker, Bunter?" asked Mr. Quelch, in a tone that boded ill for the fat junior if he failed to make out his case.

"By inference, sir. Brown went to meet the bookmaker last night, sir, and stayed out to bedtime, and he met him again this afternoon, sir."

"There is no reason to suppose that the man was a bookmaker, Bunter, or that he was blackmailing Brown," said Mr. Quelch. "I am afraid you have been reading foolish detective romances, and have allowed a vivid imagination to run away with you. You are, I think, the stupidest boy in my Form!"

"At the same time, Brown," said Mr. Quelch, turning to the New Zealander—"at the same time, you will see that there is something in this, that, for your own sake, had better be cleared up. Are you willing to give a full explanation?"

"Quite willing, sir, only I hope you won't ask me to mention names," said Tom Brown. "I met a chap on the ship coming over to England, sir, when I came to Greyfriars. He was a decent chap, but a bit weak and easily led. I've heard from him several times since I've been to Greyfriars; the last time

yesterday morning. He told me he had obtained a post at a bank in this county; but, like an ass, he went to the races, and allowed a rotten bookmaker to get hold of him there. He ended up by owing the man ten pounds, which he couldn't possibly pay. He raised most of the money by borrowing, and asked me if I could help him. He still wanted more."

"Ah!"

"I raised all I could of my own, sir, and borrowed a half-sovereign of Wun Lung, though I'm blessed if I know how Bunter knows anything about it," said Tom Brown. "I met him last night, and gave it to him. Then he told me he was still a pound short, and I promised to try and get it, and meet him to-day with it. As he was very anxious, of course, to avoid anything coming out, we arranged the second meeting on the Black Pike, for this afternoon. Bunter seems to have taken it upon himself to spy on all my actions; but he was never near guessing the facts."

"Did it take you till late last night to give him a half-sov.?" sneered Bunter.

"The rest of the time was spent in showing him the road to the Black Pike, sir. I had a pass from Wingate to stay out."

"And what did he give you the papers for, then?" persisted Bunter.

Tom Brown smiled, and drew a paper from his pocket. He handed it to Mr. Quelch.

"Will you look at this, sir? It's the paper the chap gave me this afternoon. The other is in my other clothes, but it's worded much the same."

The Remove-master glanced at the paper. It bore the simple legend: "I O U £1.—H.K."

"This is an I O U," said the Remove-master.

"Yes, sir."

Billy Bunter's jaw dropped.

Mr. Quelch passed the paper back to Tom Brown.

"I am quite satisfied," he said. "You have acted generously, if a little thoughtlessly, in helping an acquaintance out of an unpleasant scrape, Brown. I hope it

will be a lesson to him. As for you, Bunter, nothing can exceed the contempt I feel for your baseness in spying upon your Form-fellow, and your petty meanness in placing the worst possible construction upon everything you discovered."

"Oh, really, sir!" stammered the amateur detective. "You see, sir—"

"Not a word, Bunter! You disgust me!"

And Mr. Quelch passed on majestically. Bunter stood overwhelmed for a moment. The other Removites, without a word to him, moved off towards the House.

Bunter started after them.

"I say, Brown," he said, "it was all a joke, you know. I—I didn't really think you had been betting. I suppose you don't bear malice?"

"Not I," said Tom. "You're not worth it!"

"I—I—I'm coming in to tea, you fellows."

Harry Wharton turned round.

"You're not!" he said abruptly. "You can't stand you. You are a little too thick. We'll see whether we can stand you later, but for the present—pah! Get off! If you show your nose inside Study No. 1, you'll go out on your neck."

"But—but—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

And the chums went in to tea. Billy Bunter stared after them. He knew that Wharton was a fellow of his word. Study No. 1 was a closed apartment to him for that evening.

He went as far as the Remove passage. In the study he could hear the clinking of knives and forks, and the clucking of crockery, and from the door ajar came floating the savoury smell of bacon and fried eggs. It made Bunter's mouth water. But he did not venture to enter; he remained like the Peri at the gate of Paradise—a very fat, discontented Peri.

But there was no help for it. Within the study the chums of the Remove chatted merrily, making much of Tom Brown, while in the passage, cooling his heels and murmuring things not loud but deep, was the Greyfriars detective.

THE END.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

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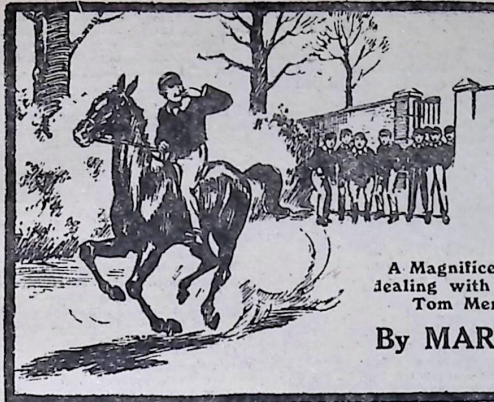
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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Little Run for Figgins & Co.

"WHOO!"
"Steady!"
"Clatter, clatter, clatter!"
"Hold him in!" roared

Fatty Wynn.
"Whoa!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, grinned as they heard the clattering and shouting outside the school gates. They strolled down to the gateway to look on.

In the wide, white road outside the gates three juniors were clustered round a horse, and one of them, a particularly plump junior, was trying to mount him. The horse, apparently, was not having any.

He backed away every time Fatty Wynn made an effort to heave himself into the saddle, and Fatty Wynn hopped beside him on one leg in a way that made even his chums, Figgins and Kerr, chuckle.

It made Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther roar!

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were School House fellows, and naturally they were glad of an opportunity of chipping Figgins & Co., the heroes of the New House. And they proceeded to chip!

"That horse knows something," said Monty Lowther. "If Fatty gets on his back he'll break into two, and he objects."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Why don't you get a ladder, Fatty?" asked Tom Merry. "Or you might get a lift in an aeroplane, and drop on him!"
"Whoa!"

"Steady the Buffs!" grinned Tom Merry. "Mind you don't push him over, Fatty. If you fall on him and killed him you'd have to pay for him, you know."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clear out, you silly School House chumps!" roared Fatty Wynn. "What are you hanging round for? Go and practice footer—so that you can score a goal or two when we play you again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Make an effort, Fatty, old man," said Kerr. "Now, when we shove him towards you, heave yourself up. Go it!"

"Both of you get on the starboard side and shove," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Figgins and Kerr held the horse, and pushed him hard towards Fatty. Fatty, with a grip on the saddle and a grip on

the mane, heaved himself up. He expected the horse to back away as before, but Figgins and Kerr were shoving him so hard on the other side that he couldn't, and so it came about that Fatty Wynn overshot the mark.

Right over the saddle he went, head first, and he sprawled across the horse and rolled down on the other side, on top of his two devoted chums.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Kerr.
"Yaroo!" roared Figgins.

Bump!
Figgins and Kerr rolled in the dusty road, and Fatty Wynn rolled over them, wondering whether an earthquake had happened, or whether the universe had come to a sudden and violent end.

The horse blinked down at the three juniors, and backed away, and began browsing on the grass beside the road, apparently quite unconcerned and unrepentant.

"Oh!" groaned Figgins. "Ow!"
"Grooh!" moaned Kerr. "I'm killed!"

"Oh, scissors!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "You silly asses! Why didn't you hold him?"

The crowd in the gateway shrieked as the three New House juniors sat up in the dust and glared at one another.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry, almost weeping. "This is as good as a circus! Try again, Fatty! This is worth a guinea a box!"

"Ow!"

"Try, try, try again!" sang Lowther melodiously. "If at first you don't succeed—suck eggs. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Catch that beastly horse, somebody!" roared Fatty Wynn. "He's going!"

Tom Merry ran out of the gateway and caught the horse by the bridle.

"Bring him here," said Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Oh, you can't ride, Fatty," he said. "You had this gee-gee brought here to be ridden, didn't you?"

"Of course I did, you fathead!"

"Well, he won't be ridden, the way you're doing it. Better let me ride him, and then the money won't be wasted."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Manners and Lowther.

"You—you cheeky rotter!" howled Fatty Wynn, scrambling up. "Give me my horse!"

"Rot!" said Tom Merry. "You can do what you've been doing in the gym, on the parallel bars, you know. No

need of a horse for that kind of exercise. Good-bye!"

He vaulted lightly into the saddle. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, realising that the School House junior intended to raid their horse, made a desperate rush at him.

But they were too late. Tom Merry was in the saddle, and he gave the horse a touch with his heel, and the steed broke into a canter.

The School House junior turned in the saddle to kiss his hand to the New House fellows.

"He—he—he's taken my horse!" roared Fatty Wynn. "After him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors in the gateway rocked and shrieked with merriment. Figgins & Co. bolted down the road after the horse and its rider. They left the crowd behind them weeping with mirth. Tom Merry looked back, and kissed his hand again to the New House juniors as they panted after him.

"Stop, you beast!" roared Figgins.
"Stop, you rotter!" roared Kerr.

Wynn:

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" sang Tom Merry.

The New House juniors put on a desperate spurt. They ran as they had never run on the cinder-path. But Tom Merry was a good rider. He kept his steed just ahead of the panting trio, and they were labouring breathlessly behind when the village of Rylcombe came in sight.

As he passed the Green Man, at the entrance of the village, Tom Merry waved his hand to the dusty juniors behind, and urged the horse into a gallop, and disappeared into a winding lane beside the road. Figgins and Kerr panted on to the corner, and saw a cloud of dust in the distance, but the rider and the raided horse were gone.

Fatty Wynn mopped his streaming face with his handkerchief.

"The beast!" he gasped. "He's got my horse—my gee-gee! I'll slaughter him! I'll scalp him! I'll—"

"Come and have some ginger-pop," said Figgins. "We're close to Mother Murphy's, and I've got a five-bob postal-order to change. We'll look for that bounder as he comes back, and scalp him! Come on, Fatty. We can have some tarts, too!"

Fatty Wynn brightened up.

"Good egg!" he said heartily. "Now you're talking!"

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And the New House chums adjourned to the village tuckshop, where they discussed ginger-pop and jam tarts, till Figgins' five-shilling postal-order had vanished, and happy smiles were once more wreathing the plump countenance of the Faletaff of the New House.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Friends in Need.

"Hullo!" said Fatty Wynn. "What's the matter?"
"Shurrup! I've sighted him!"

"Oh, good!"
It was deep dusk now, and Figgins & Co., who had looked round the lanes and by-roads for Tom Merry for some time after leaving Mother Murphy's had almost made up their minds to return to St. Jim's without catching the raider.

"He's coming!" said Figgins.
"Good egg!" said Fatty Wynn. "We'll make him sorry he raided our gee-gee. For oarke, I don't want any malice for a lark, but we can't let the School House wasters have the grin of us. We'll frog's-march him back to St. Jim's, and give him a ducking, and then we'll call it square."

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr.
"Hist!" said Figgins.

"All serene! I'm histing."
Figgins peered through the dusk along the lane. A solitary lamp at the cross-roads shed light in the lane, and into the radius of light from the lamp came a figure. It was that of a boy in Etons, with a silk hat pushed back on his head, and his hands in his pockets.

The light fell upon the face of the new-comer. The face was strangely flushed, but Figgins & Co. were not likely to be mistaken in the well-known features of Tom Merry of St. Jim's.

"The bouncer's the winner of his hat," murmured Kerr. "He was wearing a cap when he went off on the gee-gee."

"Bought a new one, perhaps, as he came back through Rylecombe," said Figgins.

"Sure it's Tom Merry?" asked Fatty, who had not left his seat upon the stile. Figgins granted.

"I suppose I know Tom Merry!" he said.

"Well, it's getting dark—"
"The light's on his face from the lamp."

"We don't want to make a mistake," said Fatty Wynn. "It would surprise a stranger if we rushed him, and bumped him over. He might think it rude."

Kerr chuckled.
"It's Tom Merry, right enough," he said. "Looks as if he's been hurrying; his face is very red."

Figgins and Kerr stared hard at the approaching lad.

It struck them both at once, that there was something very peculiar in his aspect.

He had both hands in his pockets, and was swaying queerly from side to side as he came down the lane, as if he was not quite certain of his footing.

Once he seemed to fall, and caught himself just in time; staggered, and came on again with that peculiar swaying gait.

Figgins and Kerr exchanged a quick glance.

"Something's wrong with him!" muttered Kerr.

"He's ill," said Figgins.
Fatty Wynn slid off the stile.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked.

The new-comer was quite near now, and they could see his flushed face, and his eyes, which seemed to be glazed. He did not see them though they were in full

view. He came on unsteadily, his gaze fixed strangely ahead of him, as if he saw nothing.

"My hat!" murmured Fatty Wynn. All the fat Fourth-Former's hostility vanished at once, at the thought that the School House fellow was ill.

"May have had a fall from the horse," Figgins muttered.
"Let's speak to him," said Kerr.

Figgins called out:
"Tom Merry!"

He did not answer. He tramped on, swaying, and was about to pass the juniors, when Figgins stepped out into the road and caught him by the arm, stopped him.

The lad gazed at him dully.
"Let me go!" he murmured.
"What's the matter, kid?" asked Figgins kindly.

"Norrin'!"
"Aro you ill?"
"No!"

"Have you had a fall?"
"Fall! Who's had a fall? I can walk all right!" said the lad, and he glared at Figgins with sudden anger. "Get way! I don't know you!"

Figgins & Co. looked at one another in utter horror.

"There was no mistaking the junior's condition."

The flushed face, the glazed eyes, the uncertain movements, the swaying gait—all told the same tale.

He was the worse for drink!
And if Figgins & Co. could not believe their eyes, they could have believed their noses. There was a strong odour of spirits about the junior, and his breath, as he spoke, was laden with it.

"Good heavens!" said Figgins, in utter dismay.

They gazed at the junior, spellbound!
If it had been Levison or Mellich of the Fourth, or Crooke of the Shell, or Knox of the Sixth, they could have understood it. Though even the black sheep of St. Jim's would hardly have been reckless enough to appear upon a public road near the school in such a condition.

Figs was an offence that would have been followed by flogging and instant expulsion from the school, if discovered. And Tom Merry! Tom Merry of the Shell, the junior captain of the School House—the footballer, the athlete, the good chum they knew so well—it was incredible!

Figgins stared into the flushed face before him.

If he had not known the handsome features, the curly hair, the blue eyes, so well, he could never have believed that it was Tom Merry.

But there was no doubt possible.

"Good heavens!" echoed Kerr. "He's—he's drunk!"

"Oh, ermbbs!" said Fatty Wynn. "Tom Merry—squiffy!"

"Somebody must have been larking with him!" said Figgins. "Putting something into his ginger-beer, or something—I've heard of tricks like that."

"Must be something like that," said Kerr.

The junior shook himself free from Figgins.

"Gerraway!" he muttered thickly.

"I say, kid—don't you know me?" said Figgins anxiously. "You know me—Figgys?"

"I don't know you!"
"He can't recognise us!" said Kerr.

"I dunno you!"
"Well, give your old pals," said Figgins.

"We'll stick to you, and see you through this, old son. Lean on me! My hat! Suppose anybody should pass and see him?"

"It would mean the sack!" said Kerr.

"Gerraway!" said the junior angrily.

"Wharrer you takin' hold of me for? Geraway, can't you? Lemme alone!"

"Look here, kid—"
"I'll puncher' head!" muttered the other. "I'll Lemme alone! Who says I'm squiffy?"

"No, no; only a bit tired!" said Figgins coaxingly. "For goodness' sake come out of the road! Somebody might pass and see you, you know!"

"Don't care!"
"But we care for you, old son!" said Figgins.

"You're not going to be sackered if I can help it! Take his other arm, Kerr, and we'll get him over the stile, into the footpath. He won't be seen there if anybody passes."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

They led the incapable junior to the stile, and lifted him over. He did not resist. He seemed too far gone for that.

Figgins & Co. were almost sick with dismay and horror. There was no thought of House rivalry now.

They only remembered that they were St. Jim's fellows, with a St. Jim's fellow to save from disgrace and ruin. For though Figgins suggested—and hoped—that the junior might be the victim of some trick, he could hardly believe so.

He was intoxicated; and that was all there was about it.

The New House juniors felt relieved when they had the helpless lad on the right side of the stile. He was safe from observation there, at all events. Kerr picked up his hat, which had fallen off, and put it on the junior's head.

Suddenly he detached himself from the stile, and started down the footpath into the dark wood.

Figgins caught hold of his shoulder to stop him.

The next moment he uttered a cry and reeled back, as he received a blow full on the face.

The intoxicated junior staggered on, and disappeared into the shadows.

"Kerr! Fatty Wynn caught Figgins as he reeled back.

"The rotter!" exclaimed Kerr wrathfully.

Figgins dabbed his nose. His fingers came away red. The blow had brought a rush of water to the junior's eyes.

"The spiteful beast!" said Fatty Wynn.

It would serve him right to leave him alone, to look after himself!

"He doesn't know what he's doing!" said Figgins quietly. "He doesn't even recognise us. We must look after him, you chaps!"

"Oh, all right!"
Figgins, holding his handkerchief to his nose, ran down the footpath after the intoxicated junior. The darkness was thick under the trees.

"Tom Merry!" he called out.

There was no reply. The juniors heard a crashing in the bushes farther down the path, but when they reached the spot there was no further sound. And the junior they were looking for had disappeared.

"He's gone into the wood!" said Kerr.

"Tom Merry!" shouted Figgins.

"Tom Merry! Speak up, old man! We want to look after you! I don't mind that dab on the nose! Where are you, old fellow?"

Only the echo of his voice replied.

"We've got to find him!" said Figgins desperately.

"Not much chance of that," said Kerr. "I expect he's curled up the thickets somewhere, and gone to sleep."

"Let's look for him!"
"Right-ho!"

The New House juniors plunged into the thickets and searched for the fellow who had vanished from their sight. But the darkness was thick there, under the heavy trees, and there was no sound to guide them.

It was like searching for the proverbial

needle in a bundle of hay. They might have passed within a couple of feet of the junior without seeing him. They were in danger, indeed, of losing one another in the darkness. Figgins came back to the path at last, and shouted to his chums.

Kerr and Wynn came out of the wood and joined him.

"Seen him?" asked Kerr.

"No! And you—"
 "Not a sign of him. I fancy he's gone to sleep. It won't hurt him," said Kerr. "The ground's dry enough; and when he comes to he'll find his way back to St. Jim's."

"I suppose we can't do any more?" said Figgins miserably.

"Nothing!"
 "Let's get back!"
 And the chums of the New House, giving up the search, turned their steps in the direction of St. Jim's, with clouded faces.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Figgins' Warning!

"MERRY!"

No answer!
 "Tom Merry!" repeated Mr. Raitlon, who was taking call-over in the School House.

But Tom Merry's name was not replied to. Mr. Raitlon, the Housemaster of the School House, glanced over to the banks of the Shell.

"Is Merry not there?" he asked.
 "No, sir," said Monty Lowther. "He went out for a ride after school, sir, and he hasn't come in. I suppose he's been delayed getting back, sir."

"Very well, Lowther!"
 Mr. Raitlon marked down Tom Merry's name as absent, and the calling-over finished.

Monty Lowther and Manners left together, after calling-over, and stopped in the passage, looking out into the dusky quadrangle. It was a clear night, and the stars were twinkling in deep blue heavens over the old school.

"Where on earth has that bouncer got to?" said Monty Lowther, when they had waited at the door for about half an hour, and there was no sign of their chum. "Has that blessed gee-gee bolted with him?"

"Here he is!" said Manners.
 But it was not Tom Merry.

It was Figgins of the Fourth who came into the light of the doorway.

Lowther and Manners looked at the New House junior inquiringly. Figgins was looking pale and worried.

"Hallo!" grunted Lowther. "What do you want on the respectable side of the quad, you New House bouncer?"

"Looking for a thick ear!" suggested Manners.

"May as well bump him, to pass away the time while we're waiting for Tommy!" said Monty Lowther, as if struck by a brilliant idea.

"Pax!" said Figgins quietly. "I haven't come over for a rag, you fellows. Has Tom Merry come in yet?"

"No!"
 "He missed call-over, then?"

"Of course he did! Haven't you seen anything of your gee-gee, grinned Lowther. "How far did you follow him?"

But Figgins did not grin.

"I came over to speak to you fellows," he said. "It's serious—and it's about Tom Merry. Better get up to the study!"

Lowther and Manners stayed at him.

"Nothing's happened to him—no accident!" asked Lowther breathlessly.

"Let's get up to the study!" said Figgins evasively.

Lowther grasped him by the arm.

"Is Tom Merry hurt?" he demanded sharply.

"No. It isn't that!"
 "Oh, all right, then! Come on!"

Manners and Lowther led the way to the study in the Shell. Figgins followed them without a word; and he did not speak when they were in the study, with the door closed. He seemed to be seeking for words.

"What's the matter?" asked Manners. "Why don't you speak?"

"It's horribly serious!" said Figgins. "We—we waited about Rylcombe to catch Tom Merry, if we could, as he came back from the ride. We meant to scrag him for raiding Fatty's horse. Well, we met him in the lane!"

"Then you've seen him!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yes."
 "Well," said Lowther and Manners together, "why don't you get on? Did you have a row?"

"No. He was drunk!" said Figgins, getting it out at last.

"The Shell fellows jumped."

"Tom Merry! Drunk! What on earth

"You must have been mistaken!" said Lowther. "Perhaps it wasn't Tom Merry at all—you may have mistaken somebody else for him!"

"I'm not likely to do that!"
 "But—but—"

"We got him over the stile into the footpath, to keep him out of sight, in case anybody should pass and see him. You know what it would mean if it were known here. He punched my nose, and bolted into the wood, and we lost him. We had to come back without him."

"He must have been fooling you!" said Lowther incredulously. "He was pulling your leg?"

"He smelt of spirits like a tap-room!"

"It's all rot!" said Lowther incessantly. Figgins flushed.

"I don't mean I doubt your word, Figgys!" said Lowther. "But it must be a mistake. It can't have been Tom Merry—equally!"

"It was Tom Merry, and he was equilly!"

"Oh, rot!"



Fatty Wynne, with a grip on the saddle and a grip on the mane, heaved himself up; but Figgins and Kerr were shoving the horse so hard that Fatty overshot the saddle, and rolled head first on top of his chums. "Oh, crumbs!" gasped Kerr. "Yerooh!" roared Figgins.

do you mean?" demanded Lowther angrily.

"I mean what I say!" said Figgins quietly. "It was a shock to us, I can tell you. He had been drinking, and he couldn't walk straight!"

"Rot!"
 "Why hasn't he come back?" said Figgins quietly.

"I suppose he's been delayed."

"Look here!" said Figgins. "I'm not telling you this to score over you. Goodness knows I'd give anything if it wasn't true! But it is true. Kerr and Wynn were with me. He was so drunk he could hardly walk. It may have been a trick—he may have had the stuff planted on him somehow. I don't know. I hope so. But he was so far gone that he didn't know me—he said so!"

Lowther and Manners stared at Figgins blankly. The troubled, worried face of the New House junior was proof enough of his sincerity. It was evidently not a "rag."

"You must be dreaming!" said Manners, at last.

"I thought I'd warn you fellows, so that you can look for him as he comes in," said Figgins quietly. "Goodness knows what state he will come back in! If he's still equilly, you must smuggle him into the dorm quietly—make out he's ill, or something. If the prefects see him it will be all up!"

"I can't believe it!" said Manners.

"I—"

Manners broke off suddenly, and tore open the study door. Mellish of the Fourth almost fell into the study.

Manners kicked the sprawling junior, his face flaming with anger, and Mellish roared.

"You cad!" shouted Manners. "You've been listening!"

"Oh!" roared Mellish. "Oh!"

He squirmed out of the doorway into the passage, and picked himself up, and fled. Manners slammed the door.

"It will be all over the House now!" he said hopelessly.

"And it's all rot!" said Lowther savagely. "I suppose you mean well,

Figgins, but you're talking rot, and I know it!"

"Very well," said Figgins. "I've told you, so that you can do your best for Tom Merry. If I were in this House, I'd look after him like a shot. It's up to you fellows to see that he doesn't get into trouble. That's all!"

And Figgins quitted the study.

Manners and Lowther looked at one another grimly.

"It can't be true!" said Manners. Lowther shook his head.

"It's some rotten mistake, of course!" he said.

Of course. All the same? said Manners hesitatingly, "I—I think we may as well get down to the gate, and wait for him there. Figgie believed what he said. Of course, it's a ghastly mistake; but yet—"

"Come on!" said Lowther shortly. The two Shell fellows went downstairs, and slipped out into the quadrangle.

They made their way to the gates, and had not been there for more than ten minutes before a small crowd of juniors approached them.

"What do you want here?" demanded Lowther angrily.

"We've heard a yarn about Tom Merry," said Gore.

"Well, what's it got to do with you?" growled Lowther.

"Is it true, then?" asked Gore, with a stare.

"Of course it isn't, fathead!"

"Mellish said Figgins said—"

"Blow what Mellish said," Figgins said. "You are like a tattling old market-woman! He said that she said that he said that she said—rats!"

"Well, I think there ought to be some witnesses when Tom Merry comes in," remarked Crooke.

"If he's sober, we'll bear witness to it, and prove that there's nothing in the yarn. It's for Tom Merry's benefit to have us here."

"Yes, you've come for Tom Merry's benefit, I'm sure of that!" said Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"Well, we're stopping here, anyway," said Crooke. "We've got Kildare's leave to be out of the House, and we're going to see it through!"

"Yes, rather!" said Levison.

Manners and Lowther turned their backs upon them.

"We shall have the whole blessed school here soon," said Lowther savagely, "and then the prefects will want to know what it's about, and they'll come on the scene."

"Well, what does it matter, if Tom Merry's not squify?" chuckled Crooke, who overheard the remark. "Blessed if I don't think you believe he is, Lowther!"

"B-r-r-r!" said Lowther.

There was a step in the road at last, and a ring at the bell. The figure of a junior came into the light outside the gate. It was Tom Merry at last!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Very Curious Reception.

TOM MERRY rang the bell, and waited. He did not see the crowd within the gate in the gloom.

Taggles, the porter, came growling out of his lodge, with his keys in hand. Taggles did not like being disturbed by junior boys who overstayed at their time. The school porter stared at the crowd of waiting juniors in surprise.

"It's all right, Taggy!" said Levison. "We're waiting for Tom Merry. He may want some help back to the House, and we'll going to lend him a hand."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles unlocked the gate.

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"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he caught sight of the juniors.

"Hallo!" grinned Levison. "Catch him, Manners! Hold him up, Lowther! He'll be over in a minute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry stared at Levison. The captain of the Shell was looking very red and flushed, and out of breath. He looked as if he had been running, but some of the juniors chose to attribute the flush in his cheeks to another cause.

"Squify, right enough," said Crooke.

"Horrible example to us bad boys!" said Levison. "What shall we do for a shining light now?"

"He, ha, ha!"

"What on earth are you silly asses gassing about?" demanded Tom Merry. "Is it a joke?"

"Jolly serious joke for you if the prefects drop on you," said Crooke with a chuck. "Get him into the house quick, you fellows. I saw Knox in the quad, as we came out, and he'll be down on him like a ton of bricks."

"Yes, rather!"

"Have you all gone dotty?" asked Tom Merry. "What's the matter?"

Manners and Lowther were looking at him queerly. They drew up on either side of him, to walk back to the School House with him. But Levison & Co. did not intend that the captain of the Shell should get into the House quietly. The scandal was too rich to be allowed to die away if they could help it. "Squify" or not, they intended that Tom Merry should be shown up, as they called it.

"Help him," exclaimed Levison.

"Let's get him into the House. Lend a hand, all of you."

"Come on!" exclaimed Mellish.

There was a rush for Tom Merry.

"Hands off!" shouted the Shell fellow.

"What are you up to? I don't want any help."

He shoved Levison back roughly.

"He's quarrelsome drunk," said Levison. "There are several sorts of drunk—talking-drunk, and friendly-drunk, and quarrelsome-drunk. That's Tom Merry's sort. But we're going to stand by him."

"Drunk?" repeated Tom Merry.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, come, don't play the innocent!" urged Levison. "We know all about it; Figgins saw you on the road, reeling and staggering."

"Figgins!"

"Yes, you were so tight you didn't know him," chuckled Mellish.

Tom Merry took a step towards Mellish, and his right arm shot out. His fist crashed in Mellish's face, and the cad of the Fourth dropped as if he had been shot.

Tom Merry's eyes blazed at the juniors.

"Anybody else want the same?" he demanded. "If that's a joke, I don't like that kind of joke. Jokes of that sort are barred."

"Oh!" groaned Mellish, on the ground. "Ow! Collar him, you chaps! He's fighting drunk—he'll do some damage if he's not collared."

"Hold him!" shouted Crooke.

"Stand back, you rotters!" exclaimed Lowther.

But they did not stand back. Five or six fellows caught hold of Tom Merry, and he hit out angrily. Lowther and Manners backed him up, and in a moment there was a wild and whirling combat going on. The Terrible Three were victorious. They stood shoulder to shoulder, and fought their way through, and marched on to the School House, leaving four or five combatants gasping on the ground.

Levison picked himself up, with his hand to his eye. He blinked out of the other eye, and groaned.

"Ow! Ow! I shall have a black eye in the morning! Ow!"

"Grooh!" groaned Mellish. "My nose is swelling! Yow—I'm hurt!"

"I believe my teeth are loose!" said Crooke savagely.

"I've got a black eye," said Gore.

"The beast was drunk; there's no doubt about that. Drunk as a fiddler!"

"Bosh!" said Reilly of the Fourth. "He was wild at being called squify, and it serves you right if you've got hurt, ye spalpeen."

"He was all right," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "And if he hadn't given you a black eye, Gore, I'd have given you a thick ear."

Gore ground his teeth.

"You all saw that he was squify, and he came home fighting and quarrelling," he said. "Figgins was telling the truth."

"I don't believe Figgins said anything of the sort," said Kangaroo.

"Mellish heard him."

"We all know Mellish," said the Corn-stalk junior, with a curl of the lip. "I follow you'd listen at a door would tell lies about what he heard!"

"It's true," growled Mellish.

"Rats!"

And the juniors followed the Terrible Three to the House, warmly discussing the question as to whether Tom Merry was or was not "squify." Whether his outbreak of temper was due to drink, or to a natural anger at an insulting accusation, was a question every fellow had to answer for himself, and the way they answered it depended upon their feelings towards Tom Merry.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Tom Merry's Surprise.

MEANWHILE, the Terrible Three had reached the School House, and Manners and Lowther hurried Tom Merry upstairs, their arms linked in his. Tom attempted to stop on the stairs.

"I'd better report myself to Mr. Railton," he said. "He won't know I've come in."

"I'll tell him," said Lowther hurriedly.

"Come on to the dorm."

"The dorm," repeated Tom Merry in surprise, giving way as his chums hurried him up the stairs. "Why not the study? I'm hungry."

"I'll get you something in the dorm."

"But what—" Tom Merry attempted to stop on the second flight of stairs, but his chums rushed him on.

"Come on!" said Manners.

And they took him into the Shell dormitory. Manners turned the light on, and then they looked at Tom Merry's flushed and wondering face. They looked at him hard and doubtfully. Tom Merry met their gaze with wonder and rising exasperation.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked.

"You're all right?" asked Lowther doubtfully.

"All right? Of course I'm all right! What do you mean?"

"There isn't any niff of spirits, anyway," said Manners. "Figgins was mistaken in that, Lowther."

"What makes you so red?" asked Lowther.

"I've been running. I ran all the way from Rylcombe," said Tom Merry. "I was jolly late!"

"Where have you been?"

Tom Merry's frowning face broke into a smile.

"I had a regular scamper on Fatty Wynn's gee-gee," he said. "I took him round Wayland Moor, and right over past Abbotford. Then he fell lame. Of course, I hadn't foreseen that. I had to walk back leading him. I couldn't ride the poor beast when he was lame. I took

him back to the stable—I knew where Fatty had hired him—and then I ran back all the way to St. Jim's. I'm pretty fagged, I can tell you, and as hungry as a hunter!"

"You didn't meet Figgins & Co.?"

"No. I lost sight of them near Rylcombe, soon after I started. I gave them a good down the lane after me," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"And you didn't see them afterwards?"

"No. They've come in, surely!" said Tom Merry. "I had an idea that they would wait about to catch me coming back; but they wouldn't wait all this time."

"They came in long ago," said Lowther, "and Figgins came over to see us. He said—" Monty Lowther paused.

Tom Merry started.

"You don't mean to say that Figgins really said what those cads were saying at the gate!" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"That I was—was—"

"Squiffy!"

"Figgins said so?" muttered Tom Merry dazedly. "Figgins! But Figgins isn't a cad—he must have been dreaming! He said he met me?"

"Yes, and that you were so tipsy, you didn't know him!"

"He's drunk!" Tom Merry's face flushed with anger. "But doty, or not, he's not going to tell a yarn like that about me! I'll go over to the New House—"

"Hold on!" said Lowther, catching Tom Merry by the shoulder, as he swung towards the door. "You can't go over to the New House now, it's too late!"

"But if Figgins said—"

"He believed it," said Lowther. "I told him there must be some mistake, but he believed what he said."

"And you believed it, too?" demanded Tom Merry, indignantly. "Is that what you call sticking to a pal?"

Manners and Lowther flushed uncomfortably.

"We didn't believe it," said Lowther hastily. "If it had been any fellow but Figgins who said so, we—we shouldn't have taken any notice. But, you know, Figgins isn't a liar, and he believed it—he came over to warn us to look after you, so that you wouldn't be caught by a prefect. He meant well."

"And you came down to the gates to carry me up to the dormitory?" said Tom Merry sarcastically. "Thanks! If I ever come home tipsy, I shall know that I can rely on you, now?"

"We thought it best—"

"I suppose it would have been best, if I'd been that kind of chap," said Tom. "But I think you might wait a bit before you treat me as a disgraceful blackguard!"

"Well, you see—" stammered Lowther. "If there'd been anything in it—"

"Oh, rot! You ought to have known there was nothing in it. Do you think I'd believe a tale like that about you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"If it had been anybody but Figgins—"

"Oh, blow Figgins! I'll jolly well talk to him in the morning about this!" said Tom Merry wrathfully. "I understand now what that crowd was there for. And they'll say that the yarn was true, as I knocked Mellish down. Figgins must be doty. He was always a silly ass, but he seems to be quite doty now."

"But he said he'd met you on the road—"

"I was miles away from the Rylcombe road, until half an hour ago," said Tom Merry.

"Then it's impossible!"

"Of course it's impossible, fathead!"

"But—but—but he said Kerr and Wynn went with him—and they helped you over the stile, and—and you bolted into the wood—"

"Are they all gone mad?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in utter amazement. "Do you mean to say that Kerr and Wynn told the same tale?"

"We haven't seen them, but Figgins says so."

"They can't all be mistaken," said Tom Merry, setting his lips. "Figgins may have dreamed it, but three of them couldn't dream it. If the three of them told the same story, there's only one explanation—and that is that it's a plot, and we've been mistaken in them. It's a rotten plot that Levison or Mellish might have thought of; but we'd never have believed it of Figgins and Kerr and Wynn! But it's all lies from beginning to end. I didn't meet Figgins—I didn't meet Kerr—and I didn't meet Wynn! They didn't help me into the wood, and I haven't been in the wood to-day at all! That's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's plain enough," said Lowther, with a short laugh. "I don't understand it, that's all!"

"You believe me, I suppose?" snapped Tom Merry.

The usually sunny temper of the Shell fellow seemed to be failing him now.

"Of course I believe you," said Lowther, also sharply. "But what I mean is, I can't believe that Figgins and Kerr and Wynn would make up a scandal about a fellow. It's altogether 'too thick!'"

"It seems a bit too steep," said Manners, with a shake of the head.

"Either Figgins or I must be speaking falsely," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "There's no two ways about it. He says something happened, and I say it didn't happen!"

"I give it up," said Lowther. "Come down and have some supper. Blake asked us to supper in No. 6. There may be something left."

"I'll see Figgins first thing in the morning," said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "There's got to be an explanation of this."

"Let it rest till then."

Tom Merry nodded, and the chums of the Shell quitted the dormitory. Tom Merry's face was pale now with anger; and Manners and Lowther were lost in amazement. They could not but believe Tom Merry's categorical denial.

It was impossible to doubt their chum's word. But to believe that three fellows like Figgins & Co. had deliberately made up a wretched tale about their chum—was too staggering. Figgins and Kerr and Wynn were the deadly rivals of the School House fellows, but they were open and honest as the day—the very last fellows in the world to invent or to repeat anything in the shape of scandal.

Lowther and Manners simply did not know what to think. It was a dilemma from which there seemed to be no escape.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Before the Head.

TOM MERRY was just on his way to the New House the following morning, when he came face to face with Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"The Head wants to see you at once in his study," announced Kildare. "But I think you might wait a bit before anything the matter?"

"It's about that yarn about you."

"Tom Merry bit his lip.

"So that's got to the Head?" he asked.

"Yes. One of the prefects has reported it to him. As a matter of fact, Merry, the matter ought to be looked

into and cleared up," said Kildare.

"You're to go to the Head's study."

"All right," said Tom Merry shortly.

Tom Merry walked away to the Head's study, and tapped at the door. The pleasant voice of the Head of St. Jim's bade him enter.

The captain of the Shell entered the study with a firm step, and with his head proudly erect.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, and Mr. Linton, Tom Merry's Form-master, were in the study, evidently in consultation with the Head. All three of the masters looked at the Shell fellow as he came in.

Dr. Holmes coughed.

"You know why I have sent for you, Merry?" he asked.

"Kildare told me, sir."

"There is a most unpleasant story going about the school concerning you," said Dr. Holmes. "It has come to my knowledge now. It appears that you are accused of having been seen under the influence of drink. I need not say that if such a charge were proved, you would be instantly expelled from the school."

"I should deserve it, sir, if it were true," said Tom Merry quietly.

"That is a very proper answer," said the Head. "I cannot believe that it is true. These gentlemen share my opinion."

"Certainly I should not believe such a thing without the clearest proof," said Mr. Railton at once.

"I may say the same," said Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. "My knowledge now, so far as I have observed, they are not of that kind. You must understand, Merry, that it is in your own interests that this matter should be investigated and cleared up."

"I understand that, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Are you aware of how this story was started?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir. Some New House boys said they had seen me staggering along Rylcombe Lane on Monday evening," said Tom Merry, flushing. "It was not true. I was not there."

The Head pursed his lips.

"You deny the accusation, of course?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Who were the boys who state that they saw you?"

"Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn."

"Dear me!" said the Head, in surprise. "This is extraordinary! Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are not the kind of boys to bring a false accusation against anyone."

"They must have done so in this case, sir."

"It must be a mistake of some sort," said Mr. Railton. "I cannot believe that those three boys would utter deliberate untruths."

Tom Merry was silent.

"Do you think it is a mistake, Merry?" asked the Head.

"I don't know, sir. I would never have thought that those three chaps would have lied. I always believed them to be straight. But I certainly wasn't where they said they saw me."

"Where were you?"

"Coming home from Abbot'sford at the time they mentioned."

And Tom Merry explained the incident of the horse falling lame. The Head and the two masters listened attentively, their keen gaze upon Tom Merry's face. Keen as their gaze was, it could discover nothing but sincerity in the face of the Shell fellow.

"It is extraordinary!" said the Head at last. "So Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are the only boys who have made any accusation of this sort, Merry?"

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"Yes, sir."
The three masters were looking very grave now.

"This is a most unpleasant matter, Merry," said Dr. Holmes. "You are accused of disgraceful conduct, and the evidence against you rests upon the word of three boys—three boys who have the best characters, and whom I firmly believe to be incapable of falsehood."
"I know it looks bad, sir."

"It looks so bad, Merry, that if I did not have the highest opinion of you, I should have no hesitation in condemning you to be expelled on such evidence," said Dr. Holmes.

Tom Merry's face paled.
"I hope you won't do that, sir," he faltered. "I repeat that there isn't a word of truth in it all."

"I can only let the matter stand over for further investigation," said the Head. "I should be very sorry to have to believe that you have been deceiving us, Merry."

"I have not been deceiving you, sir."
"I hope not," said the Head. "I trust not, Merry. You may go now, and I will consider what is to be done."
"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry left the study. The three masters looked at one another with grave faces when the juniors were gone.

"This is worse than I thought," the Head said.

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Railton. "The evidence is clear enough to condemn anyone, yet I cannot quite believe such a thing of Merry of the Shell."

"There must be an investigation," said Mr. Linton. "And if there is some boy who resembles Merry, and who is in the habit of disgraceful indulgence, I suppose the fact can be ascertained and proved."
"The boy's whole future is at stake, and we cannot be too careful," said the Head.

And Mr. Railton and the master of the Shell assented.

Tom Merry's face was darkly clouded as he rejoined his chums in the quadrangle. Manners and Lowther were waiting for him with their bicycles.

"Well, what has his nibs got to say?" asked Monly Lowther, thus disrespectfully alluding to the reverend Head of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.
"He's heard the yarn, and he more than half believes it," he replied. "He's giving me a chance because I've got a good character, that's all; otherwise, I should be sacked without further trouble."

Lowther whistled.
"That's jolly serious, Tommy! I wish we could get to the bottom of it!"
Tom Merry did not reply. He mounted his bicycle, and the Terrible Three peddled away from St. Jim's in the bright autumn sunshine.

It was a glorious afternoon, and under any other circumstances the chums of the Shell would have enjoyed their spin immensely. But they were not in a mood for enjoyment now. The scandal in the school was weighing too heavily upon their spirits.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. A Surprise for Cousin Ethel.

COUSIN ETHEL stepped from the train at Rylcombe Station.
The girl's face was very bright and cheerful, and looked very charming under her pretty hair.
If Study No. 6 had known that Ethel was coming by train, and by what train, there would have been an escort waiting for her at the station. But they had not.

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known, and so there were no St. Jim's juniors on the platform.

Cousin Ethel left the station, and glanced round the quaint old High Street. The ancient lark was waiting outside the station; but Cousin Ethel was young and strong, and a good walker. She started to walk to the school.

Just outside the village where the lane began stood the Green Man Inn. On the gate at the side entrance, a junior in Etons and a silk hat was sitting. He glanced at Cousin Ethel as she passed, evidently attracted by the bright face and graceful looks of D'Arcy's cousin. Cousin Ethel caught sight of him, and stopped with a smile.

She had recognised Tom Merry.
The girl was a little surprised that he did not raise his hat. Tom Merry of St. Jim's, though he was not so punctilious as D'Arcy of the Fourth, was never known to neglect any act of politeness or good manners. The boy on the gate stared at Cousin Ethel as she stopped, with a smile on her face.

"Good-afternoon!" said Cousin Ethel cheerfully.

The junior stared harder.
"Good-afternoon!" he replied.

Ethel looked at him rather quickly. His voice was pleasant enough, but it did not have the tone in it she was accustomed to in Tom Merry's voice.

"Did you know I was coming?" asked Ethel.

The boy shook his head.
"I can't say I did," he replied; "but I'm jolly glad to see you, all the same. Which way are you going?"

"To the school, of course!" said Ethel, in surprise.

"Oh, to the school! May I have the pleasure of walking with you?"

"Why, of course, if you like!"
"Oh, good!"

The junior slipped off the gate, and fell in beside Cousin Ethel as she resumed her way. The girl was a little surprised. There was something very curious about him, as she could not help thinking.

Why had he not saluted her, and why had he stared at her as if she was a stranger? It was some time since she had visited Mrs. Holmes at St. Jim's; but it was hardly long enough for so old a friend as Tom Merry to have forgotten her.

"Staying down here?" he asked.
"Why, yes," said Ethel.

"Mrs. Holmes?"
"The Head's wife," said Ethel.

"Oh, yes, the Head of St. Jim's; I know! If you're staying down here for a few days, I suppose I shall see you again!" said the boy.

"Of course you will!" said Ethel.

"Oh, good!" said the junior, though he looked a little puzzled. "I shall be down here a few days longer myself."

Ethel glanced at him.
"Are you going away, then?" she asked.

"Yes, next week."
"You are leaving school?"

"I've left."
"Left!" said Ethel, in surprise.

He nodded.

"Yes. There was trouble with the headmaster, and I was hooped out," he said, laughing. "I cleared out—order of the boot, you know."

Ethel looked surprised and shocked.
"I am very sorry," she said.

"Oh, it's nothing! I was sick of the place, anyway!" he said. "I'm going to Eton now—at least, I hope so."

"Why don't you go home, if you have left school?" asked Ethel.

He laughed.
"I've been home, and a jolly row I got into over being sacked," he said. "You

should have seen them—regular family funeral-party. I couldn't stand it. I cleared out on my own to the Green Man, and I'm not going back till they've come round."

"You are staying at the Green Man?" exclaimed Ethel.

"Yes."
"Isn't it a very disreputable place?"

"I dare say. It suits me."

Ethel walked on in silence. She could not understand; indeed, her brain seemed to be in a whirl. Was this the Tom Merry she had known—this fellow who talked so lightly of having been compelled to leave school, evidently for some disgraceful conduct, and who was staying at the most disreputable place in that part of the county? She could guess the kind of time a boy would have at a place like the Green Man. She was shocked and hurt.

"I am very, very sorry," she said, breaking the silence at last.

He looked at her curiously.

"Nothing to be sorry about, that I can see," he remarked. "I'm having the time of my life, as a matter of fact. But I say, it's awfully jolly meeting you! I was getting rather sick for somebody to talk to. Jollife and old Griggs are all right for a game of nap or eucure, but they talk nothing but horses all the time, and a chat gets fed up—you see?"

"I can quite see that," said Ethel.

"Jolly lucky meeting you!" said the junior. "I don't see why we shouldn't be good friends—eh?"

"I hope we shall always be friends," said Ethel; "but I am very sorry that you are in disgrace. Couldn't you tell the Head you're sorry, and ask him to give you another chance? I'm sure he would."

He checked.

"Not much chance of that. You see, I was squally in school."

"You were—what?"
"Squiffy—tipsy, you know!"

Ethel made an involuntary gesture of disgust.

"So I had to leave," he explained.

"But I wasn't sorry—I'm having a good time now. I say, we can have some good times, if you'll come out and meet me. I suppose you'll be able to get out? Do you ride?"

"Yes," said Ethel.

"We can get some horses out from the livery-stables here, then," said the boy.

"I've got plenty of money."
"Indeed!"

"And there's a theatre over at Wayland," said the junior. "They've got a musical play there now; and I've been going to see it. Ripping thing, they say—regular scorcher!"

Ethel flushed.

"I should not care to see it!" she said.

"Oh, what rot!" said the junior.

"Look here, if they don't allow you to get out in the evening, it could be worked."

"I should be allowed to go out if I wanted to; but I shouldn't want to!" said Ethel.

He grinned.

"Oh, that's all spoof, you know! Look here, you could get out quickly, and I'd meet you at the corner of the place, with a cab, and we could bowl over to Wayland in next to no time. What do you say?"

"I should certainly not do anything of the sort!"

He stared at her.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"It would not be right, for one thing; and I don't want to, for another!"

"Wouldn't be right!" he repeated. "But you're not so particular as all that, I suppose!"

Ethel's face crimsoned.

"I don't understand you!" she said. "You—you had better not come with me any further!"

Ethel hurried on, almost running now, only anxious to get away from the fellow. She was shocked, puzzled, almost terrified. He scowled angrily, and ran after her and caught her by the arm, and forced her to stop. Ethel panted.

"Look here! What does this game mean?" he demanded. "You spoke to me, and led me on, and now you're pretending to come the goody-goody bizzney. I don't understand it, and I don't like it. See?"

"Let me go!"

"Stuff! Look here—"

There was a ring of bicycle bells round the corner of the road. It was like music to the ears of the frightened girl. She did not know who was coming, but whoever it was, he was coming in the nick of time.

"Help!" cried Ethel.

"Oh, cheese it!" growled the junior.

"Look here—"

"Help!"

Three cyclists came whizzing into sight round the bend in the lane.

"Halt!"

"Cousin Ethel!"

Three lads leaped down, letting the cycles go spinning where they would. Three pairs of hands grasped the boy who was holding Ethel's wrist; and he was

Ethel away, while I look after that beast!"

"Right-ho!" said Manners.

"Give him one for me!" said Monty Lowther.

The boy in the ditch was scrambling out, his face dark with rage. Fortunately for him, it had not been full of water. But there was enough water and mud in it to make him a scarry-looking object. His boots were caked with mud, and his trousers thick with it, and he was splashed all over.

"Don't go!" exclaimed Ethel. "Tom Merry! I—I— Look at that boy! Look at him!"

Tom Merry, surprised, fixed his eyes upon the boy. He started as he looked at him. The fellow's face seemed familiar, though Tom Merry did not know where he had seen it before. The clear-cut, handsome features—the blue eyes and curly hair—he knew them well!

"Great Scott!" shouted Monty Lowther, as he looked at the junior's face. "Great Christopher Columbus and Aunt Jemima! Look at him, Manners!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Manners, with a whistle. "That's the giddy-mystery, is it?"

"I—I seem to know him!" said Tom Merry. "I've seen his chivvy before, somewhere—"

"Well, you couldn't have had one and forgotten it, I suppose!" grinned Manners. "But that chap might be your twin!"

"I—I am so glad it wasn't you, Tom!" faltered Ethel. "I was surprised when he spoke as he did—I could not understand it—"

Tom Merry's brow darkened. "The rotter has insulted you!" he said. "Go on with Manners and Lowther—"

"No, no! I spoke to him first!" said Ethel, crimsoning. "Of course, I took him for you; but he did not know that; so—so he misunderstood, I suppose!"

"Still, he was a cad to—"

"Pile it on," said the junior, with a disagreeable grin. "If the young lady spoke to me by mistake, I'm willing to apologise; but, naturally, I thought she wanted me, or she wouldn't have spoken to a stranger. That's all."

"You are a rotten worm!" said Tom Merry.

"Thanks!"


"What's your name?" demanded Tom Merry. "You've been taken for me before—by several fellows who've seen you playing the rotten blackguard, and I've got into trouble over it. Who are you?"

The junior chuckled. "Well, I didn't know that!" he said. "My name's Reggie Clavering, if you

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wrenched away from her, and hurled into the ditch beside the road in the twinkling of an eye.

Ethel, with a gasp of relief, turned to her rescuers—and then she staggered—astounded! For she recognised them—Monty Lowther, Manners, and—Tom Merry!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Clearing Up of the Mystery.

"TOM MERRY!"

Cousin Ethel cried out the name in amazement.

"Tom Merry!"

The Shell fellow looked at her in surprise.

"Yes, here I am!" he said.

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes, Jolly glad we came along just then," said Tom Merry. "Was that cad annoying you?"

"Oh!" panted Ethel. "I—I have been mistaken, then! I am so glad! Tom Merry! It—it is really you! It seems like a dream! I Tom Merry!"

"You've been scared!" said Tom Merry, wondering at the girl's strange agitation. "By Jove! I'll make that cad suffer for it! You two fellows take

"In the looking-glass!" chuckled Lowther.

"What?"

"He's your giddy double!"

"My—my double!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes. Blessed if I should know one from the other, only your face is healthier to look at," said Manners. "That rotter looks as if he's had a good many late nights!"

"I—I thought it was you, Tom Merry, and spoke to him outside Rylcombe!" panted Cousin Ethel. "I—I never dreamed it was somebody else, though he spoke as you would never have spoken to me. I—I—"

Tom Merry stepped closer to the stranger. He scanned the scowling face with keen eyes. There was no doubt about it; the boy was Tom Merry's living image. No wonder his features had appeared familiar to the Shell fellow. It was in the looking-glass, as Lowther had said, that Tom Merry had seen that face before.

"Might be a giddy twin!" said Lowther. "Blessed if I knew you had any twins lying about loose, Tom Merry!"

"I haven't, that I know of," said Tom. "The chap certainly looks like me enough to be my brother, but I haven't any brothers."

want to know. And you can go and eat coke!"

The junior swung away. Monty Lowther grasped him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Hands off!" said Clavering angrily. "We're not done with you yet!"

grinned Lowther.

Ethel made a gesture of appeal.

"Lowther—don't—"

"He ought to be thrashed!" said Manners.

"No! No—"

"Well, let him go, then," said Tom Merry. "The cad isn't worth licking!"

"Hold on!" said Lowther. "It's explained now about Figgins and Kerr and Wynn making that mistake. But when we tell the yarn at St. Jim's, there will be a good many fellows jib at it—Levison & Co., you know, and some more. We're going to prove it!"

"But—how—"

"By taking this fellow to St. Jim's with us, and showing him to the fellows!" said Monty Lowther.

"My hat! That's a jolly good idea!" exclaimed Manners.

"I'm jolly well not coming with you!" growled Clavering. "Hands off!"

Lowther smiled sweetly. "You can walk, or you can be carried."

he said. "I don't want the trouble of carrying you, and if I have to do it, I sha'n't handle you gently. Tommy, my son, take Cousin Ethel on to the school, and we'll follow with our giddy friend who has the check to go about with the same set of features as a pal of ours. If he doesn't come quietly, I shall alter his features so much that there won't be any chance of a mistake again."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Right-ho!" he said.

And Tom Merry walked on with Cousin Ethel. Manners picked up the bicycles and wheeled them; and Monty Lowther, with an iron grip on the stranger's arm, forced him to walk towards the school.

Clavering resisted fiercely.

"I'm not coming, I tell you!" he shouted.

"Shove those bikes against a tree, Manners; you can fetch them afterwards," said Monty Lowther. "Lend me a hand now with this rotter!"

"Certainly!" said Manners.

Clavering struggled savagely, but he was swung off his feet. Manners took his shoulders, and Lowther his legs, and he was carried bodily in the direction of the school. And as he still resisted, he was bumped down once or twice upon the hard road. Then he left off resisting, and resigned himself to his fate.

Tom Merry and Cousin Ethel entered the gateway of St. Jim's.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were waiting there. Figgins, in spite of his black eye, did not mean to miss seeing Cousin Ethel, and Kerr and Wynn kept him company. The New House Co. raised their caps at once, and looked grimly enough at Tom Merry. But Tom Merry's face was bright and friendly now.

"It's all right, Figg!" he exclaimed.

"What?" said Figgins, as he shook hands with Cousin Ethel. "So glad to see you again, Ethel! What a jolly long time since you've been down here!"

"Hallo!" shouted Kerr. "What's that?"

Lowther and Manners came in with their burden.

Figgins & Co. stared at Clavering blankly.

"Tom Merry's double!" said Lowther blandly. "The chap you fellows met in the lane the other evening, and took for Tom Merry!"

"Great Scott!"

"Let me go!" howled Clavering.

"Not just yet, my pippin!" said Lowther. "You're on view, you know. Every chap at St. Jim's has got to see you before you're allowed to go loose again. Bring him in, Manners!"

"What-ho!" said Manners.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn stared blankly at the junior who so strangely resembled the captain of the Shell. They understood now. It was only too clear that Tom Merry had a double—and this was the fellow. And the New House chums understood the mistake they had made.

"I—I say, I'm awfully sorry, Tom Merry!" Figgins faltered. "I—I suppose that was the fellow we found squiffy in the lane—"

"And helped over the stile," said Kerr: "We thought it was you, Tom Merry."

said Fatty Wynn. "Blessed if I'd have dreamed there could be two fellows so like one another! I'm sorry!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm jolly glad it's cleared up, that's all! My hat! They're getting a crowd round now!"

Manners and Lowther had stopped before the School House with their victim.

Fellows were gathering round from all quarters to look at him, and to demand to know what it all meant.

The chums of Study No. 6 had seen Ethel from their study window, and they were coming out to meet her in the quad, when they spotted Clavering.

They stared at him blankly.

"'Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "What are you holding Tom Mewwy like that for, you fellows?"

"Tom Merry's over there with Cousin Ethel and Figgins!" said Lowther.

"What!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"My only hat!" yelled Blake. "Then he's got a double, and this is the giddy double! Who'd have thought it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come and look at him, Levison!"

shouted Lowther. "And you, Crooke, and Gore and Mellish! Bring those rotters over here; they're not going to have any excuse for pretending they don't believe it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Levison & Co. were pushed forward by the juniors, and forced to take a close survey of the scowling Clavering, and to admit that he was indeed Tom Merry's double. The news had spread far and wide by this time, and pretty nearly all St. Jim's had collected upon the spot.

There were exclamations of amazement on all sides, and of delight and relief from Tom Merry's friends. Kildare of the Sixth came off the cricket-field to see the stranger, and the roar of voices brought the Head of St. Jim's to his study window, and Mr. Railton and most of the other masters out into the quadrangle.

"Bless my soul! What is the cause of this extraordinary disturbance?" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, as he leaned out of the window and looked over the surging crowd in the quad.

"Show him to the Head!" shouted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Clavering was dragged forward under the Head's window.

"Bless my soul! Tom Merry——"

"It isn't Tom Merry, sir—here's Tom Merry!" called out Figgins.

"Bless my soul!" repeated the amazed Head.

"It's the chap who's been taken for Tom Merry, sir!" Monty Lowther explained. "Three silly duflers took him for Tom Merry on Monday evening——"

"Look here——" began Kerr.

"So we've brought him here to show all the fellows, sir, to show them what asses they've been!" said Monty Lowther.

The Head coughed, and then smiled.

"A very good idea, Lowther. Indeed, the resemblance is most remarkable—and I think I should have been deceived myself. Is this boy a relation of Merry's?"

"Not that we know of, sir. His name's Clavering."

The Head fixed his eyes upon the sullen-looking junior.

"Clavering," he said. "Your resemblance to a boy belonging to this school has caused a most unhappy mistake to be made. But it would not have mattered if you had been a decent and properly-behaved lad, like the boy whom you resemble outwardly. But your disgraceful and degraded conduct caused a great amount of trouble to Tom Merry; and, indeed, brought him within danger of being expelled from the school."

"This terrible injury which you have so nearly inflicted upon a stranger should be a warning to you. I trust you will reflect upon it, and mend your ways. As for you, Merry, you are of course cleared from every shred of suspicion; and I hope your schoolfellows who have misjudged you will express their regret."

"We've done that, sir!" shouted Figgins.

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"Let that boy go!" said the Head.

"My lads, I am very glad that this matter has been cleared up so satisfactorily."

And Dr. Holmes, looking very relieved, turned back into his study.

The juniors roared Clavering, that unpopular youth made his way out of the school gates, and disappeared. He was not seen in Rycombe or near St. Jim's again.

In spite of the "good time," which, according to his own words, he was having at the delectable hostelry of the Green Man, he had apparently had enough of the neighbourhood of St. Jim's.

He left—probably going back to his home—but wherever he went, the chums of St. Jim's were glad enough that he had gone.

Tom Merry was surrounded by a cheering crowd after his double had slunk away.

Tom's eyes were very bright, and his face very cheerful, as he walked into the School House with Cousin Ethel, surrounded by his friends. He had cause to be cheerful, for his name had been cleared at last; he was no longer a Schoolboy Suspect!

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER. Something Modern.

"THERE'S something in the wind!" Jimmy Silver uttered the sentiment in the end study of the Classical Fourth Form passage.

Lovell nodded.

"Correct, my son," he said.

"I happened to hear something in the quad, which I wasn't supposed to," Jimmy proceeded. "Tommy Dodd & Co. were hatching a dark scheme against us. It's got something to do with 'stinks.'"

Lovell, Raby and Newcome, the remaining members of the Fistical Four, looked interested. Being Classics they despised—or affected to despise—everything which the Moderns did. "Stinks"—or chemistry, to give it its proper name—received their special scorn.

Nevertheless, they realised that their rivals on the Modern side, Tommy Dodd & Co., were foemen worthy of their steel, and not to be despised at any time. If "stinks" was entering into the question, something had got to be done.

"I didn't hear much," said Jimmy.

"I wasn't trying to do any eavesdropping. But Manders has been showing them some new stuff which creates a horrible niff, and Tommy Dodd & Co. are going to rig us up a booby-trap with it."

"M-my hat!" gasped Lovell.

Raby looked serious. He had a horrible aversion for chemicals.

"We'll have to watch out for this," he said. "You can never get rid of that sort of stuff. We should niff like polecats for the rest of our natural."

"Exactly!" said Jimmy Silver.

"They're always pulling our legs, and saying we're not clean because this part of the school is so old. It would be a standing joke for ever."

"Of course—" bugged Lovell.

Raby uttered a warning sound.

"Hist!" he said.

He was standing by the window which overlooked the quadrangle.

"The enemy approaches," he said.

"Tommy Dodd & Co. are coming across, and I just saw Doyle shove something under his jacket."

"Then we'll give them a warm reception," said Lovell readily.

"Just a minute," said Jimmy Silver, with a twinkle in his eye. "We don't want that stuff messed about in the passage. Why not capture it, and use it ourselves?"

"Wha-n-a-at!"



The brown-paper parcel flew through the air, and smote Tommy Dodd's face. And as it did so it broke, and a mass of lanky paper and gummy rags flattened themselves across the Modern Junior's features.

"If we nip into the box-room opposite," said Jimmy quietly, "they'll think we're all out, and rig it up. Then we can just take it down quietly and keep it for future occasions."

"We don't want their beastly 'stinks' muck," said Raby in great disdain. "Still, it will be a much better scheme if we get into the box-room and watch what they are going to do."

"Hear, hear!" said Newcome. "Come on, Lovell!"

The Fistical Four made their way to the box-room, and took up their station behind the half open door.

They did not have long to wait. Stealthy footsteps sounded down the passage, and then the whispering voices of Tommy Dodd & Co.

"I believe they're out," said Tommy Cook.

"Hush!" said Tommy Dodd.

The footsteps came nearer.

"You're right entirely," said Tommy Doyle a moment later. "Hoist me up carefully, and I'll fix this little lot ready for them."

"Heathen!" growled Lovell. "Fancy talking about 'stinks' like that!"

Tommy Dodd, blissfully ignorant of the presence of the enemy, chuckled quietly.

"They'll have the surprise of their sweet lives," he said. "This stuff will cling to them like—like—"

"Like the ivy on the old garden wall," said Tommy Cook with a chuckle. "We'll be able to scent them a mile off!"

"And they'll be placed in quarantine, for sure," said Doyle.

"Or Coventry!" added Dodd.

There was a pause in the conversation. Evidently the two Tommies were lifting the third Tommy so that he could put the booby-trap into position. Lovell peered cautiously round the door, and saw that this was so.

He turned back to the other three with a grin.

"The chance of a lifetime," he whispered. "Just listen!"

"Here!" said Jimmy Silver. "Where are you going?"

But Lovell had already gone. He could not resist the temptation.

Tommy Doyle had just placed the booby-trap in position as Lovell emerged from the box-room and crept across the passage.

His backs were towards him, and they certainly did not expect anything at all alarming to happen. But the next moment they received the shock of their lives.

Tommy Doyle was just preparing to descend to the ground when the other two Tommies felt a violent shove in the back. Quite unable to stop themselves, they fell against the door.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 263.

"Yaroooh!"

There was a shout of alarm from the unhappy representatives of the Moderns, and a roar of laughter from the ambushed juniors.

The booby-trap had fallen beautifully—and it had come home to roost. The precious package smashed across Tommy Doyle's head, and sent a shower of vile-smelling liquid over the two conspirators who were holding him up.

Tommy Dodd backed sharply, with the result that Tommy Doyle fell heavily to the ground.

"Groooogh!" he roared. "You silly asses have gone and spoiled the whole thing! Whew! Ain't it awful!"

"Someone shoved us!" howled Tommy Dodd. "M-n-my hat, ain't it vile! I'll stay you for this, Lovell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Lovell, promptly retreating into the box-room.

The three Tommies staggered away from the doorway. They were drenched in their own contrivance. And it was certainly vile stuff.

"It's those Classical oads!" shouted Tommy Doyle wrathfully, as he picked himself up. "Wherd' ar they? I'll sifficate to them! I'll anks mincement of them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed from behind the closed door of the box-room.

"Stay them!" hooted Cook. "They were watching all the time, My aunt! What a niff!"

There was a furious thudding at the box-room door, and then a sudden whisper, and it ceased.

"Go! Prefect!" hissed Tommy Dodd. Hurried steps sounded down the passages as the three Moderns fled. Jimmy Silver & Co. emerged from the box-room laughing; but they soon gripped their noses as they caught the odour from the wrecked booby-trap, which still lay on the floor.

"My hat!" said Jimmy. "It's the limit!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Presents.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. exchanged looks.

"We can't stick this for long," muttered Lovell. "Whew! Open the window, Jimmy!"

Jimmy did so. Raby, taking his courage in both hands, got a newspaper, and wrapped the remnants of the booby-trap in it. He heaved the whole lot out into the quadrangle.

"That's better," said Jimmy Silver. "If we leave the door open for a bit, I expect the smell will blow out in time. Those Modern bounders were decent enough to take most of it away on their hair!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four laughed heartily. The tables had been turned upon the "stinks" merchants with a vengeance.

"They'll have to wash for a week," said Newcome. "and then they'll stink!"

Jimmy Silver grinned suddenly.

"Look here, kids," he said. "it wouldn't be a bad idea to take 'em round a little present of scent, eh?"

"Scent? Eh?" ejaculated Lovell. "Where are we going to get it from?"

Scent was not one of the luxuries indulged in by the Fistical Four. They had better use for their money than that. But Jimmy Silver was not stupider yet.

"Smythe and his gang use brillianine, and all that sort of rot," he said. "Suppose we raid their studios, and collect up a few things that might be useful, then take 'em round."

"That's only helping 'em," objected Raby.

"Not at all," said Jimmy Silver. "Take 'em round, as a present from Smythe & Co. That'll be adding insult to injury."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 253.

"T'n. L'n. lu!"

The suggestion seemed quite good.

"Come on, then," said Lovell. "Townsend and Topham are out, I know. There's bound to be some stuff in their study."

The study in question was only a little way further down the passage. It was empty when the Fistical Four arrived.

"Here's the stuff!" said Newcome, pointing to the mantelpiece. "Three bottles of it."

The nuts of the Fourth had certainly fulfilled their part of the bargain. There were three varieties of brillianine waiting for the jingling juniors.

"Fetch 'em into the study," said Jimmy Silver. "I'll pop up to Smythe's study and collect up a few more."

He darted along the passage and made his way to the Shell passage. There was no reply to his tap on Smythe's door, and the junior entered. The study was deserted.

Jimmy Silver pounced across to a table at the side, and grinned. There were two bottles; and a couple of small jars. He caught them up without looking to see what they were, and made his way down again to the famous end study in the Fourth Form passage.

"What have you got?" asked Lovell.

"Essence of Arabia Berurmes," he grinned, looking at the first bottle.

"Breeze of the Western Hills' this one." "Eh?" ejaculated Lovell.

"That's a fancy name for brillianine," said Jimmy, looking at the bottle. "See, it says that it will master the most obstinate hair."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy drew out the two jars. They were both fancy varieties of face cream, recommended for delicate complexions.

"Just the ticket!" laughed Raby, as he examined them.

The three bottles which had been gleaned from Townsend and Topham were filled with similar perfumes. Their combined effect should certainly be enough to rid the unhappy Moderns of the after-effects of their booby-trap.

"Now for some luggage labels," said Jimmy, as he dived in a drawer. "Lend a hand, you kids. We'll fix one to each bottle."

He took up a pen and started printing.

"With the compliments of Townsend and Topham," he wrote.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell & Co. fell busy with pen and ink. The captures from the Shell study were adorned with the names of Smythe and Howard, and hints that Classical perfume might overcome Modern odours.

"This one ought to suit Tommy Dodd," chuckled Lovell, as he surveyed the last.

"It's 'Spicy Balm of Araby!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four roared as they surveyed their work.

The nuts of Rookwood had selected their toilet requirements with great care and taste; and they could not have been more hitingly, though unconsciously, sarcastic. It was easy to picture the wrath of Tommy Dodd & Co. when they discovered the present.

"I expect they'll be washing now," said Jimmy Silver, when they had got over their fit of laughter. "The study is bound to be clear. Shall we chance it?"

"Rather!"

Concealing the bottles in their pockets,

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the Fistical Four left the study, still with the door open, and went down the corridor. They crossed the wide landing, and entered the Modern side of Rookwood wearing particularly innocent expressions.

To their satisfaction they encountered no one who asked any awkward questions, and they reached their rivals' study safely.

Jimmy Silver knocked on the door. There was no answer.

The Fistical Four entered cautiously; in case an ambush had been prepared for them. But the study was deserted.

Only a vague, unpleasant smell hung on the air, to show that the luckless trio had been there recently.

The Fistical Four arranged their presents on the table with great taste. Lovell stepped back and surveyed them with a chuckle.

"The effect is beautiful," he said. "We've certainly upheld our reputations as Classics!" said Jimmy Silver. "When the Moderns get tainted with the choice odours of 'Stinks' we bring them the fair produce of the East—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver put the matter in a way which was not likely to appeal to the Modern juniors. But it was certain that they would see the point.

"Better clear," said Raby. "Those Modern oads may be coming back at any time now, and we shall give the show away if we're caught."

He made his way out into the passage and the others followed him.

The passage was still deserted. The Fistical Four, chortling to themselves, made their way along it, and back to their own part of the school. But as they drew near to their own study Jimmy Silver paused.

"Not going back there," he said firmly. "Give it a chance to clear!"

The chums turned and made their way out into the quad.

"I wonder what they'll do to Smythe & Co?" speculated Lovell, as they went.

"Something they'll remember, I hope," said Jimmy Silver.

There was no love lost between the heroes of the Fourth and the fops of Rookwood.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Arabic Perfumes!

TOMMY DODD & CO. made their way sorrowfully to their study.

They had just spent an energetic hour with the soap and water, trying to remove the result of their attempted jape on the Fistical Four.

Tommy Dodd's hand was on the door-handle. He entered, and then paused, flushing rather red.

"Look!" he ordered.

His chums followed him into the room and looked.

"M-n-my hat!" gasped Tommy Cook. There was a beautiful array of scent bottles on the table, and to each was affixed a luggage label. The three stepped forward and read them.

"Of all the confounded cheek!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Look at this one!" To Thomas Dodd, from a well-wisher. Hoping it will not be too small, less like a polceat than Nature intended him to be."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Doyle and Cook. Tommy Dodd clenched his fists.

"You silly asses haven't anything to cackle about," he howled. "See this one! To Thomas Cook. You smell as bad as you look. So for a bad lad is some scent of Bagdad. A present from Smythe and Howard."

Tommy Cook flushed. And Tommy Doyle also looked serious. He expected his turn would come next. And it did.

He read the inscription on the next bottle of brillianine with a lowering brow.

"Townsend and Topham send this to Tommy Doyle, with all good wishes."

"M-my aunt!" gasped Tommy Doyle. "And does this mean that those insulting ends have brought their rotten scent round to us?"

The others nodded in silent wrath. "I'll pulverise the spalpeens entirely!" roared Tommy Doyle. "Just the sort of thing those Classical ends would do!"

The remaining labels were read with anger that increased at every word. The scream of the Fistical Four had gone home even more deeply than its authors ever anticipated. Tommy Dodd & Co. were nearly fuming when they came to the jars of face cream.

"Heave 'em out of the window!" roared Tommy Dodd. "We'll flay those rotters!"

"Just a minute!" interposed Tommy Cook. "I've got a better scheme than that. If we go ragging in the Classical studies we'll probably get scragged, and we can't get the other fellows to back us up. They'll laugh at us for mugs if we tell 'em what happened."

Tommy Dodd nodded. "We'll take it out of Smythe & Co. when we get the chance," said Cook. "But I don't suppose they know how many bottles they brought round to us."

This was quite correct, although Tommy Cook did not know it.

down to see that the coast was clear, and then made his way back to the study.

The three juniors then made their way to the Classical side of the house, and here they were as fortunate as the Fistical Four of the end study had been in the visit to the other side.

One of the bottles was placed on the mantelpiece in Townsend's study, where the nuts were sure to see it when they looked for a dressing for their immaculate hair.

The Shell passage was also deserted, and the other bottle found a resting-place ready for Smythe's use when he needed something stronger than water to emphasise the parting in his hair.

This was certainly stronger than water. So Tommy Dodd & Co. felt quite justified in leaving it.

That part of the programme completed, Tommy Dodd & Co. made their way back to their own quarters, and after a little more scouring, sauntered down to Little Side.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were engaged in a friendly bout of shooting at goal, and they grinned as the three Moderns came down.

"Anyone got any disinfectant?" asked Jimmy Silver loudly, as they came up.

Lovell gripped his nose, and pretended to back away. Raby and Newcome

"Whatever have you two been doing to yourselves?" he gasped. "You smell like a couple of—of polecats."

The two nuts of the Fourth looked at each other.

"It's—it's 'Essence of Arabic Perfumes'!" gasped Townsend. "Awful good stuff, you know, Bulkeley! Used by all the nobility, you know. I always find—"

"Get out of here, you disgusting little sweeps!" roared Bulkeley, gripping his nose. "And—here, Smythe! Howard! Have you been doing the same?"

Smythe and Howard had just come in the door. But that odour was offensive at fifty yards, or thereabouts.

"I don't understand you, Bulkeley," said Smythe, with dignity. "There is a disgusting smell here, certainly, but—"

"It's you, you filthy fop!" shouted Bulkeley. "If you precious fops come here again with any of that beastly stuff on your hair I'll slay the lot of you!"

The four nuts looked at each other. The unpleasant odour of Tommy Dodd's special brand of hair-oil was growing increasingly obnoxious as they stood.

"Get out of it!" roared the Head prefect again.

The nuts turned and vanished. It had dawned on their slow brains that something certainly was radically wrong!

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"Well?" ejaculated Tommy Doyle impatiently.

"This is my idea, then," said Cook. "Suppose we get some more 'Stinks' stuff and fill up a couple of their brilliantine bottles and plant it back on 'em. Ten to one they'll use it, if they're in a hurry. It looks the same, and they won't nit it till too late."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea seemed a good one, and the angry Tommies did not wait to discuss it further. If they had, they might have wondered why Smythe & Co. should have troubled to bring all their stock of choice oils round to them. That was a slip which the Fistical Four had made. But it passed unnoticed.

A couple of bottles of brilliantine were emptied out of the window, and Tommy Dodd nipped off to the laboratory to fill them.

The door was locked, but a window at the side was conveniently open. He slipped through, and, making his way to the other side, drew down a large bottle of yellowish liquid.

The bottles were quickly filled, and, having been corked, washed in running water to remove all traces of their unsavoury contents.

Tommy Dodd peered through the win-

dstudiously walked round in a circle to keep as far away as possible.

Tommy Dodd snorted. But he turned red all the same.

"On the ball!" he cried, and dashed forward.

His clumps followed him, and scored a shot. It happened that a Classical was in goal, and this rather piqued the Fistical Four.

They dashed in and collared the ball, and in the house rivalry the jape was soon forgotten. Tommy Dodd & Co. made things too hot to allow the Moderns to jape them. Tea-bell rang before they had had time to exchange any more comments.

Funds being low, all the juniors were taking tea in Big Hall. The game had made them hungry, and they did not waste much time.

They had scarcely sat down before Townsend and Topham came in. Their hair was nicely plastered down, but both were eyeing each other rather doubtfully.

"There's an awful smell somewhere," gasped Topham.

"Yas," said Townsend. "I think it must be that beastly brilliantine you put on."

"But you—"

Topham got no further. They were just passing Bulkeley, and the big prefect suddenly beckoned to them.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Tommy Dodd's Parcel.

TOMMY DODD & Co. chortled. "Heef 'em out, Bulkeley!" cried Tommy Dodd. "That's a Classical smell. They don't like Modern ways."

There was a howl from the Moderns in support of the words. The jape on the nut had worked uncommonly well. All of them had dressed for tea in a hurry, and the brilliantine bottles had been sprinkled on their hair in great haste. Though how it was they had not discovered it before reaching Hall no one knew.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged looks. "I know what's happened!" said Lovell, with a grin. "They filled up the brilliantine bottles with that 'Stinks' stuff, and returned them. And those silly Jugginses have used the stuff!"

Jimmy Silver smiled. "Serves 'em jolly well right!" he said. "Smythe won't get any tea now, and he won't feel like any supper, after fiddling about with that sickly stuff. But it's one against the Classics!"

Raby nodded. "We'll have to do something to square them for this," he said. "Can you suggest anything, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful. "Not now," he said. "Listen to those Modern cads! They're shrieking the place down about the Classical rift!"

The Moderns were certainly making their voices heard. And those who had not heard of the afternoon proceedings certainly thought that the nuts had disgraced their house. Snythe & Co. were fit for a warm time at the hands of their own friends as soon as they were fit to touch!

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not get excited. They had not anticipated that Tommy Dodd & Co. would take the line they had for the fancied insult they received from the nuts of Rookwood, but they were not sorry that events had turned out as they did.

If only they could score back on Tommy Dodd & Co. they considered that odds would be even.

A solemn conclave was held in the end study of the Fourth Form passage after tea, and many schemes were schemed and rejected. But at last Jimmy Silver struck a winner, and when he expounded it to his chums they laughed approval.

"Tommy Dodd will fall right into it!" exclaimed Raby delightedly. "He can't help himself!"

"And we'll show him a Classical joke without resorting to 'Stinks'!" added Newcome. "We'll use some good old Classical ink and gum."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The scheme appealed more to the Fistical Four as they discussed it, and they laughed again at the approaching discomfiture of Tommy Dodd.

Prep was finished off in record time that night. Townsend and Topham did not appear in the Fourth Form passage until very late, and even then they still held a faint odour of the "Essence of Arabian Perfumes" which Tommy Dodd had obtained for them.

The Fistical Four grinned as they saw them, and closed the study door.

Then preparations were made for the undoing of Master Dodd, of the Modern side.

Paper, ink, and gum were requisitioned from every available source, and the four worked hard for a good hour upon their scheme.

But when they tied the last string, and

stepped back to survey the neat little brown-paper parcel on the table, they were not sorry for the time they had spent.

That night nothing of event happened, but next morning, after the post had come, a startling rumour floated round the Modern side.

"Tommy," said Tommy Cook to Tommy Dodd, behind the cover of a "Stinks" book, "have you heard about your parcel?"

"Parcel?" asked Tommy Dodd.

The other nodded.

"There was a parcel for you on the post-table this morning," he said. "Heaps of the fellows saw it. And now it's missing! I've heard that those Classical cads have snatched it."

"My hat!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Here, I say, this is a bit too thick. They're not jolly well going to have that. Who's got it?"

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"Jimmy Silver!"

Tommy Dodd flushed.

"The bouncer!" he muttered. "I'll sculp that Classical cad. He's gone a bit too far for this time!"

And for the rest of the morning the irate Modern fumed over the news.

It certainly did seem a bit thick, pinching a parcel before its owner had even seen it! But it was war to the knife between the rival sides at Rookwood, and Dodd did not see any reason why Jimmy Silver should not do such a thing if he thought he could score a victory.

Immediately after morning school Tommy Dodd emerged into the quad with a wrathful frown and a savage temper.

"Anyone seen Silver?" he asked Raby.

"Haven't oven seen a copper!" said Raby blandly.

Dodd snorted, and passed on.

But he got no satisfaction from his questioning. Apparently Master Silver had made himself scarce. Tommy Dodd was just about to raid the Classical quarters, when the window of the Fourth Form room opened, however, and a face looked out.

"Silver!" shouted Tommy Dodd, dashing across. "Where's my parcel?"

Jimmy Silver grinned. He held up a brown-paper parcel.

"This is for you," he said calmly. "Do you want it?"

"Of course I do!" howled Tommy Dodd.

"And you won't be angry if I give it you?"

"No!"

"Or throw it!"

"Give it here!" snapped Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver smiled. There were a number of fellows looking on, and he judged the moment had come.

"Here is your parcel!" he said.

The brown-paper thing flew through the air and smote Tommy Dodd's face. And as it did so it broke, and a mass of inky paper and gummy rags flattened themselves across the Modern fellow's features.

"Yar-oooh!" roared Tommy Dodd.

He had not expected that sort of parcel, nor had the fellows in the quad. They roared with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd tore a portion of the inky mess from his face and glared at the window from which it had come. But Jimmy Silver had vanished.

A guileless voice sounded at Tommy Dodd's elbow.

"Did you find Silver?" asked Raby. "And get your parcel?" added Newcome.

Tommy Dodd snorted.

It suddenly dawned on him that the whole thing had been a joke to make him ask for the parcel—and then get it. He turned and made off in the direction of the Modern quarters, with a howl of Classical laughter ringing in his ears.

The Classics had scored with a vengeance!

THE END.

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