

TROUBLE FOR TOM MERRY

FRANK
RICHARDS

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Frank Richards

Trouble starts for Tom Merry when he accidentally knocks down Knox of the Sixth on his bicycle. If Knox had not been the most unpleasant prefect in the school he would have taken Tom Merry's word that it was an accident, but instead a train of events is set in motion that threatens to keep Tom Merry out of the important cricket match against Greyfriars.

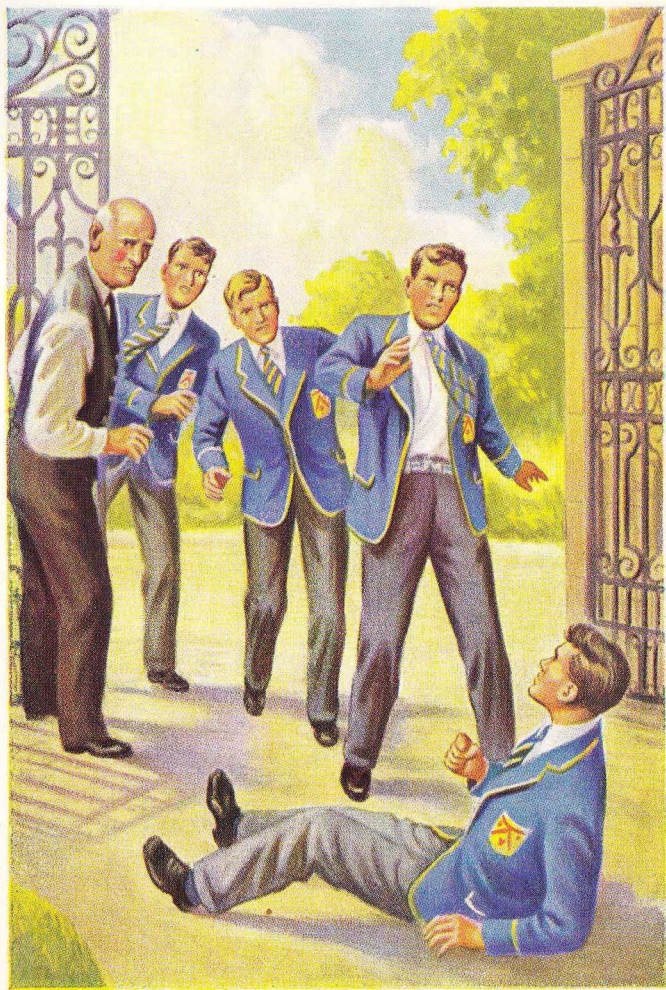
That aristocratic dandy of St Jim's, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, lives up to his reputation of being a well-meaning ass by interfering on Tom's behalf — and making matters ten times worse.

Even so it looks as though Tom will get over his difficulties without too much trouble. But this is reckoning without the intervention of that greatest wrecker of schoolboy plans in history, William George Bunter. It is Bunter who, as usual, really makes a mess of things.

There can be no greater recommendation for this book than to say it is vintage Frank Richards: all the immortals, Tom Merry, Harry Wharton, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Cardew, and of course D'Arcy and Bunter, are there and involved in adventures as hilarious and absorbing as ever.

Author of:

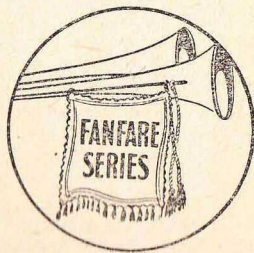
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TOM MERRY
THROUGH THICK AND THIN



'Oh, my eye!' said old Taggles, blinking at Knox

FRANK RICHARDS

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TOM MERRY



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CHAPTER I

A KNOCK FOR KNOX

'PUT IT ON!' exclaimed Tom Merry, breathlessly.

Neither Monty Lowther nor Manners answered. They were 'putting it on' already: and they needed all their breath.

Three Shell fellows of St. Jim's were racing up the road. In the distance ahead were school gates. The sound of a bell, borne on the summer breeze, had died away. But the gates were still open, and there was still a chance of getting in on time.

The three were late.

Such things will happen, when schoolboys ramble after class. Realising that they were a little late, the three had come up the lane from Rylcombe at a trot. As they heard the bell for lock-ups, that trot developed into a gallop. They almost flew.

Taggles, the ancient porter at St. Jim's, was always prompt to close the gates. In other matters Taggles was often slow... often very slow. But when it came to shutting the gates on time, Taggles could be relied upon to a split second. Indeed many St. Jim's fellows believed that old Taggles took a sort of demoniac delight in slamming the gates shut on

a fellow's nose. Shut out, a fellow had to knock, and give his name for report to his house-master. That meant lines.

Not one of the three wanted to be reported to Mr. Railton, in the School House. Nobody wanted lines. And although the bell had stopped, Taggles for once seemed slow in shutting the gates, and there was still a sporting chance. They could see old Taggles at the gateway . . . unaccountably inactive. For some reason which they could not see, old Taggles was standing there, his bunch of keys in his horny hand, the gates unshut. His back was towards them: but really it looked as if the old porter, for the first time in history, was giving late-comers a chance.

They flew up the road.

Still Taggles did not stir. Still the way was open. It was almost a minute since the bell had stopped: and Taggles had never been known to delay a second. But there it was . . . there was still a chance for three breathless juniors going all out.

'Put it on!' gasped Tom a second time.

He was ahead of his comrades, Manners and Lowther panted a little behind him. If Taggles heard their hurried footsteps he did not turn his head. Apparently he was looking towards someone within, in the quad. Anyhow the gateway was still wide open for three racing, breathless juniors to bolt into like rabbits into a burrow.

Tom was the first. He reached the gateway and

bolted in, passing Taggles. The next moment, there was a loud, startled yell, and a crash.

'Oh!' gasped Tom.

He staggered back from the shock. Too late it flashed into his mind why Taggles was keeping the gates open a minute after time. Someone was coming out! It was quite simple, if Tom had thought of it. Unluckily, in his haste and hurry, he hadn't. That someone had just reached the gateway from within, as Tom reached it from without.

The result was really inevitable. The breathless junior, charging in at top speed, charged right into the Sixth-Form senior who was coming out, and sent him spinning.

Gerald Knox, of the Sixth Form, went backwards, as if a cannon-ball had hit him. He tottered several paces and crashed. He lay extended on his back, yelling. It sounded as if Knox was hurt. It sounded still more as if he was enraged.

'Oh, my eye!' said old Taggles, blinking at Knox, sprawling on his back. 'Oh, my eye! You done it now, Master Merry.'

Manners and Lowther came speeding in. But they had heard the crash and the yell, and they pulled up in time.

'Oh, my hat!' panted Lowther, 'Is — is — is that Knox?'

'Knox! Oh, crumbs!' gasped Manners.

Knox sat up, quite dizzily.

Tom Merry ran to give him a hand up.

'Awfully sorry, Knox,' he exclaimed, sincerely enough. Tom Merry did not like Knox of the Sixth: no junior at St. Jim's liked him. Knox was a prefect, and in the opinion of the Lower School, at least, much too given to the use of the official ashplant. Knox had a bad temper, a sharp tongue, and unpleasant ways. Still, Tom was sorry that he had accidentally floored him. Knox often made himself disagreeable: still, Tom would not have bowled him over if he could have helped it.

Knox smacked the proffered helping hand aside and gave Tom a glare.

'You young ruffian!' he gasped. 'You've knocked me over.'

'I came in in a hurry — I didn't see you — I' stammered Tom.

'You came in with your eyes shut!' snarled Knox.

'You see, — I —'

'That will do! You young rascal —'

'I tell you I didn't see you! I just bolted in because Taggles still had the gate open, and there wasn't a second to spare —'

'I've told you that will do! You'll get six for this.'

'It was entirely an accident —'

'Hold your tongue.'

Knox staggered to his feet. He panted for breath. The shock seemed to have winded him. His eyes gleamed at Tom Merry.

'Look here Knox, you can see that it was an accident,' exclaimed Monty Lowther. 'We were running to get in —'

'You need say nothing, Lowther.'

'Tom was going too fast to see you or anything else,' said Manners. 'He couldn't guess that somebody was coming out at lock-ups.'

'That's enough from you, Manners.'

'If you won't believe that it was an accident, Knox —!' said Tom Merry between set lips.

'I believe nothing of the kind,' said Knox, 'you saw your chance to bowl a prefect over, and took it. You'll get six for it. I'm going out now - but you'll come to my study after calling-over, and take six. Now get off to your House, and don't tell me any more fancy tales.'

'I've told you the truth, Knox,' said Tom, quietly. 'If you don't choose to believe it, you can do the other thing. Come on, you fellows.'

The three went on towards the School House. Tom Merry's face was set and angry. Certainly, it was not a light matter to bowl a Sixth-Form prefect over, headlong: and had it been done intentionally "six" from the official ash was a just reward for such an exploit. But it had been a sheer accident: and any St. Jim's prefect excepting Gerald Knox would have taken Tom's word on that. But Knox's own word was not as good as gold: and he valued the word of others no more highly than the value of his own.

Knox gave an angry glare after the three Shell fellows as they went, and then scowled at Taggles, who was grinning. Then he tramped out of the gates. The law of lock-ups did not apply to Sixth-Form prefects, who came and went according to their own judgement. Taggles clanged the gate behind Knox and went back to his lodge, still grinning, apparently amused by the episode. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther went into the School House, in ample time for roll, but rather wishing that they had not put on that final spurt to get in on time.

CHAPTER II

A LETTER FROM GREYFRIARS

'BOTHAH!' said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

His aristocratic brow was wrinkled in a frown.

Blake and Herries and Digby, in Study No. 6 in the School House, looked round at him. Something, it seemed, had disturbed the accustomed equanimity of the Honourable Arthur Augustus.

He had taken a letter from his pocket, and was standing by the study window reading it. Apparently he derived no satisfaction whatever from the perusal. He shook his head, frowned, and ejaculated 'Bothah!'

'What's up, Gussy?' asked Jack Blake. 'Bill from your tailor's? If you will order a new pair of trousers every day —'

There was a chuckle from Herries and Dig. Arthur Augustus, ceasing to frown at the letter in his hand, frowned at Blake instead.

'Weally, Blake —,' he said, 'you are vewy well awah that I do not orday a new paih of twousahs evewy day —'

'New waistcoats?' asked Blake. 'If you keep ordering three new waistcoats a week —'

'I do not ordah thwee new waistcoats a week!'

hooted Arthur Augustus, 'and this is not a bill from my tailah at all.'

'Hatter's account?' asked Digby. 'All those new toppers —?'

'Dozens of them,' said Herries, with a nod, 'they must run you into a pretty penny, Gussy.'

'Or is it neckties?' inquired Blake. 'Let's see — is it a dozen you've had this week, or two dozen?'

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and gave his three chums a withering stare. It was true that Arthur Augustus was the best-dressed fellow in his House: the glass of fashion and the mould of form, as it were: but really and truly he did not order a new pair of trousers every day, or toppers by the dozen.

'A fellow has to dwess decently,' he said. 'You fellows are wathah wagbags. But I have had only one new paih of twousahs this week, and only thwee neckties, and it is a fortnight since I had a new Sunday toppah. But this lettah is not a bill at all. It is a lettah fwom a chap at anothah school.'

'Then what are you scowling about?' asked Blake.

'I was not awah that I was scowlin', Blake. But I cannot say that I am eithah pleased or gwatified by this lettah fwom Gweyfwiahs.'

'Greyfriars!' repeated Blake, 'what's the matter with a letter from Greyfriars, fathead? Jolly good chaps over there, and they're coming over to play cricket on Wednesday.'

'Yaas, wathah,' assented Arthur Augustus, 'I shall be vewy glad to see them when they come: they are vewy good fellows all wound. But —'

'Is that a letter from Harry Wharton — ?'

'It is not fwom Wharton, Blake.'

'Cherry, then — ?'

'It is not fwom Chewwy. It is fwom a chap named Buntah.'

'Bunter?' said Blake. 'Who's Bunter?'

'I've heard that name somewhere,' said Herries, 'who is he?'

'I think I remember him,' said Digby. 'He's been over here — fat chap in gig-lamps, isn't he?'

'I should not descwibe him as a fat chap in gig-lamps, Dig,' said Arthur Augustus, rather severely. 'He is certainly wathah plump, and he weahs glasses, if that is what you mean. Pwobably he is a nice chap, in his own way: but I cannot say that I weally want to see him —'

'I remember him,' said Blake, with a nod. 'He's no cricketer — He won't be in the junior team from Greyfriars, Gussy.'

'Not at all,' said Arthur Augustus, 'but it appeahs fwom this lettah that he is comin' ovah with the team on Wednesday. As I shall be playin' cwicket I shall not have much time for him. Howevah, I suppose a fellow must be civil as he seems so vewy fwiendly, I weally do not know why. Pewwaps you fellows may as well wead the lettah.'

'Chuck it over,' said Blake.

Arthur Augustus handed over the letter from Greyfriars School: and Blake and Herries and Digby read it together. They grinned as they read it.

It ran:

Dear Gussy,

You'll be pleased to heer that you'll be seeing me on Wednesday, as I am kuming over with Wharton and his crowd, I'm not in the team. There's a lot of jellussy in cricket, as I daresay you kno, so I am left owt. But I'm kuming over all the same, just the plezure of seeing you agane so no moar at pressent from your old pal,

W. G. Bunter.

'Old pal of yours, what?' grinned Blake.

The swell of St. Jim's looked perplexed.

'So Buntah says, but weally I was not awah of it,' he said. 'In fact I am quite unawah of bein' pally with Buntah at all. Weally, I do not know the chap. But I suppose that I must have given him that impwession, as he is so vewy fwriendly. It is weally wathah an awkward posish, to be wegarded with fwriendship by a chap one would weally wathah not meet.'

Blake chuckled.

'You see, old bean, you're a fellow worth knowing,' he explained, 'and you're so jolly soft...'

'Weally, Blake —'

'...so jolly soft that any bounder can stick on you. But it's all right - lots of time to answer this letter before Wednesday. You can write to Bunter and tell him not to come —'

'Bai Jove! Wouldn't that be wathah wude, Blake?'

'Not if you put it tactfully and delicately,' assured Blake. 'Something like this - "Dear Bunter, please don't let me see you next Wednesday, because your face - if you call it a face - worries me —"'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Herries and Dig.

'Weally, Blake, you ass —!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

'Well, if you don't like that, try putting it like this,' said Blake. "'Dear Bunter, I am glad to hear that you are coming over with the cricketers on Wednesday, because you're the chap I should most like to kick. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity.'"

'Ha, ha, ha!' came another yell from Herries and Dig. They seemed entertained by Blake in the role of polite letter-writer.

'I wegard you as an ass, Blake,' said Arthur Augustus, stiffly. 'I shall certainly not w'ite anythin' of the sort to Buntah. If he comes ovah, I must twy to be vewy civil, as he is so fwiendly, but —'

Arthur Augustus was interrupted. Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, put a grinning face in the doorway of Study No. 6.

'You fellows heard?' grinned Trimble.

'What and which?' asked Blake.

'Tom Merry's up for six!'

'Bai Jovel!'

That news was sufficient to banish the existence of Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School from all minds in the study. Baggy seemed amused: but it was not amusing to Tom Merry's friends in the Fourth Form to hear that he was 'up for six'.

'What's happened, then?' asked Blake, with a glare at Baggy's grinning face.

'Barged a prefect over!' grinned Baggy.

'Rot!' said Blake.

'Yaas, wathah,' said Arthur Augustus, warmly. 'Uttah wot! Some weckless ass like Cardew might, but Tom Mewwy would do nothin' of the sort.'

'I tell you he has!' squeaked Baggy. 'A lot of fellows are chewing it over on the study landing now. He barged Knox over — knocked him flying. A dozen fellows saw him. I jolly well saw him. He makes out that it was an accident, but think Knox would swallow that? Not likely. Lot of accident there was about it, if you ask me!' and Baggy chuckled.

'If Tom Mewwy says it was an accident, Twimble, it was an accident,' said Arthur Augustus, sternly.

'I don't think!' chuckled Baggy.

'Kick him!' said Blake.

'Here, look out - stoppit - you - hooop!' roared Baggy: and he fled from a lunging foot. And Blake

and Co. went down the passage to the study landing, to join the crowd of fellows there who were 'chewing' over the news that the junior captain of the House was 'up for six'.

CHAPTER III

A FRIEND IN NEED

'DON'T GO!' said Cardew.

Tom Merry made no reply to that.

It was easy enough for any fellow to say 'Don't go!' It was not so easy to act on that advice.

A fellow had to go, when a Sixth-Form prefect gave the order. Knox of the Sixth was not a pleasant fellow, or a popular fellow: and he was a good deal of a bully. But he was a prefect: invested with the power of the ash: and for cause given, had the authority to order any Lower School man to 'bend over' and take six. Barging him over certainly was good cause, as Knox refused to believe that the barge was accidental.

Tom Merry's face, usually sunny and unclouded, was set and angry. He did not want 'six' — no fellow could possibly want 'six': but the injustice roused his anger more than the prospect of the ash. Kildare, or Darrell, or Langton, would have taken his word about that unlucky barge. Knox would not. Knox, in fact, had rather a 'down' on the junior captain of the House, and was probably glad of a good pretext for wielding the official ash.

'It's a rotten shame,' said Lowther, 'but you'll have to go.'

'A pre. is a pre.,' said Manners, 'but —'

'But what?' asked Tom.

'Knox is a cad and an outsider, not to take a fellow's word,' said Manners, 'but he's a pre. All the same, there's an appeal from a pre. to the house-master. You could go to Railton.'

Tom Merry shook his head.

'I don't see why not, Tom,' said Talbot of the Shell. 'Railton would call Knox to order.'

Tom shook his head again.

'After all, you did barge Knox over,' said Racke of the Shell. 'I was in the quad, and I saw him go — fairly head over heels. If it was an accident —'

Tom's eyes gleamed.

'I've said so, Racke,' he said, very quietly.

'Well, even if it was, Knox was a bit damaged,' said Racke. 'If a fellow got off by calling it an accident, after barging a pre. over, I fancy there would be a lot of such accidents.'

'Lots!' grinned Crooke. 'I'd barge Kildare over myself, if he would be kind enough to believe that it was an accident.'

'Oh, shut up, you two!' said Levison of the Fourth. 'We all know it was an accident, if Tom Merry says so. Still, such accidents aren't expected to happen, and it would mean lines or detention, if it went to Railton.'

'Chap should look where he's going!' remarked Gore. 'Dash it all, you might have barged over Railton himself, or the jolly old Head, tearing in at the gate like that. Anybody might have been going out.'

Tom Merry nodded assent to that. He had, in his haste and hurry, acted thoughtlessly, and he was willing to admit it. Really and truly, such important persons as prefects of the Sixth Form were not to be bowled over like skittles by thoughtless juniors in a hurry — not with impunity.

'Put it up to Railton,' said Cardew. 'It would be no end of a facer for Knox, if the House-beak put the stopper on him.'

'He would!' said Manners.

Again Tom Merry shook his head. He did not like the idea of going to his house-master with a plaint.

'Bai Jove!' Study No. 6 arrived on the scene and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chimed in, 'I wathah think, Tom Mewwy, that you had bettah go to Wailton. Knox is a wottah and a wank outsidersah —'

'You'd better let him hear you say so!' grinned Racke.

'Weally, Wacke —'

'All that and more, Gussy,' said Tom Merry, 'but I shall have to go through it. I'm not going to Railton.'

'Weally, Tom Mewwy, you can twust the advice of a fellow of tact and judgement,' said Arthur Augustus, in his most fatherly manner, 'and I wecom-

mend you to go to Wailton and explain the mattah to him. I fellow has a wight to appeal to his house-mastah, and old Wailton is a very good sort. Of course you were wathah an ass to wush in at the gates and bowl a pwefect ovah —.'

'Thanks,' said Tom smiling.

'But all the same, it was an accident bowlin' ovah that wottah Knox, and Wailton would see you wight-ed!' said Arthur Augustus, encouragingly.

'I'm not going yowling to the House-beak,' said Tom Merry, rather shortly. 'After all, I did bowl the cad over, and he had rather a crash.' His eyes glinted, 'If he hands out six, I daresay I'll make him sorry for it, some time, somehow.'

Arthur Augustus shook his head seriously.

'No good thinkin' of that, deah boy,' he said. 'A fellow can't get back on a pwefect. Much bettah go to Wailton —'

'Bow-wow!' said Tom.

'I do not wegard that as an intelligent wemark, Tom Mewwy, and I wepeat that I considah —.'

'Hello, there's the bell!' said Blake.

'You are intewwuptin' me, Blake,' said Arthur Augustus with dignity.

'My dear chap, you have to be interrupted sooner or later — can't stand here listening-in till dorm ...'

'Weally, Blake —'

'Come on!' said Herries.

With the bell ringing for calling-over, the little

crowd on the study landing broke up. The juniors crowded down the staircase. Arthur Augustus's noble brow was very thoughtful as he went down with Blake, Herries and Dig. The swell of St. Jim's was sincerely concerned for Tom Merry and what lay before him.

'It is wathah wuff on Tom Mewwy, you fellows,' he said, slowly. 'In fact it is vevy wuff indeed.'

'All in the day's work!' said Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies, I wegard it as extwemely wuff. I am suah that Wailton would set it wight. On the othah hand,' continued Arthur Augustus, very thoughtfully. 'I quite undahstand Tom Mewwy objectin' to goin' to the House-beak. No fellow likes goin' to a beak with complaints. But —'

'Come on,' said Blake, 'Tell us the rest after roll.'

'Weally, Blake —'

'Want to be late for roll?' asked Dig.

'I do not want to be late for woll, Dig: but pway allow me to finish my wemarks. In Tom Mewwy's place, I don't think I should go to the House-beak about it — but that is no weason why a fwiend of his should not go to the House-beak and explain mat-tahs. I wathah think that if Wailton heard about it fwom a fellow of tact and judgement, it would be all wight.'

'Rot!' said Dig.

'Weally, Dig —'

'Better not butt in,' said Blake.

'I do not wegard it as buttin' in, Blake. I am not the fellow to butt in, I trust. But I wathah think that I will go to Wailton aftah woll —'

'Rot!' said Herries, 'leave it alone!'

'I wefuse to leave it alone, Hewwies. Pewwaps you have heard the pwoverb that a fwiend in need is a fwiend indeed!' said Arthur Augustus. 'A fwiend in need is what Tom Mewwy wants now, and I am goin' to be the fwiend in need — and I have no doubt that it will be all wight. And I must say — pway don't wush off while I am speakin' to you.'

But Blake and Herries and Dig did rush off. They dodged into the hall after the crowd, and Arthur Augustus was left to waste the rest of his remarks on the desert air. However, as Kildare of the Sixth was about to close the door on late-comers, Arthur Augustus hurried his step and dodged in too.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, called the roll. After it was over, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first junior out of the hall. Tom Merry was due in Knox's study in the Sixth after calling-over, so the swell of St. Jim's had no time to waste. And having made up his aristocratic mind to act the part of a friend in need, Arthur Augustus headed without delay for the study of Mr. Railton, House-master of the School House.

CHAPTER IV

NOT SO GOOD

'BEND OVER!' said Knox.

His look was far from pleasant when Tom Merry came into his study after roll. Knox of the Sixth had cut roll: prefects were privileged so to do, if so the spirit moved them. He had come in from his walk, and was in his study when Tom tapped and entered. A cane lay on the table, and Knox rose to his feet at once and picked it up.

Tom looked at him. He did not like Gerald Knox, with his surly temper and overbearing manner. He could have kicked himself for his act of careless thoughtlessness which had given Knox this chance at him. And little as Tom was disposed, as a rule, to follow the example of a reckless fellow like Cardew of the Fourth, who was a rebel by nature, he was powerfully tempted for once to defy the prefectorial authority, and refuse to 'bend over' at Knox's order.

Knox probably could read as much in his face. A glitter came into Knox's rather narrow eyes. He swished the cane in the air.

Tom drew a deep breath.

'I've told you I barged you by accident, Knox —' he said.

Knox laughed sourly.

'Don't tell me that yarn again,' he said. 'The other day my hat was knocked off with a chunk of turf, and I never saw who did it. I daresay you could tell me.'

'I know nothing about that.'

'Only yesterday I found my inkpot filled up with gum. You know nothing about that either, what?' asked Knox, with grim banter.

'Nothing at all.'

'Oh, quite!' said Knox. 'But this time you were caught right in the act, and you are getting six for it. You'll think twice before you barge over a Sixth-Form prefect again.' He pointed to a chair with the cane, 'don't waste any more of my time — bend over that chair.'

'If you can't take a fellow's word —'

'I've told you to bend over.'

Tap!

The study door opened. Knox made an irritable gesture: he did not want interruptions when he was about to administer 'six' to a junior the disliked. But he had to clear the frown from his face in a hurry, as he saw that the newcomer was Mr. Railton, the House-master. He replaced it with a respectful smile as quickly as he could.

'Please come in, sir!' he said. He lowered the cane,

rather wishing that it had not been in his hand. Knox, as a Prefect, had what they called 'whopping privileges' at St. Jim's: but he did not want to draw the house-master's special attention to his very frequent use thereof.

Tom Merry stood silent. He did not know why Railton had come to Knox's study, and he was no more pleased than Knox by the interruption. As it had to be, he would have preferred to get it over — with an inward resolve to make Knox sorry for himself, somehow, when opportunity knocks. He was quite unaware that a 'friend in need' had been putting in a word.

'Ah! You are here, Merry,' said Mr. Railton, glancing at the junior.

'Yes, sir!' answered Tom. He realised then that Railton's call had something to do with his presence there.

'You were about to cane Merry, Knox?' said Mr. Railton, his glance turning on the Sixth-Form man.

'Yes, sir, for barging me over in the quadrangle,' answered Knox. He was glad that he had so good an explanation to offer: he was not always so well provided when he handled the ashplant.

'A very serious matter, if done intentionally,' said Mr. Railton.

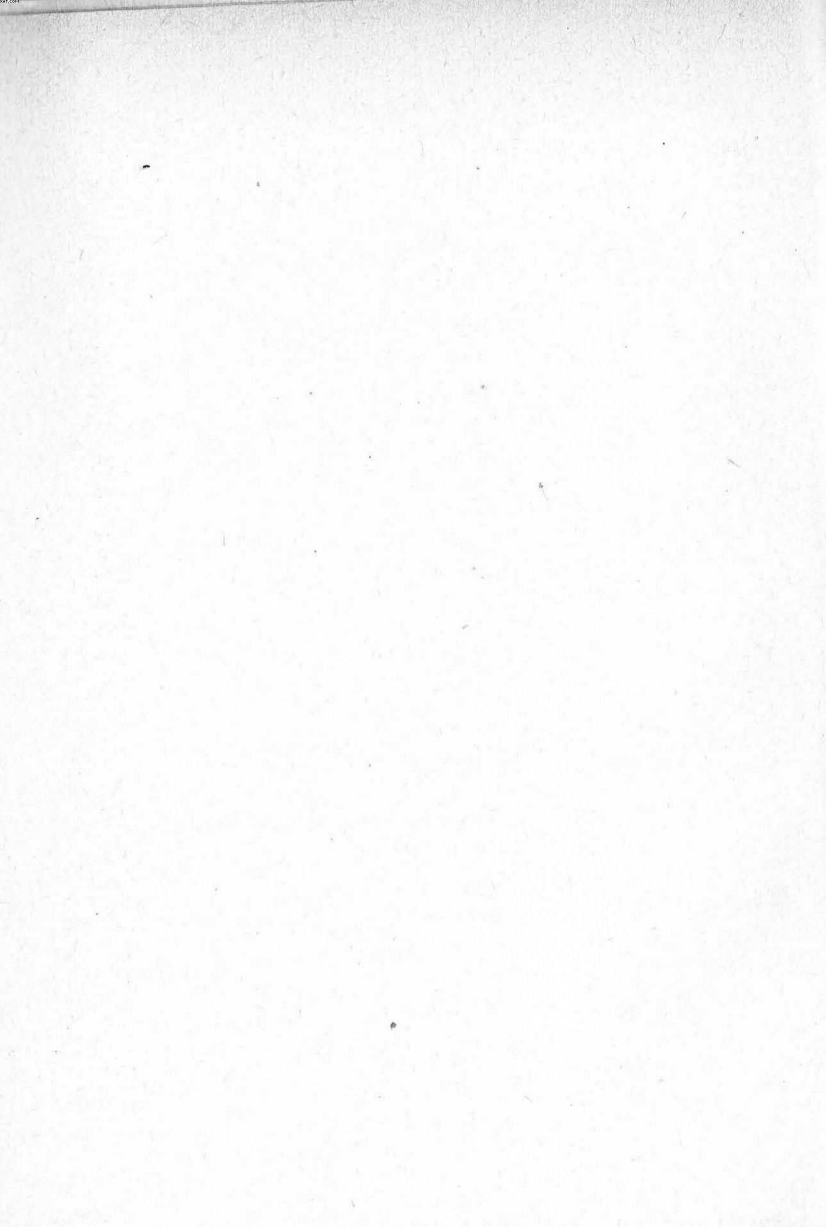
'It was done intentionally, sir.'

'You are sure of that, Knox?'

'Perfectly, so, sir. I was about to go out at the



'Ah! You are here, Merry,' said Mr. Railton



gates, and Merry rushed in from the road and knocked me spinning. I was rather hurt by the fall.'

'I have heard of the incident, and that Merry maintains that it was an accident, Knox,' said Mr. Railton. 'Did he tell you so?'

'He did, sir. I did not believe him,' said Knox, biting his lip. He knew now why Railton was there: he had come to intervene.

Tom Merry guessed it too, and his face brightened. He would not have gone to the house-master himself with a plaint: but it seemed that Railton had heard about it from some other source.

'On the other hand, Knox, I should be very much disposed to take Merry's word on these subjects, knowing his straightforward character,' said Mr. Railton, sharply. 'However, I will question him. Merry!'

'Yes, sir,' said Tom.

'It appears that you rushed in at the gates in great haste and blindly. Did you see Knox there?'

'No, sir.'

'He must have seen me —!' breathed Knox. 'I'm big enough to be seen, I think.'

'Please leave this to me, Knox. If you did not see Knox, Merry, and did not intend to rush into him, why did you rush in at all in such a headlong manner?'

'Taggles was just going to close the gates, sir,' explained Tom. 'Another moment, and we should have

been shut out. We had to dash to get in on time.'

Mr. Railton smiled faintly.

'I understand,' he said. 'You should not have left it so late, Merry. You know the time of lock-ups, and there was no need for such haste at the last moment. It appears, then, that you turned in at the gateway, and rushed headlong in, without a thought that someone might be in the way.'

Tom coloured.

'Yes, sir!' he admitted. 'I know I shouldn't have, but I did. I was sorry I ran into Knox, and I told him so. It was wholly an accident.'

'It was nothing of the kind,' snapped Knox. Knox was feeling rather like a cat seeing a mouse about to escape.

Mr. Railton gave him a cold stare.

'I believe every word Merry has spoken, Knox,' he said, very distinctly. 'It was an accident, and there is no occasion whatever for punishing it with severity. Merry will not be caned.'

Gerald Knox breathed very hard through his nose. Very gladly at that moment would he have told his house-master what he thought of him. But that he could not venture to do. But he could not wholly suppress his resentment.

'As you say, sir!' he muttered, 'but if Sixth-Form prefects are to be knocked flying by juniors rushing about, and nothing done...'

'Nothing of the kind, Knox,' said Mr. Railton,

sharply. 'It was an accident - but such an accident as should not have occurred. I shall take the matter into my own hands.'

'Very well, sir!' said Knox; the glitter in his eyes indicating that it was far from 'well' from his point of view.

'Merry, you will not be caned —'

'Thank you, sir,' said Tom.

'But you will be given a detention for a thoughtless act, which will no doubt make you a little more thoughtful on another occasion,' said Mr. Railton. 'You will go into extra School, in the French master's next detention class. I will speak to Monsieur Morny. You may go, Merry.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Tom again.

He left the study quietly. He was aware, though he did not look at him, that Gerald Knox's eyes glittered after him as he went. But he cared nothing for Knox now: the matter was in the house-master's hands, and out of Knox's, and that was that. He walked cheerfully down the passage and went cheerfully up to his study in the Shell, where Manners and Lowther were waiting for him rather anxiously.

'Whopped?' asked Lowther, as he came into No. 10.

'Did that cad lay it on?' asked Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

'No: Railton butted in — he'd heard somehow. I've got a detention instead — that won't hurt me. I don't think Knox was pleased.'

'He wouldn't be!' chuckled Lowther. 'He likes laying on the ash - especially this study, if he gets a chance. Good old Railton!'

'Good luck,' said Manners, 'as it turns out it's just as well you did barge the swob over - every man in the House would like to barge Knox. I know I would! But you couldn't expect to get off scot-free: after all, the brute is a pre.'

'Oh, quite,' said Tom cheerily, 'and a couple of hours' extra French will improve my Parisian accent, I dare say. Mossoo's next detention class - anybody know when that is?'

Manners jumped.

'Did you say Mossoo's next detention class?' he ejaculated.

'Yes: that's the sentence. What about it?'

'Oh, my summer hat!' Manners' face grew long and grave. 'It's on the board — it's Wednesday afternoon —!'

It was Tom Merry's turn to jump.

'What?' he gasped.

'Wednesday afternoon,' said Manners. 'There's two or three of the Shell booked — Gore and Skimpole, and Glyn — and now —' Manners whistled.

'Greyfriars day!' said Monty Lowther, adding a whistle to Manners's.

'Oh, crumbs!' Tom Merry gasped, 'I — I can't go into extra School on Wednesday — I've got to play cricket — Oh, my only hat! The Greyfriars men here

playing the School and me sitting in Mossoo's detention class. I'd rather Knox licked me half-a-dozen times over! Extra — on Greyfriars day!

And the terrible Three of the Shell stared at one another in dismay. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had acted the part of a friend in need. His intentions had been of the very best. The result was - disaster!

CHAPTER V

NO LUCK

'ASS!' said Jack Blake.

'Weally, Blake —'

'Fathead!' said George Herries.

'Weally, Hewwies —'

'Noodle!' said Robert Arthur Digby.

'Weally, Dig —'

'Ditherer!' said Monty Lowther.

'Weally, Lowthah —'

'Cuckoo!' said Manners.

'Weally, Mannahs —'

Only Tom Merry in the little group in the quadrangle in break on Tuesday morning did not add an epithet. Tom's face was a little overcast: he was not feeling quite so merry and bright. But if his opinion of the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the same as that of the other fellows, he did not state it.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass from face to face, with dignified indignation. Gussy, at least, saw no reason why he should be described as an ass, a fathead, a noodle, a ditherer, or a cuckoo.

'The fat's in the fire now,' grunted Blake. 'This means that you stand out of the game, Tom.'

'Fraid so,' said Tom.

'That ass Gussy —'

'I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass, Blake,' exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. 'I was acting as a fwiend in need —'

'Didn't I tell you not to butt in?' hooted Blake.

'I do not wegard it as buttin' in. It was only wight and pwopah for Wailton to know the facts, when that bwute Knox was goin' to give Tom Mewwy six for nothin'. Tom Mewwy has been let off lightly: though it is wathah unfortunate that he will be in Extwah tomowwow, when Gweyfwiahs come ovah. Of course a fellow could not have foreseen anythin' of the kind.'

'Or anything else!' said Blake.

'Ass!' said Herries. 'You had to butt in.'

'Wats! I am suah that Tom Mewwy does not wegard my action as buttin' in,' said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

'Okay, Gussy,' he said. 'You meant well, old chap: and it can't be helped now. Old Talbot will have to captain the side tomorrow and we shall want another man in my place. French verbs for me.' He made a grimace. 'Bother, Knox! Why did he want to get in the way?'

'What did he want to do a song and dance about it for?' said Monty Lowther, savagely. 'Accidents will happen.'

'There's the brute now,' said Manners, with a nod towards a Sixth-Form man strolling by the elms. 'I've a jolly good mind to give him a barge myself.'

'Let's!' exclaimed Lowther.

'Don't play the goat,' said Tom, quietly. 'Give Knox a wide berth, you duffers. You're in the side tomorrow, Monty — do you want to be in Extra instead?'

'Um — no!' admitted Lowther.

'Aftah all, you got off the six, Tom Mewwy,' remarked Arthur Augustus. 'I jolly well knew Wailton would put the stopper on that.'

'Fathead!' said Tom.

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —'

'Think I wouldn't rather have six, or double six, or treble six, than cut cricket tomorrow?' said Tom, crossly. But his face cleared again at once, 'Can't be helped, so why grouse?'

'Pewwaps it can be helped, deah boy,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I have been thinkin' it ovah —'

'What have you done that with?' asked Blake, with deep sarcasm.

'Wats! I wepeat that I have been thinkin' it ovah, and there is a chance for Tom Mewwy tomorrow,' said Arthur Augustus. 'That chap Knox, as we all know, is wathah a cad, and wathah a bully, and wathah a wottah; but aftah all he is a St. Jim's man, and he must have a spot of the sportsman in him.'

'Very small spot, invisible to the eye!' said Monty Lowther. 'But what are you burbling about, Gussy?'

'I am not burblin', as you vewy diswespectfully descwibe it, Lowther. I wepeat that there is a chance for Tom Mewwy tomorrow, if Knox has a spot of the sportsman in him, and I have no doubt he has.'

'What do you mean?' asked Tom.

'If anything!' sighed Blake.

'I mean that Knox could get Tom Mewwy off, if he liked. He has only to ask Wailton, and it would be all wight.'

Six juniors stared at Arthur Augustus.

'I can see him doing it!' said Lowther.

'Is that the big idea, Gussy?' hooted Blake.

'Yaas, wathah. Suppose I go to Knox, and explain how this has dished Tom Mewwy for the cwicket, and put it up to him as a sportsman. Don't you think that vewy likely he would see the thing in a pwopah light, and call it off.'

Tom Merry gave a little start.

'I wonder—!' he said. 'I might speak to Knox—he's not much of a cricketer but he would understand about a fellow being keen on the game—he might anyway—might be a ghost of a chance.'

'Bettah leave it to me, deah boy,' said Arthur Augustus. 'It is wathah a delicate mattah, and much safer in the hands of a fellow of tact and judgement.'

Tom Merry laughed.

'Thanks!' he said. 'Sit on Gussy's head, you fellows, while I go over and speak to Knox.'

'Bai Jove!'

Tom Merry quitted the group of juniors, and walked over to the elms, where Gerald Knox was strolling with his hands in his pockets. There was, perhaps, the ghost of a chance that even Knox might play up. If he has, as Gussy optimistically believed, a spot of the sportsman in him, he would not want to 'dish' a keen cricketer over a match which, from the junior point of view at least, was of some importance. It was perhaps a faint hope: but Tom was willing to put it to the test.

Knox's look was not very favourable as he came up. The prefect had certainly had plenty of time to recover from the effects of that unlucky barge the day before: but his temper did not seem to have recovered. Knox was, in fact, feeling sore about the house-master's intervention, and in his opinion Tom had been let off much too lightly.

'Well, what do you want?' he snapped.

'Only a word, Knox, if you'll let me speak,' said Tom, mildly.

'You can speak, I suppose, if you've anything to say,' said Knox, staring at him. 'What the dickens do you mean?'

'About that accident yesterday—'

'Don't spin me any more yarns about that. Railton butted in, and you got off, you young ruffian. You won't get off so cheap another time.'

It was not a promising beginning. But Tom went on, quietly.

'I dare say you know it's our match with Greyfriars tomorrow, Knox.'

'Is it?' said Knox. 'I know nothing about it, and care less. You haven't come to talk fag cricket to me, have you?'

'Well, yes,' said Tom, patiently, 'and as I happen to be junior captain Extra School tomorrow dishes me for the game. I'd much rather you'd given me that six yesterday.'

Knox stared at him, harder. He was not interested in junior cricket, and knew and cared nothing about the Greyfriars game. But a derisive grin dawned on his face. He had been feeling sore because the junior who had barged him had got off too lightly. He realised now that what would have been a light penalty in ordinary circumstances was a very heavy one as matters stood.

'So you've got a game on tomorrow,' he said.

'It's our biggest fixture,' said Tom.

'And you're keen to play in it?'

'Very keen, Knox,' said Tom, eagerly. 'I know it's asking a lot, the way you look at it, but if you'd speak to Railton, and tell him you'd rather the whole thing was washed out, I'm sure he would do as you asked, and...' He broke off, as Knox burst into a laugh.

'So Railton barging in has made matters worse for you instead of better. Is that it?' grinned Knox.

'As it happens, yes.'

'Would you rather come to my study now, and take the six?'

'Much rather,' said Tom, at once.

Knox laughed again.

'Well it's too late,' he said. 'Next time you have a fancy for barging over a prefect you happen to dislike, you'd better think twice before you get going. No, I won't speak to Railton, you cheeky young rascal. Get out!'

Tom Merry's lip curled.

'I suppose that's all that I might have expected from you, Knox,' he said; and he did not try to keep the contempt out his voice.

'That's all,' said Knox, 'and now cut off, before I smack your head for your cheek.' Knox half-raised his hand, as if to suit the action to the word.

Tom Merry turned away, with deep feelings. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's belief that Knox of the Sixth had a spot of the sportsman in him was evidently ill-founded. He was only maliciously amused. 'Punching a pre.' was the kind of thing that juniors might dream about but never put into practice: but never had Tom Merry been so powerfully tempted to punch a prefect! However, he wisely resisted that temptation, and left Knox without another look or word. But his face was very dark as he went back to join his friends in the quad. Mr. Railton, coming along from the School House, glanced at him, and frowned. He did not like to see

bad temper in a boyish face, and for once Tom was looking in a very bad temper indeed. He did not even see Railton, as he joined the group of juniors.

'Nothing doing!' he said, savagely. 'That cad Knox will have something coming to him one of these days — !'

'Shut up, old man!' breathed Manners. He saw Railton, if Tom did not.

But it was too late.

'Merry!' came a sharp voice.

'Oh!' exclaimed Tom. He spun round, and stared at his house-master, his face crimsoning. Mr. Railton's brow was knitted.

'I heard what you said, Merry!' he rapped.

'I — I — !' stammered Tom. He was helplessly taken aback.

'What you said, Merry, amounted to a threat, referring to a Sixth-Form prefect!' said Mr. Railton, sternly.

'I—I didn't mean —I—I—,' Tom stammered again.

'I trust, Merry, that you spoke without thinking and did not mean what you said. I shall take no note of it, except to warn you to be more careful.'

Mr. Railton walked on, with that; evidently displeased with a junior who was generally in his good books.

Tom Merry breathed very hard.

'I seem to get all the rotten luck, lately,' he said. 'Now Railton's got his back up.'

'Yaas, wathah,' said Arthur Augustus, sympathetically. 'It is vewy wuff, deah boy. But never say die, pewwaphs I shall be able to think of something to be done. You can wely on a fellow of tact and judgement —'

'Fathead!' said Tom.

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —!'

'Ditherer!' said Tom: and with that he walked away with Manners and Lowther. Apparently he had had enough of Arthur Augustus's kind offices; which, in the circumstances, was not surprising. He left Arthur Augustus gazing after him with an expression like that of the elder Hamlet: more in sorrow than in anger.

'Bai Jove!' said Arthur Augustus, 'Tom Mewwy seems quite cwabby. Have you fellows any ideah what Tom Mewwy is cwabby about?'

'Ass!' said Blake and Herries and Digby, in chorus.

'Weally, you fellows, I trust that I may be able to think of some way of gettin' poor old Tom Mewwy out of this scwape, and I really think —'

'You butt in again and we'll bump you bald-headed,' said Blake.

'What about bumping him anyhow?' asked Herries.

'Good wheeze!' said Digby, heartily.

Arthur Augustus walked away rather hastily.

CHAPTER VI

CUT ?

'CUT !' said Cardew.

Tom Merry made an irritated movement.

It was like Ralph Reckness Cardew to give such reckless advice. It was not in the least like Tom to act upon it. 'Cutting' a detention was a serious matter: to Tom, at least, if not to Cardew, who took nothing seriously.

It was a glorious summer's morning — ideal for cricket. Wednesday had dawned bright and fair. If it had rained it might have been some sort of consolation. But the weather was perfect: and never had the cricket pitch looked so attractive in Tom Merry's eyes. But that was not all — it was far from all. He was wanted in the game. The Greyfriars junior eleven were a tough proposition: St. Jim's had to go all out to beat Harry Wharton and Co. They could not afford to lose their best bat, if it could be helped. Unfortunately it could not be helped: and Cardew, in such circumstances, was the fellow to throw all considerations of law and order to the winds, taking the chance of getting away with it. Tom was not.

'Why not?' asked Cardew.

'Oh, rot!' said Tom, 'it couldn't be done anyway. How could a fellow cut Extra, and play cricket, right under Railton's nose? Like to see him walk down to the field and walk me off?'

Cardew laughed.

'That would be rather an entertainment for the Greyfriars men,' he admitted.

'Not the sort of entertainment I want to give them,' said Tom, gruffly.

'But it wouldn't happen,' said Cardew.

'Why wouldn't it, then?'

'Simply because Railton won't be at home today,' answered Cardew. 'Railton's going up to town today to attend one of those conferences, as everybody knows whose head isn't too full of cricket to think of anything else.'

'Oh!' said Tom, 'I remember now.' He looked thoughtful. Disinclined as he was to follow Cardew's wild ways, he was tempted. Certainly, there was a penalty for 'cutting Extra': but that counted for nothing in comparison with playing for School. It might be extra detention: it might be lines: or it might even be 'Whops': but that would come afterwards and could be faced, whatever it was. Tom was a fellow to toe the line, and pay just regard to just authority: but the case was exceptional. An accident had happened: and he owed his detention partly to Knox's surly and suspicious temper, partly to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's well-meant but unfortunate inter-

vention. In such an exceptional case, exceptional measures were indicated — if practicable.

'But there's Mossoo —!' said Tom, dubiously. 'He counts his flock for Extra, Cardew.'

'Old Morny wouldn't worry you a lot,' said Cardew. 'I've cut Extra myself at times, as you may know —'

'I know!' said Tom, shortly.

'Well, what does Mossoo do? He doesn't chase all over the school for a missing man. He simply marks him absent and reports him to his house-master.'

'That's so,' assented Tom, with a nod. The prospect began to look more attractive.

'Mossoo will be busy with his detention class, while you're playing cricket,' went on Cardew. 'After counting his chickens and marking you absent, he will forget your existence.'

'I suppose so,' assented Tom.

'His detention class usually keeps him busy,' grinned Cardew. 'As often as not there's a rag when the French master takes Extra. Mossoo won't waste a single thought on you.'

Tom Merry nodded again.

Really, it looked a safe proposition, as Cardew mapped it out. Railton would be safe off the scene: and Monsieur Morny's manners and customs were well known: any fellow who did not turn up for Extra, when Mossoo was in charge, was marked absent, and there was an end. Report to the house-

master would follow, with a penalty to pay: which Tom was prepared to pay quite cheerfully, after he had wielded the willow in the Greyfriars game. Certainly he did not want Railton to think him a reckless, undisciplined fellow like Cardew. But he did want to play cricket that day.

Cardew smiled. He could see that Tom was coming round. He was quite good natured in seeking to help the junior captain out of a 'jam': but at the same time, it amused him to see a steady fellow like Tom Merry falling to the temptation to kick over the traces for once.

'Safe as houses, old boy,' he said, lightly. 'You'll be okay — till afterwards. A couple of hundred lines to write won't hurt you — after the game.'

'No,' said Tom, 'that doesn't matter. But —' He paused.

'If it's whops, you can stand it.'

'That's nothing,' said Tom, 'but —' He paused again. An act of disobedience to his house-master meant more than any penalty he might have to pay. But he suddenly made up his mind.

'I think I'll chance it,' he said. 'So long as we get through the game, afterwards can take care of itself.'

'Good man!' said Cardew, and he strolled away smiling, leaving Tom a little troubled, but decided.

He joined Manners and Lowther, who were watching a taxi that had come in at the gates, and stopped at the School House.

'That's for Railton,' said Lowther. 'He's going before tiffin. I wonder —' Lowther paused, thoughtfully.

Tom Merry laughed.

'You wonder whether the mouse might play, while the cat's away?' he asked. 'Well, that's settled. I'm playing cricket this afternoon.'

'You're not let off Extra?' said Manners.

Tom shook his head.

Manners' face became very grave.

'It's risky,' he said slowly.

'I know.'

'I wouldn't,' said Manners. 'I know it's tough, Tom, and I know you're wanted in the game, but — you're junior captain of the House, old man, and you can't play mad tricks like Cardew —' He paused, frowning, 'you've just been speaking to the reckless ass — did he suggest it?'

'Why shouldn't he?' said Tom, rather gruffly. 'I'm glad he gave me the tip.'

'Not the chap whose advice I should like to take,' said Manners, drily. 'Look here, Tom —'

'I'm playing cricket today,' said Tom.

'Shush!' murmured Monty Lowther, as Mr. Railton came out of the House. 'Don't tell the beaks, old chap.'

Tom Merry frowned, and was silent. The School-House master stepped into the taxi, and it was driven away. Mr. Railton was gone — for the day. Tom

watched the taxi disappear out of the gates, and was relieved to see it go.

'All serene, so far as our House-beak is concerned,' said Monty Lowther. 'After all, why not?'

'Lots of reasons why not,' said Manners, shaking his head. 'It's tough, Tom, but a fellow has to toe the line —'

'I'm playing cricket,' said Tom, curtly.

'It means a row,' said Manners.

'Let it!' said Tom. His brow darkened. 'I'm not going to cut a cricket match because that cad Knox chose to do a song and a dance about a sheer accident — and that's what it comes to. I'm going to play cricket, so you can pack up the fatherly advice, Manners.'

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

'A wilful man will have his way,' he said. 'I hope it will work out all right, Tom. But —'

'Wash out the but's,' said Tom. 'It's settled, and fixed, like those jolly old laws of the jolly old Medes and Persians. Hallo, there's the bell. You fellows coming in tiffin?'

Settled and fixed it was, when the St. Jim's fellows went in to dinner. Tom Merry had made up his mind; with doubts, perhaps: but he had made it up: and once he had made it up, he was not the fellow to change it. He was going to play cricket for St. Jim's, though the skies fell: and take whatever was coming to him afterwards. That being finally decided, he

dismissed doubts from his mind: and when Harry Wharton and Co. of Greyfriars arrived, he greeted the visitors with a cheerful face, and gave all his thoughts to the one important subject of the day — King Cricket!

CHAPTER VII

GOOD SHOW I

'I SAY, YOU fellows.'

Nobody heeded Billy Bunter.

At his own School, Greyfriars, William George Bunter was often, if not always, superfluous. He was superfluous now. The fellows at the pavilion, who were watching Tom Merry and George Figgins at the wickets, had absolutely no use for conversation from Billy Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove.

'Bai Jove!' remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. 'Tom Mewwy is going stwong.'

'What-ho!' said Blake.

'Top-hole!' said Talbot.

'Even that coffee-coloured coon can't touch him,' said Cardew. 'And he's some bowler. He had my wicket for six.'

'Yaas, wathah,' said Arthur Augustus, 'I forget his name — somethin' like Hefty Jampot or something — but he can bowl —'

'His name's Hurree Jamset Ram Singh,' squeaked Billy Bunter.

'I knew it was somethin',' said Arthur Augustus. 'It is weally wemarkable, you fellows, how Tom

Mewwy is standin' up to his bowlin' — he had me out for nine.' Arthur Augustus shook his noble head. He was distinctly pleased to see Tom Merry standing up to the bowling of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh of Greyfriars School: but it was perplexing, when that dusky youth had dismissed Arthur Augustus himself for nine. 'Cwicket is a very uncertain game, you fellows; you nevah weally know your luck. I was wathah hopin' to knock up a century - what are you gwinnin' at, Cardew?'

'How many centuries would it take you to do it?' inquired Cardew.

'I say, you fellows — !' squeaked Billy Bunter.

'Bai Jove! There they go again!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'This is goin' to be thwee at least.'

'Good old Tommy!' chuckled Lowther. 'Can he hit?'
'Yaas, wathah.'

The batsmen were running. The field were leather-hunting. There was no doubt that Tom Merry was in great form. Good batting was required to deal with Greyfriars bowling: and Tom was putting up the good batting that was required. His face was bright and sunny. It had quite vanished from his mind that he was supposed, in those very moments, to be sitting among other delinquents in the French master's class-room, improving his knowledge of the beautiful French language. He was living and breathing cricket, and he was putting up runs for his side — which were needed indeed.

The home captain had won the toss and decided on first knock. Tom Merry had opened the innings with Talbot at the other end: but the dusky nabob of Khanipur had dismissed Talbot, good man as he was. Blake had gone in, only to fall to a catch by Harry Wharton in the field: Arthur Augustus had followed, only to be dismissed for nine: and Cardew also had fallen to the dusky nabob's bowling. But Tom was still going strong: and Figgins of the New House, now at the other end, was backing him up nobly.

'Thwee, I wathah think,' said Arthur Augustus.

'Close fit,' said Blake, anxiously.

'I wathah think - Oh, cwissy!' ejaculated Arthur Augustus, as a fat thumb poked him in the ribs, and he stared round. 'Weally, Buntah —'

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles. Bunter was feeling rather annoyed. William George Bunter did not like being passed by like the idle wind that was not regarded. Billy Bunter, in his own estimation at least, was quite an important fellow: much more important, at any rate, than such a comparatively trivial thing as cricket.

'I say, Gussy —'

'Pway do not punture me, Buntah —'

'But I say — !'

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Blake. 'Figgins won't do it — look at that ball coming in from that chap Cherry —'

'Wun!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, his back turned on Bunter, 'wun like anythin'. Wun, bai Jove, wun!'

Tom Merry had made good at his end. But the ball was coming in from the swift and powerful hand of Bob Cherry, straight as a bullet for Figgins's wicket, and though Figgy stretched his long legs to their top gear, he was seconds too late. A wrecked wicket greeted him on arrival.

'How's that?' chirruped several voices in the field.
'Out!'

'Wotten luck!' sighed Arthur Augustus, as Kerr went in to take Figgins's place. 'Bai Jove! It's wathah good luck that Tom Mewwy is playin' after all — we shall want all the wuns he can hand out.'

'I say, Gussy —'

'Weally, Buntah —'

'They've come over in good form,' said Blake. 'That chap Cherry is nippy in the field. And can that dark johnny bowl?'

'Tom looks set,' remarked Talbot.

'Set for the innings, on his looks,' said Monty Lowther. 'Jolly good luck that he isn't sitting in Extra with Mossoo.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Good old Tommy!' said Blake. 'It's worth lines or a licking when Railton comes home. By gum, I'd take six, or sixty, to put up an innings like that. Good old Tommy.'

There was no doubt that Tom Merry, always a good bat, was at the top of his form. Likewise there was no doubt that St. Jim's were going to need every

run he could add to the score. If Tom had remembered Extra, he would have been glad that he had taken Cardew's tip, and 'cut'. But he did not even remember the existence of Monsieur Morny, or even that of his respected house-master, Victor Railton, just then. King Cricket reigned supreme, and all lesser considerations were banished from mind.

'Gussy, old chap!' squeaked Billy Bunter. Bunter was growing more and more annoyed. Really, he might not have been there at all for all the heed his old pal D'Arcy was taking of his fat existence. True, Arthur Augustus was quite unconscious of being Bunter's old pal!

'Bai Jove!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus, blind and deaf to Bunter, 'there's old Kildare! Bai Jove — I wondah — !'

Blake whistled softly. Some of the others looked a little anxious. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, had strolled down to Little Side, to give the junior match a look-in. Several fellows noticed that his eyes fixed rather intently on Tom Merry at the wickets. That might have been only because Tom was putting up so good a show for his side. Or — !

'If he knows — !' murmured Blake.

'He wouldn't butt in, if he did,' muttered Lowther; 'Kildare's a sportsman, he wouldn't butt into a game.'

But faces were a little anxious. Tom Merry was too concentrated on the bowling and the willow to notice

that the captain of the school was in the offing. But many eyes turned uneasily on Kildare. If he happened to be aware that Tom was scheduled for detention, in those very moments, what would he do? What Knox would have done nobody needed to ask: but luckily Knox had no interest in games, and was not likely to waste his precious time giving a junior match the once-over.

But if Kildare knew —

The St. Jim's captain stood for several minutes looking on, and then walked away again, much to the relief of the crowd of juniors at the pavilion. If Kildare knew, he was content to leave a disciplinary matter till after the cricket was over. Popular as the captain of St. Jim's was, the juniors were glad enough, on this occasion, to see his back.

'All wight!' said Arthur Augustus, with a deep breath of relief. 'If old Kildare knows, he wouldn't butt into a cwicket match — old Kildare is a sportsman. That wottah Knox would think nothin' of walkin' Tom off the field.'

'Catch Knox around with cricket going on!' said Herries, with a sniff. 'Smoking cigarettes in his study is more in his line.'

'Safe as houses,' said Cardew. 'By gad, old Tommy is making the fur fly. If that isn't a boundary I'll eat my hat.'

It was a boundary. But if the batting was good, the bowling was far from ineffective. Kerr came out,

and Fatty Wynn went in to take his place. Fatty Wynn of the New House was a bowler of renown in the Lower School: with the willow he was a steady stone-waller, and he now put up some stone-walling to back up Tom Merry's more brilliant performance. And plump as he was — almost as plump as Billy Bunter — he had a good turn of speed, when Tom made the running. The pair went on steadily: Tom, when he had the bowling making the fur fly: Fatty, when he had it, blocking it with philosophic calm.

'Gussy, old chap — !' For the umpteenth time, Billy Bunter squeaked: reinforcing his fat squeak with another jab of a fat thumb in aristocratic ribs.

Arthur Augustus glued on the game, turned his head impatiently. For once exasperation was too much for his polished politeness. His eyeglass gleamed at Bunter, and his noble eye behind it.

'Pway don't wowwy, Buntah!' he said.

'Oh, really, D'Arcy —'

'Wun away and play, deah boy.'

Billy Bunter blinked at him indignantly.

'Look here — !' he began warmly.

'Pway let me watch the cwicket, Buntah.' Arthur Augustus remembered the manners and customs of the fat owl of Greyfriars, 'Pewwaps you would like to go up to the study, Buntah. There is a cake in the cupboard if you feel like a little light wefweshment.'

Billy Bunter's indignant face brightened.

'Right-ho!' he said, 'see you later, D'Arcy.'

Billy Bunter rolled away. Bunter, undoubtedly, felt like a little light refreshment - that was his perpetual state! If there was a cake in study No. 6 in the School House, study No. 6 in the School House was the special spot in the universe that had the strongest attraction for William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove. Off rolled Bunter, to Arthur Augustus's infinite relief: and the swell of St. Jim's was able to concentrate on cricket, untroubled by fat squeaks in his noble ear, and pokes from a grubby fat thumb in his aristocratic ribs.

CHAPTER VIII

KNOX MAKES A DISCOVERY

GERALD KNOX grinned. He was amused.

Knox was strolling idly in the quadrangle. While Tom Merry and Co. and their Greyfriars rivals were playing cricket, watched by a buzzing crowd of juniors of both houses: while other St. Jim's men were following more or less strenuous activities, Knox of the Sixth was idle, as he generally was on a half-holiday. He did not care for cricket—he had no inclination to pull a boat on the rippling Ryll: he was not disposed to push out his bicycle for a spin: still less did a ramble in leafy lanes and scented summer woods attract him. He was, in fact, a slacker of the first water, and he was slacking.

He had, as George Herries had sagely guessed, smoked a cigarette or two in his study. Then he looked for Cutts and St. Leger of the Fifth, to while away the time with a game of banker. But Cutts and St. Leger had gone out, so there was no banker for Knox in Cutts's study. Coming down, he had spotted Wally of the Third sliding on banisters, and smacked his head — not so much because it was against the rules to slide on banisters, as because he was

given to smacking the heads of fags. Now he was strolling in the quad, with his hands in his pockets, and his stroll took him past the window of the French master's class-room.

That window was too high from the ground for anyone to look in: but it was wide open to the summer breeze, and voices floated out. Monsieur Morny's rather shrill voice came to his ears.

'Vous, Trimble, vill you give me ze translation of zat sentence zat is on ze blackboard. Toute de suite.'

Trimble of the Fourth, evidently, was one of the hapless youths in Extra School that afternoon. For that Knox cared nothing or less than nothing: but it reminded him of Tom Merry, and he grinned.

The cheeky junior who had barged him over — deliberately and with malice aforethought, to Knox's suspicious mind — was there: at least, Knox at present had no doubt that he was there. Sitting in Extra, absorbing French, on a day like this, with the sun shining, and cricket going on, on Little Side—a match that was utterly unimportant to Knox, but very important indeed from the point of view of Tom Merry and his friends. Knox, with cigarette and banker in his thoughts, had rather forgotten Tom Merry: and now that he was reminded of him he was sourly amused.

The young rascal had got off that 'six', owing to Railton's intervention, much to Knox's angry resentment at the time. But, as it had turned out, he had

escaped from the frying-pan into the fire. From Tom himself, he had learned that the junior would much rather have taken the 'six' than have cut cricket. Picturing him sitting in Extra, listening perforce to Monsieur Morny's shrill drone while his thoughts were on the cricket-field, Knox was distinctly amused. The young ruffian would think twice, before he barged Knox again!

'Ecoutez, vous Trimble! you translate —' came Mossoo's shrill voice to Knox's ears, 'Je ne suis pas ce que je suis — now zat you translate.'

'Oh, crikey! I — I mean — I ain't what I am!' came Trimble's reply.

'Mon Dieu! zat is not the translation, Trimble! You are one stupid! You do not zink of vat I tell you of "être" and "suivre". Zat sentence he mean — I am not zat which I follow. Now you understand?'

'Oh! yes! No, I mean, yes, sir.'

Knox strolled on grinning. That was what Tom Merry was going through, along with Trimble and the other delinquents, instead of wielding the willow on Little Side. He wouldn't barge Knox again in a hurry! That cricket match was going on without him. Knox, little as he gave thought to the summer game, knew that Tom Merry was a tower of strength to his side, and that he would be missed — perhaps sorely missed. He couldn't have cared less. Indeed, if Tom was to learn, when he came out of the Extra, that his side was down and out, that would only

have added to the malicious amusement of the bully of the Sixth. Knox was not a fellow to forget offences, whether real or fancied.

He grinned again, at the sight of the fat junior rolling across the quad to the House. The blue and white cap told him that this was one of the Greyfriars crowd, though not a man in the eleven: and he remembered that he had seen Billy Bunter before. It was Bunter's unusual circumstances, and the flash of his spectacles in the summer sunshine, that brought the grin to Knox's face this time. As Bunter was coming from the direction of the cricket ground, he had no doubt that the fat Greyfriars fellow had been watching the game, and it occurred to him to inquire how the junior team were getting on minus their accustomed captain.

'Here, fatty!' called out Knox.

Bill Bunter was rolling on, regardless of Knox, his fat thoughts concentrated on the cake in the cupboard in study No. 6 in the School House. He blinked round with a frown as the St. Jim's senior called to him, and gave Knox a hostile stare through his big spectacles. Billy Bunter did not like the epithet 'Fatty': it was a disrespectful and quite inappropriate reference to a manly and well-proportioned figure!

'You're from Greyfriars, I think?' said Knox.

'What about it?' snapped Bunter. He had no politeness to waste on a fellow who called him 'Fatty'.

'They're playing cricket now, aren't they?' asked Knox.

'Think we came over to play football?' asked Bunter.

Knox gave him a frown.

'Don't be cheeky!' he said. 'How is the game going?'

'What do you expect?' retorted Bunter, 'St. Jim's wickets are going down like skittles of course.'

Knox smiled: and Bunter stared at him. He had expected, and intended that reply to be unpleasant. Knox evidently was not taking it so. St. Jim's wickets going down like skittles seemed to amuse him.

'What's the score now?' he asked.

'Haven't noticed,' answered Bunter. 'Most of them down for hardly any runs. Just like skittles. You see, we play cricket at Greyfriars.' Bunter put stress on the word 'play', as an intimation that whatever they did with cricket at St. Jim's, they didn't 'play' it! 'I've got tired of watching them go down, and if they think Tom Merry will last much longer, they've got another guess coming, as I can jolly well tell them.'

Gerald Knox jumped almost clear of the ground.

'Tom Merry!' he repeated. 'Did you say Tom Merry?'

'Yes, I did. He's not much good really — I could play his head off, if Wharton had the sense to put me in the team.'

With that, Bunter rolled on. He had wasted enough

time on Knox, with a cake awaiting him in study No. 6 in the School House.

'Stop!' exclaimed Knox.

He was utterly amazed by the information the fat owl had let drop. Tom Merry was in detention—sitting in Extra School with other culprits in Monsieur Morny's class-room: he was not, and could not be, playing cricket on Little Side. But if he was not, what did Bunter mean? Knox wanted to know. He called after Bunter as the fat junior rolled on: but Bunter preferred to turn a deaf ear, and he rolled on regardless.

'Do you hear me?' exclaimed Knox. 'Stop at once.'

Bunter rolled on. At Greyfriars, he would have paid heed: at St. Jim's he was under no compulsion to heed Knox or anybody else. So he rolled on with his back to Knox, leaving him to call as long and as often as he liked, and be blowed to him!

But Knox of the Sixth was not to be treated in a cavalier way by a junior, whether he belonged to Greyfriars, or St. Jim's, or any other school within the borders of Great Britain. With a knitted brow, he strode after Bunter, overtook him, and seized a fat ear between fingers and thumb. Bunter was brought to a sudden halt as Knox pulled on that auricular appendage.

'Ow! wow! Yaroooooh!' roared Bunter.

'Now, you fat cheeky young rascal —!' snapped Knox.

Billy Bunter yelled. 'Leggo! you leggo my ear, will you? I'll jolly well hack your shins if you don't leggo my ear!'

'Do!' said Knox, unpleasantly, 'do, if you want to be licked till you can't crawl, you little fat rotter.'

Billy Bunter did not want to be licked till he could not crawl. Very much indeed he did not. So he did not hack Knox's shins, though he would have given anything — anything that was uneatable, at least — to have done so. He gave Knox a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

'Leggo my ear!' he howled. 'Think you can bully a Greyfriars man? I can jolly well tell you — leggo, will you, you beast!'

Knox did not like 'beast' any more than Bunter had liked 'Fatty'. He signified the same by giving the fat ear a twist, to the accompaniment of an anguished howl from Bunter.

'Now, answer me, you fat little tick,' said Knox, releasing the ear at last. 'You were saying —'

'Ow! wow! ow! wow! ow!' spluttered Bunter, rubbing a burning ear, 'Oh, crikey! You jolly well look here —'

'Pack it up,' snapped Knox, 'now —'

'Ow! wow! wow!'

Billy Bunter had no idea why Knox had stopped him, or what Knox wanted to know: neither did he care. He would have bolted, however, for the sake of leaving the bullying senior unanswered, if it had

been practicable. But he realised that his fat little legs were no match for Knox's long ones in a foot-race. So he rubbed his ear, glared through his spectacles, and remained where he was.

'Now tell me — !' said Knox, 'you said something about Tom Merry being at the cricket. What did you mean?'

Bunter stared at him.

'Eh! what?' he ejaculated, 'I said he wouldn't last much longer, and so he jolly well won't, so yah!'

'Do you mean to say that Tom Merry is playing cricket?' It was dawning on Knox, and there was a glitter in his eyes.

'He isn't playing hop-sotch,' answered Bunter, 'or marbles either.'

'You chattering little idiot, will you answer me, or do you want me to pull your ear again?' exclaimed Knox, savagely. 'Take that!' he grabbed at the fat ear, seized it before Bunter could dodge, and gave it a savage pull.

'Yaroooh!' roared Bunter.

'Now, you cheeky little fat flabby frowsey tick —'

'Ow! wow! yow-ow!'

'Is Tom Merry on the cricket-ground or not?' hissed Knox.

'Ow! wow! Of course he is,' gasped Bunter. 'How could he be batting, if he wasn't? Why shouldn't he be on the cricket ground, when there's a match on? Gone crackers, or what?'

'You saw him there —?'

'Of course I saw him,' answered Bunter, in wonder. 'He's big enough to be seen, I suppose. What do you mean?'

Knox gritted his teeth.

'If you're pulling my leg, you fat little tick, and giving me a walk for nothing, I'll look for you and wallop you,' he said. 'You mean to say that Tom Merry is batting now?'

'He was five minutes ago, at any rate,' answered Bunter. 'I dare say he's out by this time—our bowling is too good for St. Jim's. He was batting when I came away. What about it?'

Knowing nothing of Tom's detention, or of Knox's resentful malice towards that particular St. Jim's junior, Bunter was quite puzzled. Had he known anything of the circumstances, no doubt he would have kept his extensive mouth shut. As it was, he had unluckily opened it too wide. Knox of the Sixth knew how matters stood now. Never for a moment had suspicion crossed his mind that Tom Merry was not in Monsieur Morny's detention class, after all. But he knew now that Tom was nowhere near Mossoo's class-room.

He gave Bunter a black look and turned away. The black look did not affect the Owl of Greyfriars at all: but there was a severe pain in his fat ear and Bunter simply yearned to put a foot on Knox's trousers as he turned away. He contented himself,

however, with breathing the expressive word:

'Beast!'

Unluckily Knox caught it, and he turned again.

Smack!

'Yooo-hooop!' roared Bunter.

His fat head fairly sank from that smack, Knox's hand was rising for another, but Bunter did not wait for that. He bolted.

Knox gave him no further heed. He moved away with a black brow, and his eyes glittering. According to Bunter, Tom Merry who should have been in Extra was playing cricket, as if barging Knox and getting Extra were trifles light as air which could be disregarded at his own will and pleasure. Knox's lips set bitterly. If that was the young rascal's idea, he was soon to learn better. But he was going to make sure before he took the trouble of going down to the cricket ground. That blinking young ass in spectacles might have made some silly mistake — might have mistaken one fellow for another. It was easy enough to make sure. Knox walked back to the open window of Monsieur Morny's class-room, where a few minutes ago he had been grinning in the belief that Tom Merry was there at Extra.

He could not see in at the window: but he caught the sill, pulled himself up, and resting his elbows on the sill, looked in. That gave him a view of the interior of the class-room.

A detention class of more than a dozen looked

round at him. Monsieur Morny stared across at the face at the window.

'Mais pourquoi —!' Monsieur was beginning, staring at Knox.

Knox ran his eye over the class. There were several Shell fellows, several of the Fourth, one or two of the Third. But Tom Merry was not among them.

'Vat is it?' exclaimed Monsieur Morny. 'Vat you vant at ze window, hein! Zat you interrupt not, you Knox.'

'Excuse me, monsieur,' said Knox, 'I understand that Merry of the Shell should be here in Extra, but I don't see him.'

'C'est vrai — he is absent,' answered Monsieur Morny. 'I mark him absent, and he will report to Monsieur Railton.'

'Did he not come in at all?'

'Non, non, I have not seen him.'

'Thank you, monsieur! This is a matter that I have to look into as a prefect,' said Knox. 'I will see that Merry comes to your class, as ordered by his house-master.'

Knox dropped back to the ground. There was no doubt now. He had never suspected it, or dreamed of it: now he knew that the junior who had been given Extra for barging him over, had coolly walked off, disregarding Extra, and was playing cricket.

Knox walked away in the direction of Little Side,

with set lips. Knox had his duty to do as a prefect: and that duty was to round up a truant and march him in. And Knox, never at other times a whale on duty, was prepared to carry out that particular duty with zest.

CHAPTER IX

WALKED OFF!

TOM MERRY jumped.

That jump did it.

He was getting the bowling again from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky nabob of Khaniput and the best junior bowler of Greyfriars. A batsman standing up to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's bowling had to be all eyes. And all attention, Tom had stood up to that bowling for a good many overs, and all the dusky nabob's skill had been exerted in vain. It had looked as if first man in might be 'not out' at the end of the innings. Another St. Jim's wicket was down, and Kangaroo was now at the other end. Another — !

'Merry!'

That sharp unpleasant voice came to Tom's ears: and it reminded him of all that cricket had driven from his thoughts. It was the voice of Gerald Knox, prefect, of the Sixth Form. And Tom jumped — and that did it! The next second his wicket was in pieces.

'Oh!' gasped Tom.

He looked at his wicket: his middle stump slant-

ing, the bails down, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned a dusky grin. He had 'got' that impregnable batsman at last: and he did not know that he owed it to Knox of the Sixth.

Tom gave that dismal wicket one glance and then walked quietly back to the pavilion, with deep feelings. Knox was there and he knew why Knox was there. He had forgotten Knox. Nobody expected Gerald Knox anywhere near the cricket ground: neither would he have been anywhere near it, but for the information he had unexpectedly received. But he was there: and Tom knew why he was there. The fall of the wicket, when he was going as strong as ever in a splendid innings, was a bitter blow: yet it mattered little, for he knew that Knox would have interrupted the innings if it had not come to that sudden close. Knox was there to wreak his grudge, and cricket mattered nothing to him. Tom was playing a magnificent innings for his side: but that did not alter the fact that he was a truant, and that a prefect of the Sixth Form had the authority and the power to 'run him in'.

His heart beat, and his eyes gleamed, as he went back to the pavilion. Faces there were glum, with one exception. Knox was certainly not feeling glum.

'Merry!' he rapped.

'Well?' said Tom, breathing hard. He knew what was coming: and his grasp closed almost convulsively on the cane handle of his bat.

'I found that you had cut detention, Merry!' said Knox. 'I have come here to take you back to the house.'

'Weally, Knox — !' expostulated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'Look here — !' began Blake.

'We're in the middle of a match, Knox,' said Talbot. 'Mr. Railton will deal with Tom Merry afterwards—!'

'You can pack up all that,' said Knox, coolly. 'I'm here to take a truant back to detention. Come along, Merry.'

'Shame!' came a voice from somewhere.

'Bully!' came another voice.

'Cad!' came another.

Knox stared round angrily. He was always unpopular with the juniors of his house: but never had he been so unpopular as now. Every face was angry and resentful. Cardew was biting his lip. His 'tip' to Tom Merry was not turning out much of a success, after all. Tom, certainly, had put up a handsome score for his side — so far! But he was out of the game now.

Or was he!

He did not stir as Knox ordered him to come along. His eyes fairly burned at the bully of the Sixth.

'Are you coming?' snapped Knox.

Tom did not stir or speak.

The Greyfriars men were staring from the field,

wondering why next man in did not come out to the wicket. Three or four other Greyfriars men who had come over with the team, and were at the pavilion, also stared. This was a very unusual experience for them. All the crowd of St. Jim's men were staring at Knox and Tom Merry: and some of them were in a mood to barge Knox off the scene, prefect of the Sixth Form as he was.

'I've told you to come, Merry!' snapped Knox. 'Do you want me to take you away by the collar?'

Tom's eyes flushed, as Knox raised a hand.

'Better not!' he said very quietly.

'Look here, you cheeky rascal —'

'Lay a finger on me,' said Tom, in low concentrated tones, 'and I'll knock you flying with this bat, Knox.'

That answer to any other Sixth Form prefect at St. Jim's would have been followed by more than a finger being laid on the junior who made it but there was a yellow streak in Knox. Tom Merry meant every syllable of it: and the fact that he would inevitably be 'sacked' for knocking down a prefect did not encourage Gerald Knox to go through the process of being knocked down by a cricket bat. Knox's lifted hand dropped to his side again.

'Look here, Knox —!' Blake began again.

'Hold your tongue!' snapped Knox savagely. 'Tom Merry, are you coming or not? You will come with me this instant to the French class-room: or I shall

go straight to the Head and report that you are out of detention and refuse to obey a prefect. Now then!

Tom Merry drew a deep, deep breath. His anger and resentment were almost out of control: but fortunately he contrived to keep them in check. He had to abandon the wild idea of resistance to authority that had been vaguely in his mind. If he defied Knox, he could not defy the head-master. He had, in fact, placed himself in an utterly false position by following Cardew's 'tip', and disobeying the order of his house-master. He realised it now, and he knew that he had to toe the line.

'Will you come or not?' snapped Knox.

'I will come,' said Tom quietly, 'but — you could, if you liked, let this stand over till after the match, Knox. Will you?'

'Certainly not,' retorted Knox.

'I'll come, but I'll make you sorry for it somehow, you cur,' Tom exclaimed, his anger breaking out in a flame.

'I shall report that to your house-master,' Knox snarled.

'You can do as you like,' said Tom, contemptuously. He handed his bat to Manners.

'Talbot, old man, you'll captain the side; you'll have to play a substitute in the field when Greyfriars take their knock. If it fits in, I may be able to bat again when I come out of Extra. Carry on, you fellows.'

'I'm waiting,' snarled Knox.

Tom, without replying, walked away with him. The crowd of juniors cast expressive looks after Knox. There were a few present who would not have liked to collar him, and give him the ragging of his life.

'The wat!' breathed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. 'The utter wat!'

'The swob!' said Blake.

'The rotter!' said Lowther. 'By gum, we'll make the brute sit up for this sometime, somehow.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Rotten luck,' muttered Cardew. He was feeling a twinge. It had amused his idle mind to see a fellow like Tom Merry kicking over the traces, and taking wild chances. But it did not seem so amusing now, with Tom walked off the field, and all the rest angry and dismayed, and the Greyfriars visitors looking on at such a scene.

'Carry on!' said Talbot.

Next man in went to the wickets. The game was resumed after that long pause. And while the Greyfriars bowlers and field wound up the St. Jim's tail, and Billy Bunter devoured cake in Study No. 6, Tom Merry sat it out in Extra, with a dark brow, for once in the worst of tempers: and certainly not benefiting in the very least from Monsieur Morny's exposition of the mysteries of French irregular verbs. Never had he enjoyed irregular verbs less.

CHAPTER X

CAKE FOR BUNTER

'BEAST—!' breathed Billy Bunter.

His little round eyes and his big round spectacles gleamed down from the window of Study No. 6 at Gerald Knox, passing in the quad below.

Bunter had finished the cake.

It had been quite a large cake. It had arrived only that day from Eastwood House for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy: and but for the circumstances that the Owl of Greyfriars was honouring St. Jim's with a visit, would doubtless have graced the tea-table in D'Arcy's study. There was quite enough of it for four fellows. Some might have been left over. But what was enough for four ordinary fellows was by no means enough for William George Bunter of the Greyfriars' Remove: and there was not a crumb or a plum left over. Bunter had done full justice to that cake. Having demolished it to the final fragment, he blinked through the study cupboard for more. There was nothing more but a small pot of jam. A few minutes sufficed for that jam to follow the cake on the downward path.

Then Billy Bunter, in a rather crumby and sticky

state, blinked from the study window in the direction of the cricket-field in the distance. He was considering whether to roll back there, and bestow his fascinating society on Arthur Augustus, with a faint hope of extracting an invitation to Eastwood House for the summer holidays, or whether to take a rest in the study arm-chair: or whether to look into another study and ascertain if there were any more cakes about.

All this naturally needed thinking out. It was not a long walk back to the cricket field, but even a short walk had no attraction for Billy Bunter; who had a deeply-rooted objection to exertion in any shape or form. A rest in the study arm-chair was more attractive: Bunter could do with unlimited rest. More attractive was the possibility of another cake.

But even Billy Bunter hesitated a little. At his own school, no fellow's tuck was safe from Bunter. But even Bunter paused at the idea of transferring his activities in that line to another school.

On the other hand he was a guest at St. Jim's: a self-invited one, it was true; and surely a guest was entitled to a little light refreshment. And Bunter knew which study to select. A fellow like Cardew, coming in to find Bunter devouring tuck in his study, might very likely kick him, guest as he was. A fellow like Tom Merry wouldn't. And Bunter knew that Tom had a dear and indulgent old governess who often sent him quite nice things from Huckleberry

Heath. And Tom was — so far as Bunter knew — still at the wickets, and therefore not likely to come in at all. Even if he was out he was likely to remain on the cricket ground, indeed fairly certain to do so. Bunter, blinking from the window of No. 6, had already decided on No. 10 in the Shell for his next call when he sighted Knox of the Sixth below.

Knox did not look up and did not see the fat face at the window. He was grinning, as if feeling pleased and satisfied about something. Dearly Bunter would have liked to smack that grin off his face.

His eyes fairly glittered through his spectacles at the top of Knox's head.

Bunter was not a fellow to remember grudges: his thoughts usually ran on the more attractive subject of food. But Knox really was the limit. So far from civility to a guest, a stranger within the gates, he had pulled Bunter's fat ear twice, and smacked his head in addition. There was quite a sharp pain in that fat ear, and another pain in the fat head. Bunter, blinking down at Knox, rubbed the fat ear with one hand and the fat head with the other, and if a glare of concentrated wrath and scorn could have knocked a fellow out, Gerald Knox would have collapsed on the spot. As it was, however, Gerald Knox sauntered, and grinned, unconscious and regardless of the wrathful and vengeful Owl...

'Beast!' hissed Bunter. Knox, as he sauntered, was about to pass directly under the high window.

Bunter's eyes gleamed as a sudden thought flashed into his mind. If something dropped on Knox's head as he passed below, he would never know what hit him. Very gladly he would have retaliated on Knox by pulling his ear, or smacking his head: but that was not practical politics. But undoubtedly he could drop a book or an inkpot on a head passing below, and pop back out of sight before the fellow at the receiving end could spot him!

Billy Bunter grinned.

Leaving the window, he blinked round Study No. 6 through his big spectacles, for a suitable missile. There was an inkpot on the table, and a fairly weighty Book of English Verse. Bunter hesitated between the inkpot and the Book of English Verse. English Verse suddenly and unexpectedly landing on the top of a fellow's head, would certainly make him jump. But there was ink in the inkpot, which would spill when it landed on Knox: so Bunter decided in favour of the inkpot.

He clutched it up in a fat hand, and rolled back to the window. Then he hissed: 'Beast!'

Undoubtedly it was rather beastly of Knox, for instead of coming on, under the window, he had turned, and was sauntering back, under other windows. He was already out of range of an inkpot from a fat hand.

Billy Bunter breathed hard. Vengeance had been almost within his reach; now it had eluded him. In

his mind's eye he had seen that inkpot dropping on Knox's head, the ink streaming down his face: but he was not to see it with any other eye! He gave a snort of disgust, and pitched the inkpot back on the table. It rolled over, spilled its contents on the Book of English Verse — unheeded by Bunter. Care of other people's property had never been one of his weaknesses.

Vengeance being out of reach, Billy Bunter's fat thoughts returned to a subject which was, after all, more attractive: food. There being nothing more of an edible nature in Study No. 6, he had no further interest in that celebrated apartment. He rolled out and headed for the Shell studies. Bunter had been at St. Jim's before; he knew his way about.

The coast was clear. Almost every School House junior who was not in the game was watching the game on Little Side, excepting the handful of delinquents who were in Extra School and suffering under Monsieur Morny. Any St. Jim's junior, who had come on Bunter, might have been surprised to see a Greyfriars' junior rambling about the studies. But no St. Jim's fellow came on Bunter: and he rolled into No. 10 in the Shell quite at his ease.

He closed the door, and rolled across to the study cupboard. Quite an ecstatic expression came over his face, as he blinked therein.

'Oh, good!' ejaculated Bunter, 'Prime!'

He had surmised that there might be something

good in Tom Merry's study. His surmise had been well founded.

Tom, as well as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, had been in luck that day, from the direction of his home. Miss Priscilla Fawcett had not forgotten her dear Tommy: and the cake on which Billy Bunter now feasted his eyes and his spectacles was really magnificent. It was twice as large as D'Arcy's; it had marzipan on top, and it was deliciously aromatic. That day, certainly Tom had been thinking more of cricket than of cake — quite possibly he had forgotten that it was there: at all events, it was still uncut. It was not likely to remain in that pristine state now. Bunter feasted his eyes — but he did not linger long on such a Balmeicide feast as that. He clutched the cake.

'Prime!' gasped Bunter.

He grabbed a knife from the table-drawer and cut the cake. Filling a capacious mouth to capacity was the work of a split second. Gobbling, Billy Bunter set to work in earnest.

With D'Arcy's cake already packed away in his extensive interior, Bunter might have been expected to go slow with Tom Merry's cake. But no one who knew William George Bunter would have expected that. Bunter's stowage capacity was almost unlimited: and he was always ready to take on cargo over the Plimsoll-line, if the provender ran to it. With glowing eyes Bunter proceeded to demolish that cake!

Half of it went down quite rapidly. Then even Billy Bunter slowed down. But he did not stop. To stop eating, while something remained to be eaten, was really against William George Bunter's principles.

His breathing grew a little laboured. His fat brow perspired. His plump jaws slowed down — but they still worked. Slice after slice of cake disappeared, and it grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less. When only the final slice remained, even Bunter paused. But no doubt on the principle that if a job was worth doing it was worth doing well, Bunter demolished that last slice. Save for a few crumbs on his fat knees that cake was now numbered among the things that had been, but no longer were.

'Ummmmmm!' mumbled Bunter.

He leaned back in Tom Merry's arm-chair. Even Billy Bunter had had enough and a little over. He needed a rest after his exertion, and he was disinclined to stir. There might be more tuck available in other studies, but Billy Bunter was not now disposed to go in quest of it. He did not even care if there were more edibles in the cupboard in No. 10. For once, if only for once in his fat career, Billy Bunter had had enough — indeed he had a slightly uncomfortable feeling that perhaps he had had a little too much. Nothing short of a fire or an earthquake would have dragged him out of that arm-chair.

His eyes closed behind his spectacles.

It was a warm summer's afternoon. Bunter was

drowsy. And next to eating, sleeping came second on his list of earthly joys. There were fellows who were fatheads enough to slog about in the sunshine with cricket bats and cricket balls: but Billy Bunter was not of their number. Bunter's eyes closed and his mouth opened: he slept, and he snored.

Snore!

That resonant sound woke echoes in Tom Merry's study. Probably any fellow passing the study might have heard Bunter's musical effects. But everybody was out of the House that golden afternoon: even Baggy Trimble would have been out, had he not been in Extra. There was no danger of the sleeping beauty being disturbed. Billy Bunter slept on, and snored on, and like the music of the spheres, his musical effects were unheard by mortal ears.

CHAPTER XI

OUT FOR A DUCK

'OUT!'

Tom Merry's lips set.

Tom was always a good loser. He had good luck at games, chiefly because he was keen, and always kept himself fit. But when bad luck came along, he could take it. If he went in hoping to make a century and came out with a duck, he could go through it cheerfully, and smile. But circumstances alter cases: and on this special occasion it was hard to 'take it' with his accustomed cheerfulness. It had happened — but it ought not to have happened, and it need not have happened: it was the malicious enmity of a suspicious, unpleasant, disgruntled fellow that had caused it to happen, and that gave it a bitter sting.

'Extra' had been over at tea-time. By that time, the Greyfriars' first innings was also over. St. Jim's had taken seventy in their knock. Harry Wharton and Co. had beaten that by a baker's dozen: their score was eighty-three when they joined the St. Jim's men at tea. That was a leeway that had to be made up: and after tea Tom Merry opened the home second innings with Figgins at the other end, hoping to make

up that leeway. And the first ball of the first over knocked his wicket flying.

He knew that he might have expected something like it. He was utterly out of sorts. Anger and resentment, rare with him, were strong in his heart, and such feelings did not conduce to fitness or good play. Added to that, he had sat for weary hours in detention, in a stuffy class-room under an irritable master — no detention master was ever at his best and Mossoo was liable to gusts of temper when his class gave him trouble, as too often they did. Tom's thoughts had been on the cricket-field, not on French verbs, and a good many times he had had the sharpest edge of Mossoo's tongue. Everything, in fact, seemed to go wrong that unhappy afternoon. He came out of detention tired, disgruntled, and very little like the cheery cricketer who had knocked up a hatful of runs for his side earlier: who had been first in and looked like being 'not out'. Had he had time to play himself in, it would have made a difference: but Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh bowled the first over for Greyfriars, and it was a ball that would have beaten many good batsmen at their best. Tom, at his worst, played it a shade too late.

That crash struck him like a blow.

He stared at his wrecked wicket, and his eyes gleamed as he stared. Greyfriars bowling was good, but it was Knox of the Sixth who had wrecked that wicket. His feelings were very deep.

He had had to be missing from the fielding side when Greyfriars had batted. But he might have made up for that, with luck at the wicket. And he had had the worst of luck — out at the first ball. His first innings had been cut short by Knox. His second innings was nipped in the bud — and that too was owing to Knox. It was with a set face that he walked back to the pavilion — quite unlike the cheery cricketer who, as a rule, was able to take the rough with the smooth, and take it with a smiling face.

'Wuff luck, deah boy,' said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sympathetically.

Tom nodded, without speaking. His feelings were too deep for speech.

'Too bad, old man,' said Lowther.

'That darky can bowl,' said Jack Blake. 'Look out for him, Talbot, when you go in. He's real mustard.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

Talbot of the Shell went out to take Tom's place. Several fellows glanced at Tom Merry's face curiously. What had happened was a jolt, and a severe one, for the junior captain, but nobody expected Tom to take it as he appeared to be taking it. Cardew shrugged his shoulders slightly.

'Fwightfully wuff luck,' said Arthur Augustus. 'But cwicket is a vewy uncertain game, deah boy.'

Without answering, Tom went into the pavilion. Lowther, whose name was well up on the batting list, remained where he was, but Manners followed

Tom in. He was rather worried by his chum's look — and not less so when he saw Tom throw his bat down with almost a crash.

'Tom, old chap —!' muttered Manners.

Tom looked at him.

'Go and watch the game, old fellow,' he said. 'Better leave me alone for a bit; I'm not feeling good.'

'It was rotten luck, but it might happen to anybody, old chap,' said Manners.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

'It wouldn't have happened if that cur Knox had let me alone,' he breathed. 'That rat did it for me.'

'I — I suppose so, to some extent,' said Manners uneasily. 'But it's no good thinking about that, Tom. After all you did cut your detention, and Knox is a pre. —'

'Fat lot he cares about that!' said Tom, savagely. 'Think he would run in his pal, Cutts of the Fifth, if he caught him breaking out after lights out? You know he wouldn't! He's had a chance at me today, and he's made the most of it. But I'll make him sorry somehow for mucking up this cricket match, and losing it for us as likely as not.'

Manners shook his head.

'Better forget all that, Tom,' he said.

'I'll forget it when I've made that rat sorry for himself somehow.'

'For goodness' sake, don't talk out of your hat!'

exclaimed Manners. 'Look here, Tom, try to look at it sensibly. Being in detention, you oughtn't to have played at all, and you can see now that it would have been better not —'

'Leave it at that,' snapped Tom. 'I'm not in a mood for sermons, Manners.'

Manners flushed.

'If I'm sermonising I'm sorry,' he said, tartly, 'but I told you this morning when that thoughtless ass Cardew put you up to it —'

enough,' said Tom. 'Don't sing it over again.'

'I know! But I told you —'

'If you're going to say "I told you so!" once is enough,' said Tom. 'Don't sing it over again.'

Manners' flush deepened, and his lips set a little. He was a more thoughtful fellow than either of his chums, and his advice had often been useful to them. On this occasion it had been disregarded: and no one could say that the result of that had been beneficial to anyone.

'Well, I did tell you so, whether you like it or not,' he said, sharply. 'But if you think I'm rubbing it in I'll leave you alone. You'll be a bit cooler presently.'

With that, Manners turned on his heel, and went back to rejoin the crowd of fellows in front of the pavilion watching the game. Tom was not unaware that he had offended his chum: but for that moment he did not care. He was too full of disappointment and bitterness to care.

'Keep a stiff upper lip, old boy,' said a drawling voice in his ear, and he looked round to see Ralph Reckness Cardew. There was a faintly contemptuous expression on Cardew's face that brought a gleam to Tom's eyes.

'What do you mean?' he asked, very quietly.

'Only what I say,' drawled Cardew. 'You've scored a duck: but the skies haven't fallen! Fellows can't hit fours all the time. You've left fellows staring at you —'

'Let them stare,' snapped Tom.

'I saw two Greyfriars men—Nugent and Mauleverer, who came over with the team—looking at you—'

'They can look.'

'And another Greyfriars man winked at them —'

Tom breathed hard. He had taken Cardew's 'tip' that morning, and it had done more harm than good. He had done little good to his side; he was booked for trouble with his house-master; he had rebuffed Manners, whose advice, had he taken it, would have saved all this; but he had no word of reproach for the careless, reckless fellow who had misled him. If there was blame for his action, he laid it on himself: and on Gerald Knox of the Sixth Form. But though he did not blame Cardew, or think of reproaching him, he was in no mood to take 'lip' from him. His eyes gleamed at the dandy of the Fourth.

'That will do, Cardew,' he said. 'Cut it short at that.'

'There's such a thing as taking a jolt without scowling like a demon in a pantomime,' said Cardew, coolly. 'If you take a tip from me you'll keep a stiff upper lip —'

'I've taken a tip from you today,' said Tom, bitterly. 'I want no more of your tips, Cardew. I dare say it amused you to see me playing the goat, as you're fond of playing it yourself. Leave me alone now.'

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

'Oh, brace up!' he said. 'The world isn't coming to an end because you scored a duck.'

'It's not that,' muttered Tom, 'it's that cur Knox — he's the cause of all the trouble. That malicious rat —' he broke off sharply. 'That doesn't concern you — leave me alone! I don't want your company, Cardew, get out.'

Cardew gave him a cool stare.

'I suppose I can stick in the pavilion if I like,' he answered. 'You haven't bought the pav, have you? I've no more use for your company than you have for mine, but I'll please myself about getting out.'

Tom clenched his hand.

His temper was at breaking-point. He came across to Cardew with clenched hands and gleaming eyes.

'Get out!' he said, thickly.

'Hoity-Toity,' mocked Cardew, without stirring a step.

Tom's hand went up. The next moment, blows

would have been struck; but at that moment Levison of the Fourth came in.

'Cardew —!' he began. Then, as he saw, Levison grasped Cardew by the shoulder and dragged him back from Tom so suddenly that the dandy of the Fourth almost stumbled over. 'Rowing, you ass, with the Greyfriars men in hearing? Come out of it.'

'Let go, you fool —'

'Come out of it, I say.'

Levison almost dragged Cardew away. Tom Merry was left alone, more angry and bitter than ever. He had been on the verge of a row with Cardew — a fight in the pavilion, with the Greyfriars visitors only a few yards away: and what did Cardew and his jeers matter anyway? He realised that he had to take hold of his temper. He left the pavilion, and walked away quickly. His wicket was down and he was not wanted: and he was in no mood for the company of the other fellows. He tramped away to the House with a knitted brow. In the quad he passed Baggy Trimble who, catching sight of his frowning face, grinned at him. Baggy very narrowly escaped a kick: but Tom controlled his irritation and passed on, leaving Trimble grinning.

His face almost flamed at the sight of Knox of the Sixth, strolling idly with his hands in his pockets. Knox after tea had looked for Cutts and St. Leger again, but it seemed that they were teeing out of gates: at all events they had not come in, and the

slacker of the Sixth was idling about, with nothing particular to do, no banker in Cutts's study being available.

He grinned, as Trimble had done, as his eyes fell on Tom. He did not need telling that Tom had had no luck on the cricket field.

Tom paused for a moment.

Never had he felt so strongly the desire to 'punch a prefect'. But he checked himself, and tramped on and went into the House, and Knox, grinning, resumed his stroll under the study windows.

SOMETHING BACK FROM BUNTER

BILLY BUNTER yawned.

He sat in Tom Merry's arm-chair in No. 10, in the Shell, yawning.

He had had a good long sleep, and a good long snore. Now he had been awake again for some while, but being too lazy to move, he sat and yawned. Even Billy Bunter, for once, was not hungry: two cakes, one after another, had for once filled all available space within his extensive circumference, and for once Billy Bunter did not care whether it was tea-time or not. He just sat and lazed.

However, having sat and lazed and yawned for some time, Bunter got a move on at last and heaved his unusual avoirdupois out of the arm-chair.

How long he had been there, sleeping and snoring, he did not know, but he knew that it must have been a considerable time. He remembered his old pal Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and his hope of extracting from the swell of St. Jim's an invitation to Eastwood House for the 'hols': or at least a few careless words that might be construed into the same. He decided to give the cricketers a look in again, especially as

it occurred to him that there might be ices going, and perhaps strawberries and cream. Even after two large cakes, Bunter could have found space for such trifles.

He gave a fat ear a rub. Knox had a very heavy hand: and there was still a lingering reminiscence in that fat ear.

'Beast!' murmured Bunter, thinking of Knox.

He blinked from the study window through his big spectacles. After such a lapse of time, it was not likely that the unpleasant senior who had pulled his ear would be still walking below. But if it happily so chanced, Bunter was ready to carry on with the good work that had failed to come off in Study No. 6.

'Oh!' ejaculated Bunter, as he blinked down.

That happy chance had actually materialised. As if to please Bunter there was Knox, strolling in the quad again, just as he had been when Bunter blinked down from D'Arcy's window earlier in the afternoon. Blinking down, Bunter saw Tom Merry pass him and then disappear from sight. But Knox remained - and as if to tempt Bunter, he came to a halt right under the window of No. 10 - far below, of course, but directly under the window. Standing there with his hands in his pockets, Knox was staring away in the direction of the gates, perhaps looking to see whether Cutts and St. Leger were coming in.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes glittered behind his big round spectacles.*

'Beast!' he breathed. 'He's got it coming.'

He had had no luck in D'Arcy's study. It looked as if he was going to have better luck in Tom Merry's.

His eyes gleamed down at the top of Knox's head.

Fortune was favouring him! That beast had pulled his fat ear, and smacked his fat head — treating him, a Greyfriars visitor, with no more ceremony than if he had been a St. Jim's fag. And now he was fairly asking for it, standing there, utterly unsuspecting of vengeance blinking down from an upper window; begging for it, in fact!

Bunter hesitated a moment or two.

He wanted to get back on that bully - very much indeed he did. Dropping something heavy on Knox's head was the way. Bunter anticipated the bang on Knox's head with glee. That was what he wanted. But he did not want a big, angry, senior man after him to 'wallop' him for that exploit. Vengeance might be sweet: but safety first was Bunter's motto.

But it was safe as houses.

Immediately some heavy object had banged on Knox's head Bunter could cut out of the study and vanish. If Knox raged after the hurler of the heavy object, he would not even know that it was Bunter who had hurled it — how could he, if the fat Owl vanished in time. And it would be only a matter of seconds to vanish, while it would be a matter of minutes at least for Knox to come raging up to the

study. Knox could rage after the heavy-object hurler as long as he liked: he would not find William George Bunter anywhere near the scene of the crime, so to speak.

It did not take the fat Owl of Greyfriars long to make up his mind. Vengeance on the ear-puller, then a rapid scuttle along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, and then, if anybody wanted to know, Bunter had never left that study since he had entered it — for, sad to relate, Billy Bunter had no scruples whatever in the fibbing line. Like Mr. Jaggars's celebrated witness, he was prepared to swear 'in a general way, anything'.

When all was safe, Billy Bunter was as bold as a lion. Ceasing to hesitate, he blinked round Tom Merry's study for a suitable, heavy object.

Tom Merry's Latin dictionary lay on the table. It was a large, bulky, heavy object: so large, so bulky, and so heavy, in fact, that anyone a little less obtuse than Bunter might have hesitated to drop it on any fellow's head — even that of an ear-puller.

Bunter certainly was not thinking of doing even Knox any real damage. So far as he thought at all, he was thinking of giving him a jolly good bang on the napper, which would, in Bunter's opinion, serve him jolly well right. Thinking was not Billy Bunter's long suit, anyway: that big, thick, heavy 'dick', which weighed a good many pounds, was suitable for his purpose, and that was enough for Bunter.

He grabbed it up with fat hands, and rolled back to the open window.

There was Knox — standing below, still staring towards the gates. Billy Bunter grinned down at him — an inimical grin. Gerald Knox had it coming.

Fat hands heaved the big dictionary out of the window. It was hardly necessary to take aim — if Billy Bunter had had to take aim, probably he would have missed. But all that was needed was to let the heavy object drop.

Bunter let it drop.

It dropped straight for the head below: and that fat Owl popped back from the window instantly. When the falling 'dick' hit Knox, it was certain that commotion would follow; and the fat junior did not want to be seen at the window. He popped back, grinning, and bolted across the study to the door. As he went, a loud yell from below, outside, floated to his fat ears, which told that the 'dick' had landed on its target.

That yell was music to the vengeful Owl's fat ears. But he did not stay to listen. He bolted out of Tom Merry's study. Obviously the 'dick'-hurler would be looked for in that study, as it would be quite clear from which window the Latin dictionary had dropped. Billy Bunter's cue was to be at a safe distance from that study before anyone had time to look into it.

He rolled rapidly out of No. 10. The coast was

quite clear — not a fellow in the passages. Bunter shot along to the study landing, breathless, but grinning happily over his success. Billy Bunter's movements generally bore a resemblance to those of a tortoise: but on this occasion he understudied the hare. In a matter of moments he was in study No. 6 in the Fourth, with the door closed. That study was vacant: at the moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was at the wickets and Blake and Herries and Dig were watching him there.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter.

He rolled across to the arm-chair and sat down, resisting the temptation to blink from the window and see what was going on in the quad. Study No. 6 in the Fourth was at a safe distance from No. 10 in the Shell: no fellow in No. 6 in the Fourth could be supposed to have dropped a dictionary from the window of No. 10 in the Shell: still, it was safer not to be seen at all: Bunter's cue was to be absolutely ignorant of the whole transaction.

He deposited his weight in D'Arcy's arm-chair, and chuckled. While he chuckled, he listened. He had no doubt that somebody or other would soon be after the 'dick'-hurler. So far, the House seemed all quiet and undisturbed, everybody out of doors: but that would not last, after what had happened. Bunter knew that Knox was a Sixth Form prefect: and a bang on the head of so important a person as a Sixth Form prefect was not a matter to be passed over



Fat hands heaved the dictionary out of the window



lightly. And it was only a matter of minutes before he heard footsteps from the direction of the Study landing.

These footsteps did not approach study No. 6, however; nobody was interested in Fourth Form studies. Billy Bunter felt quite secure. He leaned back in the arm-chair, grinning from one fat ear to the other. Sagely, he decided to remain where he was till the commotion was over. Not the slightest risk did he want to run of that heavy-handed beast, Knox, getting after him on the trail of vengeance. He was safe in study No. 6 and he sagely stayed safe.

Leaning back in the arm-chair in the drowsy summer heat, his little round eyes closed behind his big round spectacles, once more the fat Owl of Greyfriars glided into balmy slumber, and the snore that had recently awakened the echoes in No. 10 in the Shell now awakened them in study No. 6 in the Fourth. And if Billy Bunter dreamed as he snored, he certainly did not dream of what was to follow his exploit with Tom Merry's Latin dictionary at Tom Merry's study window.

CHAPTER XIII

FROM BAD TO WORSE

TOM MERRY came into his study, and closed the door after him with rather a bang.

That was quite unlike Tom's usual manners and custom. Seldom, if ever, was his sunny face clouded with bad temper. He was too fit and healthy, and keen on the open air, to be nervy or jumpy or irritable. But he was quite out of sorts now, and very much unlike his usual self.

Everything had gone wrong. He knew that he had been a fool to listen to Cardew's tip: and a greater fool to disregard Manners's advice and act on Cardew's. He laid the blame on himself, but that made it no pleasanter. He had played the reckless rebel like Cardew, and it had ended disastrously. The scene on the cricket-field, when Knox had marched him off, made his cheeks burn when he remembered it. Finally, and worst of all, he had as good as let down his side — the thing might have been worth while if he had had better luck: as it was, he had lost his wicket in his first innings, and scored a duck in his second; he might as well have gone into Extra in the first place and left the others to carry on without

him. He had rebuffed old Manners, and very nearly scrapped with Cardew: and nearly, though fortunately not quite, yielded to the temptation to punch Knox when he passed him in the quad — an action for which, if it had happened, the 'sack' would have been the probable penalty.

It was not like Tom to seek solitude: but he wanted to be alone now, away from even his nearest friends. He was out of sorts, disgruntled, miserable: everything was at sixes and sevens: and though much of the blame could have been laid on others, Tom was not the sort of fellow who could find comfort in laying it there. He was not going to show up on the cricket field again till he felt better and less liable to fly off the handle, snapping at either friend or foe; which was a wise decision on his part, so far as that went.

He came into No. 10, without the slightest idea that, only a minute earlier, it had been occupied by a fat junior from Greyfriars. Indeed a minute earlier he would have met Billy Bunter coming out. That minute was destined to mean a great deal to him.

As it was, he naturally did not think of Billy Bunter at all. If he had noticed the fat Owl who had come over with the Greyfriars crowd, he had given him no thought or attention, and he certainly did not remember him now, with other matters troubling his mind. Had he looked into the study cupboard, and noticed that Miss Priscilla's cake was missing,

he might have thought of Baggy Trimble, but hardly of a visitor from Greyfriars. Billy Bunter might not have existed at all, so far as Tom Merry thought of him.

And he had been in his study less than a minute, when a sound of commotion below the window drew his attention. Something seemed to be going on in the quad. It had been going on when he entered the study, but he had not heeded it. Now, however, it drew his attention and he glanced down from the window.

That glance was casual: but it became fixed at what he saw. He stared down at an unexpected scene.

'That cad —!' muttered Tom.

Knox of the Sixth was standing on the path below the study windows. He had his hand to his face, like a fellow who had received a blow. He seemed to stagger as he stood: and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was steadying him with a hold on his arm. Five or six other fellows were gathered round: Darrell of the Sixth, Lefevre of the Fifth, Trimble of the Fourth, Wally of the Third, and several others — all staring at Knox, and one or two grinning.

Tom could only wonder what had happened.

Something, it was clear, had happened to Knox, since Tom had passed him in the quad. What it was, Tom could not guess. But as he stared down, Kildare's voice floated up to him.

'Steady, old chap!' The St. Jim's captain, as a rule, was not very friendly with Gerald Knox: but his voice was kind and concerned now. 'You've had a knock.'

'Something fell on my head!' Knox's voice came panting. 'It knocked me over — I banged my face —'

'It was that "dick"! Darrell was speaking; 'It must have been some young ass buzzing a "dick" from a window —'

Knox, with one hand to his right eye, stared up with his left. Apparently he had fallen, when the dictionary landed on his head, and his right eye seemed to have suffered. His available eye gleamed at the sight of Tom Merry looking down from above.

'He's still there,' Knox almost choked, 'that young ruffian who barged me over the other day — now he's done this.'

All glances turned upwards. All eyes fixed on Tom Merry's face, as he stood at the window looking down.

'My eye's blacked, I believe — look at it.' Knox removed his hand from his face, disclosing the hidden eye. All other eyes fixed on it. Billy Bunter, when he had dropped the dictionary on the head below, had certainly not foreseen any thing of the kind. But evidently the sudden shock had knocked the Sixth Form man over, his face had banged on the ground, and that bang had done it! Knox of the Sixth had a darkened eye and a red, raw nose.

'Phew!' breathed Darrell.

'Is it black?' hissed Knox.

'Looks a bit dark, old man,' said Kildare. 'You'd better cut in and get something for it. You can leave Merry to me.'

He led Knox along the path, to the doorway of the House. There they disappeared from Tom Merry's sight. The other fellows below stared up at him - Wally of the Third grinning. No doubt D'Arcy minor remembered a recent smack on his head, and he, at least, was not sorry to see Knox of the Sixth with a black eye. Trimble was giggling. Darrell of the Sixth, who was a prefect, picked up the fallen dictionary. With the book in his hand, he cast a grim glance up at Tom at the window.

'This is yours,' he called up.

'Not that I know of,' called back Tom.

'Your name's in it.'

'Is it? Then it's mine, I suppose.'

Darrell, with another grim look, walked away after Kildare and Knox, the Latin dictionary in his hand.

Tom stepped back from the window.

He glanced at the study table, remembering that he had left his Latin dictionary there. It was no longer there. Evidently, it was that volume that was now in Darrell's hand.

'What the dickens —!' muttered Tom.

From the words he had caught, uttered by Knox, he knew what the bully of the Sixth thought and

believed. Knox believed that he had thrown down the volume on his head: just as he believed that the barge at the gates, a few days ago, was no accident. That was like Knox. Tom was not feeling alarmed, however. Knox could make out that an accidental barge was intentional: it had at any rate happened. But he could hardly make out that Tom had done what he had not done. So far from feeling alarmed, Tom laughed as he turned from the window. He was in no mood to feel sympathetic about Knox's black eye. Some fellow, it looked like, had pitched a dictionary at Knox's head from a window. Likely enough Knox had asked for it - he asked for a great deal more than he received. Tom certainly would never have played so reckless a trick at the risk of doing damage: some unthinking fellow must have done it: and undoubtedly there were few fellows in the Lower School at St. Jim's who would be sorry to hear that that unpopular prefect had had a knock.

There was a tramp of footsteps in the passage and the door of No. 10 was thrown open; Kildare of the Sixth came in. Tom was accustomed to a kindly look from the captain of St. Jim's, when he happened to encounter that great personage. But there was nothing kindly in Kildare's look now. His expression was one of angry contempt, that brought a flush to Tom's face.

'Oh, you're still here!' snapped Kildare.

Tom's lips set.

'No reason why I shouldn't be in my own study, is there?' he asked curtly.

'Then you're not going to deny it?'

'Deny what?'

'You will be up before the Head for attacking a Sixth Form prefect; I suppose you know without my telling you.'

'I don't know it,' answered Tom. 'As I've done nothing of the sort, I don't know anything of the kind.'

'You pitched this dictionary down at Knox, under your window.' Kildare held up the Latin dictionary. 'You're not denying that it's yours, I suppose, with your name written in it?'

'Not at all,' said Tom. 'It's mine; thanks for bringing it back.'

Kildare breathed hard.

'You threw it down at Knox —'

'I did not.'

'Who did then?'

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

'Isn't that for the prefects to find out, if they want to know?' he asked, coolly. 'I dare say you can find the man who did it, if it matters.'

'If it matters?' repeated Kildare, staring at him. 'A Sixth Form prefect has been given a black eye and you say "if it matters".'

'Yes, I said if it matters,' answered Tom, in the same cool tone. 'It doesn't matter to me, at any rate.'

'You will find that it matters, I think,' said Kildare, grimly. 'I don't quite understand you, Merry. You're junior captain of the House, and you've generally played up pretty well. It doesn't seem like you to play a fool trick like this —!'

'Not in the least,' answered Tom. 'I hope I've too much sense to drop a heavy book on a fellow's head.'

'You seem to be taking a new line,' said Kildare, slowly. 'The other day you barged Knox over —'

'That was an accident —'

'Knox did not believe so.'

'He wouldn't,' said Tom contemptuously, 'that's his sort. Railton believed it and stopped Knox from giving me six for it.'

'You cut Extra today — the first time I've ever known you to kick over the traces like that —'

Tom Merry coloured.

'The last time, as well as the first, Kildare, believe it or not,' he said quietly. 'I was a fool to do as I did, and it made matters worse. And if you want to know, I'd be glad to punch Knox's head for walking me off the field — and I would too, if he was not a prefect, Sixth Form man as he is.'

'And you've got the nerve to tell me so!' snapped Kildare.

'Why not, when I haven't punched it — or dropped a Latin "dick" on it either?' answered Tom.

'That "dick" was dropped from this window,' said Kildare.

'Not likely.'

'It couldn't have been dropped from any other. Knox was standing directly under this window, and it hit fairly on the head. Then, when we looked up, we saw you looking down.'

'I did not drop it.'

'Was any other fellow in the study?'

'No.'

Kildare breathed hard again.

'Very well,' he said, 'this is too serious a matter for a prefect to deal with. I shall report it to Railton when he comes in and Railton will take you to the Head. If you've anything to say, you can say it to Dr. Holmes, then I'd advise you to tell the truth.'

'I don't need that advice, Kildare. You can keep it.'

'What?'

'I said you can keep it.'

Kildare laid the dictionary on the study table. Then he fixed his eyes on Tom Merry again, with a glint in them.

'If you weren't for the sack, as likely as not I'd give you six for your lip!' he said. 'You're making a mistake if you think that cheek will help you out. You'll go to Railton when he comes in: till then, stay in the House.'

He turned to the door.

'Hold on a minute Kildare,' said Tom.

'Well,' snapped Kildare.

'We're playing cricket, as you might know,' said

Tom sarcastically. 'I shall be wanted when Greyfriars take their second knock. Can't I go into the field?'

'You're not wanted to bat?'

'No — I was out for a duck!' said Tom bitterly. 'This isn't my lucky day.'

Kildare's face relaxed a little. He could see that Tom was not in his usual mood; indeed, the junior seemed almost a stranger to him at the moment. He had not the slightest doubt of what had happened in that study; it was quite certain that the missile had dropped from Tom Merry's window, and there seemed no doubt that it had dropped from Tom's hand. And Tom's words and manner could scarcely be expected to please him: it was the first time he had had disrespect from Tom Merry, but he had it now. He paused.

'They can field a substitute,' he said.

'Oh, all right,' said Tom wearily, 'have it your own way.' He turned his back on the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare stepped to the door.

'Merry —!'

'Oh, leave a fellow alone!' muttered Tom.

'I was going to say —'

'Haven't you said enough?'

'By gad!' said Kildare, 'You're asking for it, you cheeky young rascal. But you've got enough coming to you. You can go back to the cricket field.'

With that, he quitted the study: and Tom was left alone again to his reflections, which were less pleas-

ant than ever. It was sometime before he left the study and the House, and went back to the cricket field: and try as he would, he could not keep the cloud from his face.

CHAPTER XIV

GUSSY'S GUEST

SNORE!

'Bai Jovel'

Snore!

'Buntah —!'

Snore!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood in the doorway of Study No. 6 in the Fourth, and gazed into that apartment. His eyes, and his eyeglass, fixed on a plump figure in the arm-chair, while the sound of a deep, resonant snore impinged upon his noble ear.

'Bai Jovel' repeated Arthur Augustus.

Arthur Augustus had knocked a dozen for his side. That, in view of the high quality of the Greyfriars bowling and fielding, was not too bad. But Gussy had had to abandon, with a sigh, his dream of a century, when Herbert Vernon-Smith, catching him in the slips, held up the round red ball and inquired, "How's that?". After which, Arthur Augustus had watched other fellows at the wickets for a time, and then he remembered Bunter.

He had not seen that distinguished visitor from Greyfriars since early in the afternoon: and so far

as he thought of him at all, had been quite pleased not to see him. Fascinating fellow as Billy Bunter was, in his own fat estimation, quite a lot of fellows were always quite pleased not to see him. Nobody else, it was certain, was giving Billy Bunter a thought. Nobody knew, or cared, why he had come over with the cricketers. In fact, only Arthur Augustus, to whom politeness, especially to a visitor, was a sort of fetish, wasted a minute's thought on him. But having remembered the fat existence of the fat Owl, and not being wanted on the ground again till Greyfriars batted, the swell of St. Jim's strolled back to the House to give Bunter a look-in. The more he did not want his company the more he felt that he couldn't ignore him entirely. He found him in Study No. 6 enjoying his second nap of the afternoon, and signifying the same in the usual way — with a snore that was not unlike the trumpeting of an elephant.

The Owl of Greyfriars was not an attractive picture, sprawling in the arm-chair, with fat little legs extended, his eyes shut, and his mouth open. Nobody would have called him a thing of beauty, or a joy for ever. Gazing at him, Arthur Augustus pondered whether to retire, and leave him still asleep, which he was very strongly tempted to do.

Then Bunter's eyes opened behind his spectacles. Bunter had put in a good deal of snoozing that drowsy summer's afternoon, but even Billy Bunter

was not quite up to the form of Rip Van Winkle. Perhaps, too, the two cakes had had time to settle down, and Bunter was beginning to feel a vacancy. Anyhow, he awakened, and blinked across the study at D'Arcy, like a newly awakened owl.

Perhaps Arthur Augustus wished, at the moment, that he had pondered a little more rapidly, and retired before the owl-like eyes opened. But it was too late now and good manners came before everything. He stepped into the study.

'Oh! heah you are Buntah,' he said, 'takin' a west, deah boy?'

'I dropped off for a minute,' said Bunter. He rubbed sleepy eyes and replaced his spectacles, 'Just nodded off for a minute or two.'

It seemed to Arthur Augustus that the minute or two must have been considerably prolonged. However, if Bunter preferred to fancy that he had only nodded off for a minute or two, Gussy was prepared to leave him that fancy. So far as D'Arcy could see, Bunter must have been asleep in that arm-chair most of the afternoon.

'Did you find the cake, Buntah?'

It was rather an unnecessary question. There were many cake-crumbs sticking to Billy Bunter. Certainly many of them had belonged to a cake in a Shell study: but Arthur Augustus was unaware of that.

'Oh! Yes!' answered Bunter, 'not a bad cake!'

'I am glad you liked it, Buntah.'

'Not like the cakes I get at Greyfriars, from Bunter Court,' said the fat Owl, 'but pretty good. I haven't had any other cake,' he added, cautiously, 'only the cake in this study, D'Arcy.'

'Natuwally,' assented D'Arcy, wondering a little where Bunter could have packed a large cake, and little dreaming that the fat Owl had followed it up with another still larger. 'I suppose you did not feel like tea aftah it, as you did not turn up with your fwiends.'

Bunter started.

'Is it past tea-time?' he ejaculated.

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Well, I think you might have given a fellow a call,' said Bunter, blinking at him. 'I haven't been asleep long, you know — only just nodded off. Still, I think you might have given a fellow a call.'

'But if you were not asleep, Buntah —'

'I wasn't!' said Bunter, positively.

'Then you weally did not wequiah a call, deah boy.'

'Oh really, D'Arcy —'

'Pewwaps you were asleep longah than you wealised —'

'I'm not a fellow to slack about, going to sleep in the afternoon,' said Bunter, disdainfully. 'We don't slack at Greyfriars. Perhaps you do at St. Jim's.'

'Weally Buntah —'

'We brace up, at Greyfriars,' said Bunter. 'No

slacking about us, I can tell you. Mens sankey in corpus sanny, you know — that's our motto.'

'Bai Jove!' Arthur Augustus was interested, 'I have nevah heard that before Bunter. Appawently you have more languages in the cuwwiculum at Gwey-fwiars than we have heah. What language is that?'

'Don't you know?' asked Bunter, staring.

'Gweat Scott! Is that Latin?'

'Don't you know when you hear it?'

'Yaas wathah, but that does not sound like Latin to me,' said Arthur Augustus, puzzled. 'What does it mean, Buntah?'

'It means a healthy mind in a healthy body, of course,' Bunter grinned. 'You'd get the raw edge of Quelch's tongue, D'Arcy, if you were in my form at Greyfriars and couldn't construe that.'

'Oh!' gasped Arthur Augustus. He grasped it at last. 'Do you mean mens sana in corpore sano, Buntah?'

'No, I don't — I mean what I said — mens sankey in corpus sanny,' said Bunter.

'But weally, Buntah —'

'You can't teach me Latin,' said Bunter.

Arthur Augustus's reflection was that he would not like to try. He let the subject drop. If William George Bunter preferred to turn Juvenal's celebrated remark into 'mens sankey in corpus sanny', Arthur Augustus had no objection.

'Well, now you are awake, deah boy, pewwaps

you would like a wun in the open air,' suggested Arthur Augustus.

'I'm getting hungry,' said Bunter. 'I think you might have given a fellow a call at tea-time, when he was asleep in your study, D'Arcy.' Bunter had apparently forgotten that he had stated that he was not asleep and not the sort of fellow to go to sleep in the afternoon with his healthy mind in his healthy body. But if Bunter wanted to have it both ways, Arthur Augustus's politeness was equal to the test.

'Sowwy, deah boy,' he said. 'Tea's ovah some time ago, but if you would like to come along to the tuck-shop —'

'What-ho!' said Bunter, promptly. He almost bounded out of the arm-chair, 'I haven't had much, you know,' he went on, 'just that cake — nothing else. I've been in this study all the time. Haven't left it for a minute. I don't even know my way to Tom Merry's study. How could I?' He gave the unsuspecting swell of St. Jim's a suspicious blink, 'if you think I've been going about the House —'

'I don't think anythin' of the kind, Buntah! Pway come along with me, and we will dwop in at the tuck-shop.'

'What-ho!' repeated Bunter. And he rolled out of the study with Arthur Augustus. He was satisfied that Arthur Augustus suspected nothing of his recent activities in the School House. Pleased and satisfied as he was with his exploit in giving Knox something

back for that ear-pulling, Billy Bunter was very anxious to keep that exploit dark, as long as he was at St. Jim's. Safely back at Greyfriars it would not matter a bean: but at St. Jim's he was within Knox's reach — and there was still a tingle in his fat ear. He did not want to run any real risk of that grasp on the fat ear again, neither did he want his fat head re-smacked. However, it was evidently all right: and he rolled out contentedly with the swell of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was coming away from the Shell studies, as they crossed the landing. He called to Arthur Augustus.

'How's it going, D'Arcy?'

'Seven down for fifty when I came away, deah boy,' answered Arthur Augustus. 'We shall be wanted in the field pwetty soon, I wathah think.'

Tom Merry nodded, and went down the stairs and disappeared. Arthur Augustus followed more slowly with Billy Bunter. He had to accommodate his pace to Bunter's, which was not rapid. However, they emerged from the House at last and headed for the school shop.

In that establishment, Billy Bunter was accommodated with a round table well supplied with good things eatable and drinkable. Arthur Augustus stayed only for an ice.

'Sit down, old chap,' said Bunter.

'I have to get back to the cwicket, deah boy,' murmured Arthur Augustus.

'Never mind that,' said Bunter.

'Eh!'

'The fact is, I want to have a chat with you,' explained Bunter, his voice a little muffled by a doughnut. 'What about the hols?'

'The hols?' repeated Arthur Augustus.

'Yes, old fellow! Do sit down and let's have a chat about the hols. We may be able to fix it up together.'

'Bai Jove!' One of Billy Bunter's reasons for coming over with the cricketers dawned on Gussy's noble mind. Prompt retreat was indicated. 'The — the fact is, Buntah. I must wush back —'

'Oh really, D'Arcy —'

'I have to go into the field, Buntah! I weally must dash —'

'But I say —' squeaked Bunter, 'I say don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you. I say Gussy —'

But Gussy had gone! Really it almost looked as if the 'hols' were not a subject that he was eager to discuss with William George Bunter!

Bunter gave an expressive grunt. Still, there was comfort in food: and he proceeded to find solid comfort therein.

Arthur Augustus walked quite quickly out of the tuck-shop. As the St. Jim's innings was still going on, there was, perhaps, no strict necessity to 'dash' but no doubt the cricket field was more attractive than the tuck-shop, in the circumstances. However, Arthur Augustus slowed down, at a safe distance

from Billy Bunter and a chat about the 'hols'.

'Heard?' came a squeak in his noble ear, and he glanced round at the grinning face of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

'Heard what, Twimble?' asked Arthur Augustus. 'Are St. Jim's all out already?'

'Eh! Not that I know of,' answered Trimble. 'I mean have you heard about Tom Merry and Knox —?'

'I was unawah that there was anythin' to heah, Twimble.'

Trimble chuckled.

'You should see Knox,' he grinned.

'Is anythin' the mattah with Knox?'

'Sort of!' chuckled Trimble. 'Tom Merry's given him a black eye.'

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped almost clear of the ground.

'What?' he gasped.

'Given a Sixth-Form pre. a black eye!' grinned Baggy. 'What a nerve! What! You should see Knox! A black eye, you know —'

'Wubbish!' snapped Arthur Augustus, 'Tom Mewwy has done nothin' of the kind, and I have a gweat mind to kick you for sayin' so.'

Baggy backed away promptly.

'I tell you I saw it — lots of fellows did!' he hooted.

'Wats!' said Arthur Augustus. And he walked on. A minute later he passed Racke and Crooke of the Shell, and their words floated to his ears.

'Black as the ace of spades —'

'A pre. too —!'

'They'll sack Tom Merry for it.'

'Bound to.'

'I hear that Knox walked him off the field in the middle of an innings. That's why, I suppose. But what a nerve — blacking a pre's eye!'

'Bai Jove!' murmured Arthur Augustus. His face was very grave, as he walked on to Little Side.

WIN FOR GREYFRIARS

'BRACE UP,' murmured Cardew.

Tom Merry did not reply or look at him. His face was clouded and he could not help it. Anyone with a little tact might have been expected to exercise the same, in dealing with a fellow who had collected a peck of troubles. Cardew was not wanting in tact, when he chose: but it seemed to amuse his peculiar nature to irritate a fellow who already found it difficult to keep his temper in control.

That morning he had given Tom that 'tip', partly in a spirit of mischief, but partly from careless good nature. It had worked out badly enough and possibly he suspected that Tom laid the blame on him, though Tom had not said so. Anyhow, he was in one of his impish moods: he was amused and would have been still more amused had Tom's temper flared out, and caused a scene.

Tom ignored him completely, as if he had not spoken. That was all he could do: he felt that if he so much as looked at him, he would smack the sarcastic face, which was certainly not to be desired with fellows from another school looking on.

The St. Jim's innings was over: all down for 55. That made the total home score a hundred and twenty-five. As Greyfriars had taken eighty-three in their first knock, they were left with forty-one to tie, forty-three to win, it looked a rather bleak prospect for St. Jim's. There was ample time left, and the side that had knocked up eighty-three in one innings, could scarcely fail, barring accidents, to knock up forty-three in another. Tom Merry's duck was a heavy weight cast into the balance. That, and the trouble with Knox, had affected other fellows, too: St. Jim's were not at their best that day. It was said of old that cricket is a very uncertain game: and a match was never lost till it was won. But the outlook certainly was not rosy.

Tom, the best junior bat at St. Jim's, had done little for his side after a brilliant beginning. He was a good enough change bowler, but that was all. He could not hope to contribute much in that line. He was a first-class man in the field: but Greyfriars were not the men to give St. Jim's a lot of chance in the field. In fact, he was there, as it looked, to play out a losing game: and afterwards, to face up to the trouble that awaited him when his house-master returned to the school: and if ever there was an excuse for a clouded face, Tom had it. He did not want Cardew's girding, at all events, in addition: and he turned his back on the dandy of the Fourth without an answer.

Cardew winked at Levison and Clive, who frowned back at him.

'Up on the stilts, what?' grinned Cardew.

'Oh, pack it up!' grunted Clive.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

'It's rather amusin' to pull his leg,' he murmured. 'Bet you he'd give a term's pocket-money to punch my nose at this very minute. What an entertainment for the Greyfriars men, if he did.'

'I think, they've had enough entertainment today, with Knox's antics,' said Levison angrily, 'and you wouldn't find it very entertaining if he did punch your nose — he packs a pretty good punch.'

'But, my dear chap, can't I tip a fellow to brace up, when he looks as if he's lost a pound note and found a farthing!' protested Cardew.

'Oh, shut up!' said Levison.

And Cardew laughed and shut up.

'Bai Jove, we shall have to pull up our socks in the field, you fellows,' Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was saying. 'We've got wathah a lot of leeway to make up. Pewwaps you would like me to bowl the first ovah, Tom Mewwy —'

'Fathead!' said Tom, politely.

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —'

'Ass, if you like that better.'

'I was not askin' for oppwobwious wemarks,' said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. 'I am thinkin' of the side, Tom Mewwy. It would encouwege the fellows

no end to see a Gweyfwiahs wicket go down in the first ovah, and I wathah think —'

'Rats!' said Figgins of the New House.

'Weally, Figgins —'

'Wynn's taking the first over,' said Tom. 'Put in all you know, Fatty, old man: you're as good as that Indian chap —'

'Better!' said Figgins.

'Well, as good anyhow,' said Tom, his clouded face breaking into a smile. 'We're relying on you, Fatty.'

'They know how to look after their sticks,' said David Llewellyn Wynn, 'but you bet I'll give 'em all I can.'

'What-ho!' said Figgins, 'it's up to the New House to pull this game out of the fire.'

'Wats!' said Arthur Augustus, 'I wathah think Tom Mewwy —'

'Not at all,' said Tom. 'Do you ever? You're next on the bowling, Talbot old man, and you've got to pull up your socks. Get a move on, you men.'

The St. Jim's men went into the field. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped Tom Merry on the arm, as they went: and Tom looked round a little impatiently. If Arthur Augustus fancied that he could brighten things up by bowling the first over, the junior captain did not share that fancy.

'Pack it up, Gussy,' he said, without waiting for Gussy to speak.

'Weally, Tom Mewwy —'

'Try not to muff more catches than you can help. I twust that I shall not muff any catches at all, Tom Mewwy. But I was going to say —'

'Give us a rest.'

Arthur Augustus breathed rather hard.

'Pway listen to me, Tom Mewwy. I have heard a vewy extwaordinawy thing — some of the fellows are sayin' that you blacked Knox's eye —'

'I rather wish I had,' said Tom.

'Then you haven't?' asked Arthur Augustus, much relieved.

'No! I'd like to, but I haven't.'

'It is weally vewy odd,' said Arthur Augustus, perplexed. 'Twimble and Wacke and Cwooke were all sayin' —'

'Bother Trimble and Racke and Crooke.'

'Yaas, but —'

'We're playing cricket,' reminded Tom. 'Knox can nurse his black eye and I wish him joy of it.'

'Bai Jove! Then he weally has a black eye!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

'Oh, yes! He asked some fellows for it, and got it. He doesn't always get what he asks for, but he's got it this time.'

'Not you —?'

'Haven't I said so?'

'But who —?'

'Haven't the foggiest,' said Tom, 'and I couldn't care less. And now, if you don't mind my mentioning

it, this is a cricket match, not a conversation.'

Arthur Augustus went to his place without saying more. But there was a wrinkle in his noble brow. It appeared that Knox of the Sixth had a black eye: and everyone knew what Tom Merry's feelings were like towards the bully of the Sixth: and some fellows, at any rate, were attributing Knox's unusual adornment to Tom. Arthur Augustus realised that more trouble impended, when that game was over. However, cricket was now the order of the day, and the swell of St. Jim's concentrated his aristocratic intellect on the game.

Harry Wharton opened for Greyfriars: and Fatty Wynn of the New House did his best, as he promised. The Welsh junior was a tremendous bowler, as good as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh of Greyfriars, as Tom had said: if not exactly better as the loyal Figgy averred. But his best failed to take the Greyfriars junior captain's wicket. So far from that, two was followed by a two, and then by a four, and it looked as if Wharton was getting well set, till the last ball of the over.

Smack!

The ball in flight met a ready palm, as an active form leaped to it. Tom Merry held up the ball.

'How's that?'

'Out!'

'Bai Jove!' gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, 'Top-pin!' Wippin'! Good old Tom Mewwy! Bwavo!'

Bob Cherry came out to take Wharton's place. It was Vernon-Smith who received the next over, from Talbot. The Bounder of Greyfriars knocked the bowling good as it was, all over the field. Smithy was the man for fireworks but perhaps he indulged in them not wisely but too well: for suddenly an eyeglass flashed in the sun as a figure in elegant flannels leaped, and the slim fingers of the swell of St. Jim's closed on the leather.

'How's that?'

'Out!'

Herbert Vernon-Smith was not looking pleasant as he went back to the pavilion. He was not a good loser. But Tom Merry's face had lost its cloud. Once in the game, he dismissed other matters: his own failure at the wickets, Knox and his enmity, the impending trouble with his house-master and the Head: all were gone, for the time at least, and he was only a cricketer bent on pulling the game out of the fire if he could. Two down, and those two the best bats in the visiting eleven, was a good start and gave room for hope. Tom's face was as bright as any on the field, as the game went on.

But there was too much leeway. Fatty Wynn delighted the St. Jim's crowd and especially the New House portion, by performing the hat-trick. But the runs went steadily up, all the same, and there was yet a wicket to fall when Greyfriars tied. And then Johnny Bull of Greyfriars, with a mighty swipe,

sent the ball to the boundary, and it was all over.

'That wottah Knox!' sighed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when the field went off. 'But for that wottah —'

'I hear somebody's given him a black eye,' said Blake. The news was spreading. 'By gum! I'd like to give him another to match.'

'Yaas, wathah.'

'I say, you fellows.'

'Bai Jove! Buntah —'

'I say Gussy, old fellow.'

It was not like Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to turn a deaf ear to any fellow's remarks. But for once he departed from his usual manners and customs. He turned a deaf ear and vanished into the pavilion. And neither Billy Bunter's little round eyes, nor his big round spectacles, fell on him again before the Greyfriars visitors departed.

CHAPTER XVI

A SPOT OF EXCITEMENT

'TOM MERRY —!'

'Yes, Tom Merry!'

'Pretty thick —!'

'Well, Knox is a swob! Look at the way he butted into the cricket —'

'Yes: but a pre. —!'

'You fellows heard — Knox has a black eye —!'

'Who did it?'

'Tom Merry. Must have been crackers. You can't punch a pre.'

'He'll have to go up to the Head!'

'It's the sack.'

'Bank on it.'

'I expect Knox asked for it, but you can't give a pre. what he asks for —'

'Did he hit him in the eye?'

'So I hear.'

'No, he chucked a cricket ball at him —'

'Was it a cricket ball? I heard it was a book.'

'Anyhow he gave him a black eye. I've seen it — black as a hat! Knox will be a sight for a week at least.'

'Serve him right.'

'It doesn't serve poor old Tom right, though. He will get it in the neck. They can't let a man off after blacking a pre's eye.'

Such remarks, with many variations, were being made all over St. Jim's. The news of Gerald Knox's black eye had spread through the school. After the Greyfriars visitors were gone, the cricketers heard it. It was buzzed up and down in both Houses. Tom Merry's friends—and they were many—looked very grave about it. The consequences of such an act could not fail to be serious. The bare idea of Tom Merry being 'sacked' from the school was startling and dismaying. Yet, what else could be the outcome!

Knox of the Sixth, undoubtedly, had a black eye. It was stated on all hands that Tom Merry had bestowed it upon him. Knox had said so—and it was hardly to be doubted that Knox knew where he had picked up that black eye.

The exact manner in which he had picked it up varied from one bearer of the news to another. One version was that Tom had punched Knox in the eye—another, that he had hurled a boot at him—still another that it had been a cricket ball that had done the damage. Trimble averred that Tom had knocked Knox over with a big book on his head, and that a bang on the ground had done the rest: Trimble declared that he had seen Knox bang, so he knew. But there were many versions, excitedly discussed

up and down the school. Whatever the variations, few fellows thought of doubting that Tom, in a moment of exasperation, had given Knox that black eye. It was to be noted that nobody had any sympathy to waste on Knox: but all agreed that a fellow in the Lower School who blacked the eye of a Sixth Form prefect was booked for the 'long jump'.

Study No. 6 heard the story with great dismay.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had heard it earlier: but as Tom had told him that it was not so, that had satisfied Arthur Augustus. But his noble countenance was very serious now, while Blake and Herries and Dig had faces as long as fiddles.

'Must have been wild with Knox,' said Blake. 'But —'

'Of course he was wild; Knox walking him off the field like that,' said Herries. 'Who wouldn't be?'

'Yes, but a pre. —!' said Blake, shaking his head. 'You can't punch a pre. Did he punch him?'

'Nobody seems to know,' said Dig. 'Trimble says he chucked a great big book at his head —'

'Somebody said a boot —!' said Herries.

'Well, Knox has got the black eye, at any rate,' said Blake. 'I expect it was a punch. He jolly well asked for it, if it comes to that.'

'Yaas, wathah!' said Arthur Augustus. 'I should have been very glad to punch Knox in the eye myself, when he butted into the cricket. But —'

'He lost the match for us,' growled Blake. 'Tom

was put right off his form — and that did it.'

'What's this I hear?' Ralph Reckness Cardew came up to the four in the quad. 'Is it true that Tom Mer-ry's given Knox a black eye?'

'So everybody's saying, at any rate,' said Blake. Cardew whistled.

'That's the jolly old limit,' he remarked. 'Blacking a pre's eye - phew! That means calling on the Head, and a train in the morning.'

'Weally, Cardew —!'

'Can't mean anything else! Fancy a pre. walking about St. Jim's with a black eye!' Cardew whistled again, 'Thomas has been making history.'

'Pewwaps you will allow me to wemark, Cardew, that Tom Mewwy nevah did anythin' of the kind!' said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in his stately manner. Cardew stared at him.

'Has he told you so?' he asked.

'Yas, wathah!' D'Arcy turned to his chums. 'You see, you fellows, I heard it befoah we went into the field, and I asked Tom — and he said he hadn't. So that's settled that.'

'Does it?' asked Cardew.

'I pwesume so, Cardew.'

'Let's hope that the Head will agree with you!' said Cardew, and he laughed as he walked away: followed by a gleam from a noble eye through an eyeglass.

'Bai Jovel' said Arthur Augustus, with a deep

breath. 'If Cardew means that he doubts Tom Mewwy's word on the subject, I think I will go aftah him and give him a feahful thwashin'.'

'Sure Tom told you so?' asked Blake.

'Yaas, wathah.'

'But Knox has got the black eye,' said Blake, puzzled. 'If Tom didn't hand it to him, who did?'

'Tom Mewwy said that he hadn't the foggigest, and couldn't care less,' answered Arthur Augustus. 'I suppose Tom Mewwy knowş whethah he gave Knox a black eye or not: and I twust that no fellow heah supposes that he would pwevawicate.'

'Not on you life,' said Blake. 'But — it's a bit of a puzzle. Tom was wild with Knox, we all know that — and somebody's blacked the brute's eye — and everybody seems to think that it was Tom. Where's Tom now?'

'He went into the House with Kildare, soon after the Greyfriars men left,' said Herries.

'With Kildare?' said Blake. 'That looks as if old Kildare thinks he knows who gave Knox a black eye. Seen Manners or Lowther — they ought to know?'

Study No. 6 proceeded to look for Manners and Lowther. They found them loitering in the quad, with expressions on their faces which revealed at once that they had heard the dismaying news.

'Did — Tom — ?' began Blake.

'Goodness knows,' said Monty Lowther. 'He hasn't said a word to us — but he hadn't much time — Kil-

dare called him just after he'd said goodbye to Wharton. They went into the House together.'

'Knox's eye is black,' said Manners. 'I saw him at his study window — somebody must have given him a jolt.'

'But when did it happen?' asked Blake. 'Tom was in Extra after Knox marched him off the field, and he never came out till tea-time and then he was at the cricket —'

'You remember he left, after his wicket went down, and never came back till the innings was nearly over,' said Manners. 'He was a bit out of sorts. From what we've heard that was when it happened.'

'So it could have been Tom,' said Blake.

'I — I suppose so.'

'Not at all,' said Arthur Augustus, calmly. 'You fellows will be glad to hear that I spoke to Tom Mewwy on the subject, on the cwicket field, and he told me he had not done it.'

Manners and Lowther brightened up at that.

'Did he know somebody had?' asked Lowther.

'Yaas, wathah: but he did not know who it was.'

'But who, then?' asked Lowther. 'We were all wild with Knox, but not to the extent of blacking his eye. I'm afraid Tom might have been, though. Knox was a rotter to him. If he lost his temper —'

'He was rather shirty after his wicket went down,' said Manners. He recalled some sharp words in the pavilion.

'Who wouldn't have been?' said Blake. 'It was all Knox's fault. He's mucked up the match for us.'

'Yaas, wathah!'

'But if Tom told Gussy he never did it, he didn't!' said Monty Lowther. 'Tom would be boiled in oil before he'd tell lies about it, or anything else.'

'Chap might stretch a point, when he's going up for the long jump,' said Blake. 'That's what it comes to, if they land it on him.'

'Tom wouldn't!' said Lowther.

'Wathah not!' said Arthur Augustus, warmly. 'I am suwpwised at the suggestion, Blake.'

'It couldn't have been a punch in the eye or there couldn't be any doubt about it,' said Manners.

'Nobody seems to know just what happened —'

'I jolly well do!' came a squeaky voice, as Baggy Trimble, grinning, joined the worried group. 'Don't you fellows know? I jolly well do — I saw the whole thing, from start to finish.'

'Well, what happened, then?' snapped Blake. Nobody was pleased by the fat grin on Baggy's face: but they all wanted to know, if Baggy could tell.

'It was under the study windows,' explained Trimble. 'Knox was loafing about — you know Knox! Tom Merry chucked a tremendous big book at his head from his study window.'

'I've heard that one already,' said Lowther. 'That doesn't sound like Tom. Did you make that up, Trimble?'

'I tell you I was there —!' squeaked Trimble.

'Tom might lose his temper and hit out, but he wouldn't play a potty trick like that,' said Manners.

'I saw it!' hooted Trimble. 'Knox was knocked fairly flying by that big book crashing on his head, and his face hit the ground - cosh! You could have heard the bang across the quad! I wonder you didn't hear it on Little Side.'

'Oh, pile it on!' snapped Blake.

'It blacked his eye,' said Trimble. 'I wonder it didn't black both of them, and bust his boko into the bargain! I tell you it was some bang! And when we looked up, there was Tom Merry looking down from his window. Fancy having the nerve to stick there after flooring Knox! But there he was!'

'Rot!' said Lowther, uneasily.

'Knox was gibbering with rage, when he found his eye was black,' grinned Trimble. 'Kildare took him in, Darrell picked up the book. It was Tom Merry's Latin dictionary —'

'How do you know that?' snapped Lowther.

'Because Darrell saw his name in it, and called up to him,' answered Trimble. 'I say, wasn't that asking for it? His own dick, from his own study window — and then sticking there and looking down to see what damage he'd done — what a nerve! And then going back to the cricket afterwards, as cool as you please!' Trimble chuckled, 'He won't be cool about it, when he goes up to the Head to be bunked, what?'

'Kick him!' said Blake.

'Look here — wow!' roared Trimble, dodging several feet and departing in haste.

It was, perhaps, some slight solace to boot Baggy. He left Tom Merry's friends with clouded faces. Tom Merry's word was as good as gold: but — his own 'dick', from his own study window, and Tom looking down from the window! And if it was not Tom Merry, the fellow who was specially and particularly exasperated with Knox that day, who was it?

Nobody was likely to think of a fat Owl, rolling homeward to Greyfriars with the cricketers — any more than Billy Bunter was likely to think of the turmoil he had left behind him at St. Jim's. The question, Who had done it if Tom Merry hadn't? was one to which nobody was likely to find an answer.

IN RAILTON'S STUDY

'TOM!'

Manners and Lowther exclaimed together.

They had looked for Tom Merry without finding him. Kildare of the Sixth had marched him into the School House some time ago, and they had not seen him since. Lowther had cut up to No. 10 in the Shell, to look into that study, but Tom was not there. He rejoined Manners in the quad, both of them worried and apprehensive on Tom's account: and then, as they loitered, they caught sight of him — standing at the window of Mr. Railton's study, looking out. Evidently, it was to the house-master's study that Kildare had taken him, and he had stayed there. They ran up to the window, exclaiming simultaneously.

Tom gave them a nod.

The expression on his face had no reassuring effect on them. In many ways, Tom had seemed unlike his usual cheery self that day of trouble, and now he looked more unlike than ever. His brow was darkly knitted, and there was a glint in his eyes under that frowning brow, and a curl to his lip that betrayed

anger and resentment and scorn. Only too plainly he was not in anything like his accustomed mood.

'You're here,' said Manners, looking up at him.

'Adsum!' said Tom, lightly.

'What are you sticking in Railton's study for?' asked Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed: a laugh that lacked its usual pleasant ring.

'Orders from a pre.,' he answered. 'It seems that Railton is back and I'm to see him as soon as he has time to waste on such small fry. Kildare told me to stick here till Railton comes: and like a good, obedient fellow, who never thinks of kicking over the traces, I'm doing as I'm told.'

His friends looked up at him very uneasily. There was a tone of mockery in his voice, more like Cardew of the Fourth than Tom Merry of the Shell. He was quite cool: but they could see that anger and bitterness smouldered underneath.

'You've not seen the House-beak yet, Tom?'

'Not yet! I believe he's with the Head —'

'About you?' asked Manners.

Tom Merry laughed again.

'My dear chap, is he likely to remember my existence?' he said. 'Don't you know he's been up to town at a conference of old fossils? That's an important matter — to Beaks! I expect he's chewing it over with the Old Boy. When they're through, he'll hear about me.'

'You won't have to wait long then?'

'Might he hours — you know what Beaks are like, they begin wagging their chins. They forget time and space.'

'Oh, don't be a goat,' said Manners, uneasily. 'It's not like you to talk like that —'

'Railton might come in and hear you,' said Lowther.

'I don't mind if he does.'

'No good cheeking Railton —'

'Why not?' said Tom coolly.

That was a question neither of his chums felt like answering. They simply stared up at Tom wondering what had come over him. They would not have been surprised at such talk from Ralph Reckness Cardew: but it came very strangely from Tom Merry.

'Look here, Tom,' said Manners at last, 'we want to know what's happened.'

'Doesn't all the school know by this time?' asked Tom. 'I fancied that it was being cackled all over the school.'

'Knox has a black eye, we know that —'

'Yes, that's so much to the good,' said Tom with a nod. 'It's rather good for that bully to get what he asks for, for once.' He laughed again, 'Fancy, Knox walking a black eye about the school for the next week or two. He will get the laughs.'

'It's pretty serious, Tom —' said Manners.

'Oh, Knox's eye will mend,' said Tom. 'Not that I care one way or the other.'

'I mean it's serious about you,' said Manners rather tartly. 'A fellow gets the push for punching a pre. as you know as well as we do.'

'Oh, quite!' agreed Tom, 'I hope the fellow won't be found out. I wish him the very best of luck.'

Manners and Lowther exchanged a look.

'Then — !' began Manners, hesitatingly.

'Then what?' asked Tom.

'Then it wasn't you?'

'Not at all. Gussy asked me, and I told him so. Hasn't he told you that? He might have thought it worth mentioning.'

'He told us,' answered Manners, 'but — !'

'Well?' Tom's brow became darker. 'If you've heard from Gussy that I told him it was not I, what are you asking me for?'

'Everybody thinks you did it, Tom,' said Manners, quietly. 'Everybody knows how you had your back up with Knox, and a good many fellows know that you've said he would get something back for his meddling. From what we've heard, Knox was knocked over by a big book chucked from your study window — is that what happened?'

'So far as I know, yes,' said Tom carelessly. 'I'm not particularly interested in things that happen to Knox, but I believe that was how it was. The clumsy fool seems to have crashed when the book dropped on his silly head, and banged his silly face, and that did it.'

'Was it your Latin dictionary?'

'I believe so.'

'You were in your study. Who else was there?'

'Nobody.'

'Tom, old man —!' murmured Lowther.

Tom Merry's lip curled.

'I've said that I never chucked that dick at Knox,' he said, very distinctly. 'Who did, I don't know any more than you do—I suppose it must have been some fellow that Knox had bullied, but I don't know and I don't care. If that isn't good enough for you, you can leave me alone.'

'You won't make matters better by quarrelling with your friends, Tom,' said Manners, tartly.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

'I've no use for friends who can't take my word,' he answered. 'I've told you I did not do it. I never knew that anything had happened till I heard the hubbub, and looked down from the window to see what was going on below. Believe it or not, just as you choose.'

'Of course we believe you, Tom —' said Lowther.

'Thanks!' said Tom, sarcastically. 'So good of you to believe that I'm not a lying rat like Trimble, or Racke, or Knox of the Sixth.'

'But if you didn't, who did?' exclaimed Manners.

'Is that a riddle?' asked Tom.

'Tom for goodness' sake, have a little sense! You're in a bad box —'

'Is Railton's study a bad box?'

'Do be serious, Tom. I can't make you out!' exclaimed Manners, impatiently. 'Do you want to be bunked from St. Jim's or what?'

'Not exactly yearning to go,' said Tom. 'But that depends on the Beaks, doesn't it, and whether they have sense enough to get down to facts. Kildare hasn't and the Beaks may not have.'

'Does Kildare think you did it?'

'He hasn't a doubt! Kildare's pretty good at games, but thinking isn't much in his line,' said Tom carelessly.

'What was he to think, when it happened in your study, and you were there and nobody else was,' exclaimed Manners. 'Wasn't some other fellow about?'

'I saw nobody.'

'Hardly anybody was in the House, while the cricket was on,' said Monty Lowther. 'Tom, old man, you know how it looks —'

'Quite!' said Tom. He shrugged his shoulders again. 'As it happened at my window, somebody must have been in the study before I got there, and cleared off pretty quick after chucking the dick at Knox.'

'You passed nobody in the passage.'

'Nobody.'

'The fellow, whoever he was, must have been pretty quick, then.'

'He would be — after chucking a dick at a pre.'s head,' said Tom. 'Not the sort of thing he would linger over.'

'If you'd stayed at the cricket —!' said Manners. 'If —!'

'Lots of "ifs" in this life!' said Tom. 'If that cad Knox hadn't landed me in Extra - if Mossoo's detention class hadn't happened to be on Greyfriars day — if Knox had had the decency to go easy about it — if he hadn't found out about my playing cricket and butted in — if he hadn't been slacking and loafing under the study windows — if some fellows hadn't seen a chance of getting back at him for bullying — what a lot of "ifs". A regular Everest of them.'

'Who the dickens was it?' muttered Manners.

'Who the thump —!' said Lowther.

Tom Merry's frowning face relaxed. Evidently, his friends were taking his word on the subject though it added to their mystification.

'It may come out —!' said Manners. 'Oh, Tom, if only you hadn't listened to that light-headed ass Cardew and cut Extra —'

'More ifs!' said Tom. 'It won't help now, Manners. Don't tell me again that you told me so, old man. I've had that.'

'Well, if you'd listened to me —'

'If — if — if —!' said Tom.

'Bai Jovel! Is that Tom Mewwy?' Arthur Augustus D'Arcy arrived under the house-master's window.

'I've been wondahin' where you were, Tom. What are you doin' in Wailton's study?'

'Waiting for the Beak,' answered Tom, 'and thinking of Knox nursing a black eye. It's rather amusing. Nobody's ever given him a black eye before. Lots of fellows must have wanted to. Can't say I'm sorry he's got it at last. He's asked for it often enough.'

'Merry!'

It was Mr. Railton's voice.

The study door had opened while Tom Merry was speaking at the window and the house-master came in. Obviously he had heard Tom's words as he entered, and his voice was very deep.

That deep voice reached the juniors outside the open window.

The three moved away quietly. Tom Merry, turning from the window, faced his house-master, in the study. He knew that Railton must have heard his words, and he did not care. He faced him with his head erect, his eyes steady, and with a hint of doggedness, if not defiance, in his manner, that certainly did not please the School-House master.

WAS IT TOM MERRY ?

'MERRY !

'Yes, sir !

'Kildare has acquainted me with what has happened during my absence today,' said Mr. Railton.

'Does he know, sir?' asked Tom, coldly.

Mr. Railton started a little, and fixed his eyes on Tom very sharply. Certainly he had not expected that reply.

'What do you mean, Merry?' he rapped.

'I was only asking, sir,' answered Tom, in the same cool tone. 'The last time I saw Kildare, he did not know what had happened. He fancied that I had pitched a Latin dictionary at Knox's head. But perhaps he has found out since what really happened.'

Mr. Railton took a deep breath.

'Do you deny that action, Merry?' he asked.

'Certainly, sir.'

'I had not expected this,' said Mr. Railton. 'The evidence appears perfectly clear. But if you deny the action —'

'Oh yes, sir !

'Very well. In that case, the matter will be gone

into very thoroughly,' said Mr. Railton. 'You understand, of course, that it must go before the Headmaster, when I am satisfied that the offender has been found.'

'I suppose so, sir.'

'Very well!' said Mr. Railton. 'From what I learn, it appears that you stayed out of Extra School this afternoon, in total disregard of my order. I am sorry that a boy of whom I have always had a high opinion, should have taken such advantage of my absence from the school.'

Tom Merry's face became scarlet.

'I — I — I —.' He stammered, 'I — I didn't mean it like that, sir. I — I never thought of it like that!'

'You could not have acted as you did, if I had not been absent, Merry,' said the house-master coldly.

Tom did not answer that. It was true enough: he had said so himself to Cardew. It was not till that insidious adviser had pointed out that Railton would be away, that he had decided to take the chance. Certainly it had never occurred to him that there was anything surreptitious about it. But he was feeling very uncomfortable now.

'You admit this, I presume!' snapped Mr. Railton, as the junior did not speak.

'Everybody knows I cut Extra, sir,' answered Tom. 'I expected Monsieur Morny to report me for it, as he always does when a fellow cuts. I'm not asking to be let off for what I did.'

'Knox of the Sixth Form, I am told, found that you were out of Monsieur Morny's detention class, and looked for you,' resumed Mr. Railton. 'He found you on Little Side playing cricket.'

'Yes, sir,' muttered Tom.

'He ordered you back to detention as was his duty as a prefect. He has reported to me that you threatened him.'

Tom breathed hard.

'I told him I'd knock him flying if he laid hands on me!' he answered. 'So I would have.'

'Did you also tell him that you would make him sorry for it?'

'I said something of the kind.'

'Something of the kind!' repeated Mr. Railton. 'This morning, Merry, I myself heard you say something of the kind, as you term it, and spoke a word of warning to you.'

Tom was silent.

'After that,' went on Mr. Railton, his voice growing deeper, 'after that, Merry, the assault was made on Knox — after you had threatened him, once within my own hearing.'

'I — I know!' muttered Tom, 'but — but —'

'But what!'

'Fellows often let off steam when they have their backs up,' said Tom. 'I'd have liked to give Knox something back for being such a rotter to me. I'd have hit him fast enough, if he hadn't been a pre.'

But I never did. As for chucking a dick at his head, I'm not a silly fag in the Second Form to think of such a silly trick.'

'The book, a large and heavy Latin dictionary, was flung from your study window, Merry.'

'So they say,' muttered Tom.

'There is no doubt on that point,' said the house-master. 'The book was flung from your study window — it was your Latin dictionary, with your name in it. It struck Knox on the head and caused him to fall, with the surprise and shock. The further damage he sustained from his fall no doubt was not foreseen — it could not have been — nevertheless, Knox was severely hurt and his eye is blackened. The matter could hardly be more serious. Your Head-master is certain to take a very severe view of it, Merry.'

'That does not concern me, sir, does it?'

'It concerns you very nearly,' Mr. Railton said. 'What do you mean, Merry?'

'Only that I can't see how it concerns me in any way,' answered Tom. He was cool again now, and his manner was almost flippant. 'Pretty serious for the fellow who did it, if he's found out — but it doesn't concern me, so far as I can see.'

'If that means that you persist in denying that you carried out the threats you made — !'

'I have already denied doing anything to Knox, sir.'

'Very well!' Mr. Railton compressed his lips. 'You do not deny, I presume, that you were seen looking down from your window at Knox, at the time?'

'Not at the time, sir!' said Tom. 'I looked out to see what had happened and saw Knox standing with his hands to his eye.'

'You were in your study —'

'I couldn't have looked out of the window if I hadn't been, sir.'

Mr. Railton compressed his lips harder.

'That is not the way to answer your house-master, Merry,' he said. 'You will not be able to carry this matter off with impertinence. Answer me directly — you were in your study when the incident happened.'

'No, sir. If I had been, I should have seen it happen, and I know nothing about it till I looked out of the window.'

'Was another boy in the study?'

'No, sir!'

'I hardly understand you, Merry. Do you mean that you came into your study after the incident had occurred, and that some other boy must have been there before you?'

'That is what must have happened, sir.'

Mr. Railton stood silent, looking at him. What the junior stated was possible, at least: though it did not sound probable. It sounded improbable, enough, but Railton had to remember that he had always

known Tom Merry to be absolutely truthful and straightforward: the very last junior at St. Jim's whom he would have suspected of prevarication.

'You did not see this other boy — if he exists!' said the house-master slowly.

'I did not, sir.'

'You suggest that he threw the book down at Knox and immediately ran away, only a few minutes before you entered the study?'

'I can't think of anything else, sir.'

'Can you explain why he should have chosen your study for his action, and your Latin dictionary for his missile?'

'I don't see why he should, sir — but he must have. Somebody must have been there, or it couldn't have happened at all.'

There was a long silence.

Tom Merry stood waiting for his house-master to speak again. But it was some minutes before Victor Railton spoke. His look at the junior was so searching that it seemed as if it must penetrate to the thoughts behind his face. Tom faced it steadily. He had told the truth: and he had nothing else to tell.

'Very well,' said Mr. Railton, at last. 'The matter must rest here for the present, Merry. You will go before your Head-master in the morning. You may leave my study now.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Tom Merry quietly left the study. He left his

house-master frowning, a sorely puzzled man. If evidence amounted to anything, Gerald Knox of the Sixth Form owed his black eye to Tom Merry of the Shell: and if that was so, the outcome could not be doubtful: the severest penalty was due to a mutinous junior who had blacked the eye of a Sixth Form prefect. The case looked absolutely conclusive against Tom: and yet a doubt lingered in the house-master's mind. However, it was for the Head-master to judge: the fate of Tom Merry, junior captain, was in the hands of Dr. Holmes. And Tom, as he went down the passage from Mr. Railton's study, realised very clearly how momentous a day the morrow was to be for him.

COMING TO BLOWS

SMACK!

It sounded almost like a pistol shot.

It was after prep. that evening. Prep. had not had very much concentration in most of the junior studies in the School House. The Greyfriars match, its vicissitudes and its final loss, and then the affair of Tom Merry and Knox of the Sixth, occupied most thoughts and caused endless discussions.

That Tom had done it, and that it served Knox jolly well right, was the general verdict. Many fellows were surprised to hear that Tom had denied it. Fellows like D'Arcy and Talbot and his own special chums, Manners and Lowther, took his word about it, mystifying as it was. Other fellows were more disposed to think that a man facing the 'sack' might depart from the straight and narrow path of veracity, in the hope of averting the descent of the 'chopper'. For if Tom hadn't, who had? One fellow, at least, was amused by Tom's denial: and that one was Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Cardew himself had no scruple whatever about 'telling the tale' to the Beaks. He was disposed to

regard any fellow better than himself as a humbug. And he was talking in his usual airy strain, in the junior day-room when Tom Merry came down from the studies after prep.

'Thomas of all people!' said Cardew. 'Nobody blames him for giving Knox a black eye — I'd gladly give him one myself. So would a dozen fellows. But from Thomas we expect the frozen truth — solid truth, frozen as if in a fridge. He was copped — a fair cop — practically in the act! I wouldn't have denied it myself, in such circumstances — what's the use? I'd tell a Beak that black was white and pink was green, if it would see me through —'

'No credit to you if you would!' grunted Clive.

'I can do without the credit, my dear man, if I miss the Toco too!' drawled Cardew. 'But a fellow ought to know when to draw the long bow, and when not. This time it was distinctly not.'

'I believe Tom Merry,' said Levison shortly.

'Rot!' said Cardew, coolly. 'You don't, Ernest, old bean, because you can't. Everyone knows that he did it.'

'Weally, Cardew —!' came from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'A dozen fellows have heard him saying that something would come to Knox,' said Cardew, 'and it jolly well came — from his study window, with a bang. It would have paid him better, with the Beaks, to come clean. What was the use of denyin' it, it

was plain as the nose on his face? Amateur work!' added Cardew, with a shake of the head. 'Tom Merry's had no practice — you need practice in telling the tale, as in everything else. His best guess is to stick to the truth — he's just no good in the Ananias line.'

'Look here, Cardew!' broke in Talbot of the Shell. Cardew glanced at him.

'Lookin'!' he said. 'What's your opinion, Talbot?'

'I'll tell you my opinion,' said Talbot, with a knitted brow. 'You're running down a fellow whose shoes you're not good enough to polish, and you'd better shut up. Tom Merry would no more tell Railton a lie, than you would tell him the truth.'

'Hear, hear!' chuckled Jack Blake.

'Yaas, wathah!'

'My dear man, I'm not blaming Tom Merry,' drawled Cardew. 'Knox asked for it and got it, and I'm jolly glad he did. I'm not blaming him for blacking Knox's eye, or for telling the tale to Railton — only remarkin' that it was an error of judgement. No sense in telling a man what the man can't possibly believe — a crammer has to be probable at least.'

'Tom told Railton the truth,' snapped Talbot.

'He told Railton that he didn't do what we all know he did do!' said Cardew. 'If that's the truth, it's enough to make jolly old Pilate ask over again — "What is the truth?"'

It was just then that Tom came in at the doorway

of the day-room. Cardew had his back to the doorway and did not see him. Not that he would have cared in the least if Tom heard his words.

Tom did hear them: and they brought a glitter to his eyes. He had been through more than enough that day to exhaust his patience. He had none left for Cardew's airy persiflage.

He did not speak. He walked across to Cardew, and the looks of the fellows round him caused Cardew to turn his head. The next moment he was reeling under a hefty smack that landed full in his face.

It rang loud and sharp through the room.

'Oh!' panted Cardew.

He tottered several backward paces before he recovered his balance. He recovered it, and stood panting, his eyes blazing at Tom Merry. Tom stood looking him in the face, grimly.

'You — you — you!' panted Cardew. He put his hand to his face, which glowed crimson where the smack had landed. 'You — you!'

'Like another?' asked Tom. 'You'll get another and more to follow, if you can't keep your catty tongue quiet.'

There was a buzz of excitement in the day-room. A crowd of fellows surrounded Tom Merry and Cardew. Obviously the matter was not ending where it was. Ralph Reckness Cardew was hardly the fellow to have his face smacked with impunity. The fact

that he had asked for it made no difference to that.

'What's the row?' Monty Lowther came hurrying in, with Manners. They pushed through the crowd of juniors.

'Nothing much!' answered Tom. 'Cardew asked me to smack his cheeky face and I've smacked it.'

'Cardew only said what everybody else in the House is saying,' sneered Racke of the Shell.

'Cardew was calling me a liar,' Tom said. 'If you say the same, Racke, you'll get the same. Is that what you want?'

'Oh, come off it,' said Crooke. 'If you're going to smack every fellow's face that believes you blacked Knox's eye, you'll have a lot of smacking to do.'

'I'm ready to do that,' said Tom coolly. 'Fellows can think what they like if they're fool enough: but nobody is going to call me a liar without putting up his hands. Are you ready, Cardew?'

'Quite!' said Cardew. He was cool again, but his eyes burned. 'You blacked Knox's eye, and you told Kildare and Railton lies about it, and every man here knows you did. And —'

Cardew got no further than that: his hands had to be busy, instead of his tongue, as Tom Merry came at him. The next moment, a fight was going on in the day-room, fast and furious.

'Ware, Beaks!' called Kangaroo, suddenly. A tall figure appeared in the doorway and Mr. Railton strode in, with a stern brow.

'Stop that at once!' The house-master almost shouted. 'Merry — Cardew — stop that instantly.'

For a moment it looked as if Tom would pass his house-master's voice unheeded. But Cardew dropped his hands and backed: and Tom dropped his the next moment. It was upon Tom that the house-master's stern eyes fixed.

'What does this mean, Merry?' he exclaimed. 'You are junior captain of your House: and I find you fighting with a Fourth Form boy in the day-room.'

'I'm to blame, of course,' said Tom, bitterly. 'I'm to blame because somebody, I don't know who, chucked something at a bully's head — and now I'm to blame because I smacked a fellow's face for calling me a liar.'

'You are to blame, at least, for answering your house-master in so disrespectful a manner,' said Mr. Railton. 'Go to your study at once, Merry, and remain there till the bell rings for dormitory.'

'Any old thing,' said Tom: a reply that made every fellow in the day-room jump and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ejaculate, 'Bai Jove.'

'What?' Railton did not seem quite able to believe his ears, 'What did you say, Merry?'

'I said any old thing,' answered Tom, hardily.

'Tom!' breathed Manners.

'Tom, you ass!' whispered Lowther, anxiously.

There was a tense hush in the day-room. For a moment or two, the house-master did not speak:



'What does this mean, Merry? You are junior captain of your House and I find you fighting with a Fourth-Form boy?'



and everyone wondered what was coming. If ever a fellow had asked for 'six', the soundest 'six' that a house-master had ever administered, Tom Merry had. But when Railton broke the silence, he spoke quietly.

'Go to your study, Merry.'

Tom opened his lips to reply: but before he could utter a word, Manners and Lowther linked their arms in his, and walked him out of the day-room: which was just as well for Tom: for he was in too reckless a mood to care what he said. And they did not let go his arms till they had him safe in No. 10 Study in the Shell. Mr. Railton, rather unexpectedly, was looking more thoughtful than angry, when he left the junior room. He left the room in a buzz of excitement behind him.

SENT UP TO THE HEAD

'MERRY !'

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, spoke quietly. His eyes were curiously on Tom Merry as he addressed him.

It was the following morning, and the Shell were in form. That morning, as all the House knew, Tom was due for an interview with his Head-master. The result of that interview was, so to speak, on the knees of the gods—but the general opinion was, that that day was Tom's last at St. Jim's.

Many eyes were curiously on him, as well as his form-master's. But there was little sign to be read in his face that the sword of Damocles impended over his head. If he had lost his old sunny look, at all events he was cool and self-possessed, indeed quite casual in look and manner. In all probability he was 'up for the sack', and it seemed that he couldn't have cared less.

'Yes, sir!' he answered, as Mr. Linton spoke.

'You will go to your Head-master's study after this lesson, Merry,' said the master of the Shell.

'Very well, sir.'

Linton gave him a long look, but did not speak again. The lessons commenced, and the form-master found Tom as quietly attentive in class as was his wont. His 'con', which was always good, was as good as usual.

Second lesson that morning for the Shell was French with Monsieur Morny, which Tom had to cut to go to Dr. Holmes. When the form were dismissed, Mr. Linton called Tom back. The other Shell fellows marched out, while Tom came up to Mr. Linton's desk.

'I am sorry for this, Merry,' said Mr. Linton. 'I understand that you are to go before your Head-master for a very reckless act yesterday —'

'Oh, no sir,' answered Tom. 'I did nothing yesterday but cut detention, and that is not a matter to go before the head-master. I am being sent up for something some other fellow did.'

'I have heard from Mr. Railton that you deny the action, Merry —'

'Naturally, sir, as I never did it.'

Mr. Linton coughed.

'The evidence seems to have satisfied your house-master, Merry,' he said.

'He is very easily satisfied, sir.'

'What? What? What did you say, Merry?'

'I said that Mr. Railton is very easily satisfied, sir,' said Tom. coolly. 'He must be, if he is satisfied that I buzzed that dick at Knox.'

Mr. Linton gave him a long, searching look. Probably he could read that the junior's feelings were deep, under his cool and calm exterior. He seemed rather at a loss for words: and Tom went on.

'I think you know, sir, that I am not a fellow to tell lies to get out of a scrape. I did not pitch that dick at Knox, and I do not know who did. I've no doubt Knox believes so — he would! If I had done it, I might refuse to answer questions: but I should not tell lies.

'Unless something at present unknown should come to light, I am afraid there is only one conclusion for your Head-master to draw, Merry.'

'Perhaps, sir,' said Tom, 'but —!'

'But what, Merry?'

'But I think that Dr. Holmes may be able to see whether a fellow is telling the truth or not, even if Mr. Railton can't.'

There was a long pause.

'I shall speak to your Head-master, Merry,' said Mr. Linton, at last. 'I shall tell him that, in my opinion, your word is to be taken, even in the face of what appears to be overwhelming evidence. That is all: you may go.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Tom gratefully.

He left the form room.

Manners and Lowther, and several other Shell fellows, were waiting for him in the corridor. Mr. Linton came out of the form-room, and passed them

on his way to the Head's study: evidently going there to put in his word for the accused junior.

'What did Linton call you back for, Tom?' asked Monty Lowther, when the form-master was out of hearing.

Tom smiled, rather sarcastically.

'Amazing to relate, he takes my word,' he answered. 'He's going to tell the Big Beak so. It may make a difference.'

'Good for Linton,' said Manners.

'Oh, he's got more sense than Railton,' said Tom. 'Cardew can look a Beak in the face and spin out a string of lies: but Linton knows I'm not that sort. Railton ought to know it too.'

'I don't think Railton feels too jolly sure about it,' said Manners, shaking his head. 'He must have a doubt in his mind or he wouldn't have gone so easy with you, cheeking him as you did in the day-room last night —'

'Looks like it,' agreed Monty Lowther. 'After all, nobody actually saw it happen. Somebody must have been up at the window: but Knox couldn't have seen him, as he was tapping the ground with his face after the dick banged on his napper. It was rotten luck you looking out of the window a minute later, Tom — still, nobody can say that he saw the dick chucked —'

'If anyone had seen it, they'd know who did it,' said Tom. 'That cad Knox believes it was I, just as

he believed that barging him the other day was no accident. That's his sort. But he can't say he saw it, and nobody else did — and the Head is a wise old bird. I just can't believe that he would make a mistake in such a matter as bunking a fellow. If he does —!' Tom Merry's brow darkened and his eyes gleamed.

His friends eyed him rather uneasily.

'For goodness' sake, Tom, take care when you're with the Head!' breathed Manners. 'I know how you feel, old chap, but you've got to keep cool. If you cheek the Head like you did Railton —!'

'Do be careful, Tom,' urged Lowther.

'Oh, I'll be careful,' said Tom. 'I'm not anxious to catch the train home. I shall tell the Head the exact truth: and I hope it will be good enough for him, if it's not good enough for Railton, and that ass Kildare —'

'Thanks!' said a quiet voice: as Kildare of the Sixth came round a corner in the corridor.

Manners and Lowther looked dismayed. Tom Merry did not look in the least dismayed as he glanced round at the captain of St. Jim's.

'Not at all, Kildare,' he said, coolly. 'I didn't know you could hear me, but you're welcome to.'

Kildare gave him a grim look.

'Do you know what happens to a junior who calls a prefect fancy names, Merry?' he asked.

Tom Merry laughed.

'Quite!' he answered. 'Six, as a rule. Like me to come to your study before I go in to the Head?'

'No,' said Kildare, 'you've got enough coming to you. I won't give you six for your lip: but I'll give you a tip. Tell the Head the truth when you go to him.'

'I shouldn't tell him anything else,' said Tom. 'And I'm relying on him having a little more sense than Railton or you, Kildare.'

Kildare did not answer that. He walked on with a frowning brow. Perhaps there was a lingering doubt in his mind, as in Railton's: at all events, he walked on and left it at that.

'Time you fellows got along to Mossoo's class-room,' said Tom. 'I'll tell you the news when you come out after French — if I'm still here.' He laughed again, a laugh that lacked its usual cheery ring. 'I fancy I shall be still here, whatever the verdict may be — if I'm bunked, I'm not going like a whipped dog — I'll make some of them sit up and take notice before I go.'

'Tom!' breathed Manners, anxiously.

'Look here, Tom, what have you got in your head now?' exclaimed Lowther.

'What does it matter?' answered Tom. 'It may be all right when I'm through with the Head — I think it will be. You fellows cut off or you'll be late for Mossoo.'

Very reluctantly, Manners and Lowther left him,

to follow the rest of the Shell to the French master's class-room. Tom Merry made his way to the Head-master's study.

Mr. Linton was leaving it, as he arrived there. The master of the Shell gave him a kind, if somewhat troubled, glance.

'I have spoken to Dr. Holmes, Merry,' he said. 'I understand from him that Mr. Railton has also spoken in somewhat the same strain. You may at all events rely on strict justice from your Head-master.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Tom, 'I do!'

'Go in now,' said Mr. Linton.

He went down the passage, and Tom Merry rapped at the door of the Head-master's and entered. His heart was beating a little fast, but he was cool and calm, and his manner was quiet and respectful, as he stepped into the presence the Head-master of St. Jim's and met the clear grey eyes that looked at him across the Head's writing table.

WANTED, A STAMP

'I SAY, YOU fellows.'

Five juniors in the 'Rag' at Greyfriars school were talking cricket.

Harry Wharton & Co. were, in fact, playing over again the match at St. Jim's of the previous day. Having beaten the home team quite handsomely, they were fully satisfied with the result. They were interested not only in the game which they had enjoyed from start to finish, but in the somewhat unusual episode that had occurred on the cricket field. Billy Bunter rolled into the 'Rag' and interrupted: but his fat squeak passed unheeded.

'We beat them all right!' Bob Cherry was saying. 'Of course, we should have pulled it off in any case —'

'Of course!' grinned Johnny Bull.

'But what happened was a big jolt for them,' said Bob. 'That chap Merry had awful bad luck.'

'The bad-luckfulness of the esteemed Merry was terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Who was the bargee who barged in and walked him off?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Man named Knox,' said Bob Cherry. 'I heard some of St. Jim's men talking about it — they'd have liked to scalp him. It must have put Tom Merry right off his form, or he wouldn't have made a duck in his second knock.'

'I say, you fellows,' squeaked Bunter.

'Might even have beaten us, if it hadn't happened,' said Johnny Bull. 'Rotten bad luck for Tom Merry.'

'I say, you fellows!' yelled Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo!' Bob Cherry looked round at last, 'Is that Bunter! Or is it his twin porpoise from the Zoo?'

'Oh, really, Cherry —!'

'Whichever you are, roll away,' said Bob.

'I say, do listen to a chap,' urged Bunter. 'This is important. Will you lend me —!'

'Nix.'

'I want you to lend me —'

'Want away!'

'A stamp, please!' roared Bunter. 'Only a stamp! Just a tupenny ha'penny. I've asked Toddy and he says I used his last stamp when I wrote to D'Arcy the other day. Now I want to write to him again and I haven't got a stamp.'

'You want a stamp?' asked Bob. 'Only a stamp?'

'Just a stamp,' assented Bunter. 'But I think you might lend me a stamp, Cherry. If you've got any.'

'I'll give you one with pleasure, old fatman, just keep your foot steady —'

'Eh! What am I to keep my foot steady for?' asked Bunter, blinking at him through his big spectacles in surprise.

'While I give you a stamp!' explained Bob.

He lifted the largest foot in the Greyfriars Remove. 'Now, steady —!'

Billy Bunter jumped back with the activity of a kangaroo. That kind of stamp, evidently, was not what Bunter wanted.

'You silly idiot, keep your hoofs away!' he roared. 'When I say I want a stamp, I mean a stamp, not a stamp.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I've just got to write to D'Arcy,' explained Bunter, keeping at a safe distance from the playful Bob's foot. 'You see, I never had a chance of speaking to him yesterday. Going over to St. Jim's was a sheer waste of time, as it turned out.'

'Didn't you come over for the cricket?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Ah! Oh! Yes! Of — of course. But I specially wanted a chat with my old pal D'Arcy —'

'Is D'Arcy your old pal?' grinned Bob.

'Pally as anything,' said Bunter. 'The fact is, my idea was to fix up the summer holiday together. I know he'd like it of course.'

'The likefulness would probably be terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'But I never had a chance of getting down to it,'

explained Bunter. 'The minute I mentioned it, he walked off all of a sudden —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I kept my eyes open for a chance to speak to him again, but somehow or other I never got one — almost as if he was keeping out of my way —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'So I'm going to write to him,' said Bunter.

'One of you fellows lend me a stamp —'

'Bow-wow!' said Bob Cherry.

'I say, Nugent —'

'Bow-wow!' said Frank Nugent, like an echo.

'Bull, old chap.'

'Bow-wow!' said Johnny Bull, like another echo.

'I say, Inky —!'

'The bow-wowfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter,' answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I say, Harry old chap, lend me a stamp! You're not so jolly mean about a stamp as these fellows.'

'Meaner!' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Beast!'

'I wonder,' said Bob Cherry meditatively, 'how it might have turned out, if that man Knox hadn't butted in and walked Tom Merry off.'

'I say, you fellows, seen Mauly?'

None of the Famous Five seemed disposed to provide a stamp for Billy Bunter to write to his old pal Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at St. Jim's. Probably they

could guess just how much Arthur Augustus desired to hear from the Owl of the Remove on the subject of the summer holidays. The Five having been drawn blank, Billy Bunter blinked round the 'Rag' in search of Lord Mauleverer. But his lordship was not to be seen.

'Know where Mauly is?' asked Bunter.

'Looked for him in the Cloisters?' asked Bob.

'Bother him!' said Bunter. 'What the dickens is he mooching in the cloisters for?' The fat junior turned towards the door. Then he turned back, 'I say, is Mauly in the Cloisters?'

'Not that I know of,' answered Bob cheerfully. 'But go and look for him there, old fat man. A little walk will do you good.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter did not go for a little walk. He plumped down in an arm-chair in the 'Rag', to wait for Mauly to come in.

'Not a nice chap, that man Knox!' remarked Harry Wharton. 'Even if Merry was out of detention, he might have let it stand over till the finish. Rotten trick to butt in to a cricket match, even if he is a prefect.'

'Rotten,' agreed Nugent.

'Some of the St. Jim's men looked as if they'd like to lynch him,' said Bob. 'From what I have heard, they don't like him much over there. But a pre. is a pre. — you can't scrag a pre. I had an eye on Tom

Merry, and I thought for a minute he was going to hit him. But of course he couldn't — a Sixth Form pre. I'd have liked to chuck something at him myself.'

'He, he, he!' came from Bunter in the arm-chair.

Bob Cherry glanced round at him.

'What are you he, he, heing about, you fat ass?' he asked. 'I'd jolly well have liked to chuck the ball at Knox's head, when he barged in like that and spoiled Tom Merry's game. But a fellow couldn't do anything at another school.'

'That's all you know,' grinned Bunter.

'And what does that mean, if it means anything?' asked Bob.

Billy Bunter chuckled a fat chuckle.

'Perhaps somebody did heave something at that beast's head,' he said. 'Perhaps it was a Latin dictionary, and perhaps he got it right on the nut! He, he, he!'

The Famous Five all stared at the fat junior in the arm-chair. Billy Bunter's fat face was wreathed in grins, at the happy memory of his exploit at St. Jim's.

'That man Knox is a bully and a beast,' went on Bunter. 'He had the cheek to pull my ear.' Bunter rubbed that appendage as if he felt a reminiscent twinge in it. 'Pulled my ear and smacked my head, and me a visitor from another school! That's the sort of beast he is! But I jolly well got back on him all right! He, he, he!'

'You fat ass,' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'What the

dickens were you up to at St. Jim's, while we were playing cricket?'

'Oh, nothing,' said Bunter. 'I never touched the cake in Tom Merry's study, if that's what you mean —'

'You fat villain!'

'Oh really, Wharton —'

'You bagged a cake in a St. Jim's study, while we were playing cricket!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Oh, no! I never looked into the study cupboard and there wasn't a cake there,' said Bunter, hastily. 'Besides I left it there, just as it was — never touched it.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'I jolly well saw that beast Knox under the study window,' went on Bunter. 'I tell you he pulled my ear and smacked my head. Think I was going to let him get by with that? There was a big Latin dictionary on the table and I jolly well dropped it on his head.'

'Oh, crumbs.'

'You should have heard him yell,' chuckled Bunter. 'Yelled like a Red Indian! He! he! he! Copped him right on the napper with that dick — and I can tell you it was jolly heavy. I expect he's got a bump on his head! He! he!'

'You blithering fat Owl —'

'Oh really, Cherry —'

'You potty porpoise —'

'Oh really, Bull —'

'You utter ass!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'I dare say it served Knox right to get a jolt, but it was a mad trick to drop a book on a fellow's head —'

'He! he! he!'

'Might have knocked him right over,' said Nugent.

'I fancied it did!' chuckled Bunter. 'He yelled like anything!'

'Didn't he come after?' asked Bob.

'He! he! he! Think I'd let him see me?' grinned Bunter, derisively. 'I popped back the minute I'd done it, and hiked off to D'Arcy's study. I wasn't going to have that ruffian smacking my head again.'

'Do you mean that nobody knows you did it?' exclaimed Wharton.

'Think I'd let them know?' grinned Bunter. 'Not likely! I can tell you I kept it jolly dark so long as we were at St. Jim's.'

'They might think some St. Jim's man did it,' said Harry. 'A lot of them looked as if they'd like to give that man Knox a jolt.'

'They can think so if they like,' said Bunter. 'What does it matter?'

'What else could they think, if they don't know it was Bunter,' said Frank Nugent. 'Some fellow might be lagged for it.'

'Rot!' said Bunter, cheerfully. 'How could they lag a fellow that hadn't done it! I say, you fellows, Knox got a cosh — right on the nut! He, he, he! I'll bet

he's got a bump on his napper — I hope he has anyway, pulling a fellow's ear, you know — and a visitor at the school, too! I'd have jolly well got him with that dick! He, he, he!

'You awful ass!' said Harry Wharton. 'That man Knox seems to be rather a tick: but he's a Sixth Form prefect, and there's bound to be a row about a pre. getting a bang on the nut. I shouldn't wonder if they're rooting all over St. Jim's to find the man.'

'He, he, he!' cachinnated Bunter. He seemed entertained by the idea of the powers at St. Jim's rooting all over the school for a fellow who was safe at Greyfriars in another county.

'Cut the cackle, you fat ass,' said the captain of the Remove. 'What were you in Tom Merry's study at all for?'

'Anything to do with a cake?' asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'Nothing at all to do with a cake,' answered Bunter. 'I'm not the fellow to snoop a cake, I hope. Besides, it wasn't much of a cake; not like the cakes I get from Bunter Court. Not that I had it, you know. I never ate it in Tom Merry's study, and never went to sleep in his arm-chair afterwards. I — I was in D'Arcy's study all the time I was in Tom Merry's — I — I mean —'

'Gentlemen, chaps and fellows,' said Bob Cherry. 'That fat snooper snoops tuck in the studies here which is bad enough, but snooping tuck in another

school is the jolly old limit. Tip him out of that chair and boot him.'

'Hear, hear!'

'I say, you fellows, no larks,' exclaimed Billy Bunter in alarm. 'I say, I never caked that snoop — I mean I never snooped that cake! The fact is, I wasn't in Tom Merry's study at all when I chucked that dick at Knox from his window — I was somewhere else all the time and — yaroooh!'

Billy Bunter roared as Bob Cherry tilted the back of the arm-chair and he rolled out on the floor of the 'Rag'. He roared again as a foot established contact with his ample trousers. Another roar floated back as he fled from the 'Rag': and Harry Wharton & Co. resumed cricket talk uninterrupted further by the fat Owl of the Remove.

CHAPTER XXII

SACKED!

DR. HOLMES sat silent, his eyes across the table fixed on the junior who stood before him.

Tom Merry stood with his chin up. If his heart was beating a little faster than usual he was cool and calm. He well knew that his fate at St. Jim's was in the balance. But he knew, too, that he could rely on justice from his Head-master. Dr. Holmes was not the man to make mistakes.

Mr. Railton stood on one side of the Head's table. Knox of the Sixth stood on the other. Railton's face was grave and troubled, Knox's was dark and bitter. Knox's only solace for a darkened eye and a raw red nose was the prospect of seeing the junior 'sacked' for having inflicted those damages. Not for a moment did he doubt that it was Tom Merry. The junior had been goaded into retaliation, and that was all. As for Billy Bunter of Greyfriars, Knox did not even remember his existence. Tom Merry had done this: and Tom was going to be expelled for it: the junior he had always disliked was going to leave St. Jim's that day — for ever.

Tom hardly glanced at Knox. He had only enmity

to expect from the bully of the Sixth: but he knew that Knox believed him to be the culprit. Knox, certainly, wanted the right man to be punished for what had happened. But he was quite certain that Tom was the right man.

Indeed, so far as evidence went, there seemed little room for doubt. It was all circumstantial evidence: but it appeared overwhelming.

But there was one very important point: no one had actually witnessed the act. The fellow who had pitched the dictionary from the window of Tom Merry's study had been seen by no eye. That was all that Tom had to rely on: and he hoped, at least, that it would weigh with his Head-master.

Dr. Holmes broke the silence at last.

'Merry!' he said, slowly.

'Yes, sir!' said Tom, quietly but firmly.

'I have heard from your house-master and from Kildare all the circumstances of this matter,' said Dr. Holmes. 'It now remains for me to hear what you have to say. Did you or did you not throw a book from your study window at a prefect of the Sixth Form?'

'I did not, sir.'

Knox's lip curled in contempt. To him that reply seemed the most palpable of falsehoods.

'You deny it, Merry?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'You do not deny that you had been heard to utter

words amounting to a threat or something of the kind ?'

Tom coloured.

'No, sir !'

'Yet you deny the action !'

'Yes, sir.'

'I have heard from Kildare that when he came up to your study, immediately after the incident, he found you there, and no one else.'

'That is so, sir.'

'It was your Latin dictionary that was used as a missile.'

'Yes, sir.'

'You had broken detention against your house-master's orders, and Knox had taken you back to the French master's class ?'

Tom's colour deepened.

'Yes, sir ! I know I shouldn't have—but I did !'

'You were very much exasperated with Knox ?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Tom, in a low voice.

'You cannot say that any other boy was in, or near, your study at the time ?'

'I saw no one, sir.'

'If some other boy had done this he must have been to your study very shortly before you entered it ?'

'He must have been, sir.'

'Yet you saw nothing of anyone either in the study, or leaving it ?'

'Nothing, sir. But — but of course he would cut off at once, sir,' said Tom. 'I've no doubt he cleared off the moment he had dropped the book from the window. He would of course. He would know that somebody would come up.'

Dr. Holmes gave a slow nod and relapsed into silence again. When he spoke, he addressed Mr. Railton.

'Your experience, Mr. Railton, of Merry is that he is a truthful boy?' he asked.

'Undoubtedly,' said Mr. Railton, with emphasis.

'I have heard from the form-master,' said Dr. Holmes.

'What he tells us now appears almost incredible, yet the possibility exists that he is stating the exact facts. There seems to have been no eye-witness of the occurrence: and circumstantial evidence, clear as it may seem, is often misleading. I am not satisfied that Merry was the culprit in this case.'

Tom Merry breathed more freely.

He had relied on the wisdom and the justice of his Head-master; he had not relied on them in vain.

But if the Head's slow, calm words relieved Tom, they had quite an opposite effect on Gerald Knox.

Up to that point Knox had not doubted that Tom Merry would leave the Head's study expelled from the school. No other verdict seemed possible, or imaginable, to Knox. Tom Merry had done it to Knox; all the evidence proved that he had done it: and

there was nothing for the Head-master to do but to pass sentence. And now —

Knox's feelings that moment were like those of a cat seeing a mouse escape from its claws.

His eyes glinted, and his lips set. That young rascal — that young ruffian — who had knocked him over, blacked his eye, and bruised his nose, was going free — to laugh in his sleeve at the prefect whom he has assailed, and at the Head-master who let him off! That was how Gerald Knox looked at it. If he could have doubted for one moment that Tom Merry was the culprit, it would have been different. But he was positive on that point — there was not the shadow of a doubt in his mind. The young rascal had done it and now he was getting off by telling lies — that was Knox's view. But he was not getting off, if Gerald Knox could help it!

'I think,' said Dr. Holmes, after a long pause, 'that further investigation is required, Mr. Railton.'

'I agree, sir,' said the School-House master.

Knox breathed hard.

'It was Merry, sir,' he said.

Dr. Holmes glanced at him.

'You have no doubt of that, Knox?' he asked.

'I know it as a fact, sir,' said Knox. 'He was seen at his study window after he had flung the book at my head, looking down at what he had done —'

'That was after the incident, Knox —' said the Head quietly. 'Merry's explanation is that he heard

something going on below and looked out to see what it was.'

'He was looking out when the dictionary struck me, sir,' said Knox.

Knox hardly realised that he was lying.

He was so absolutely certain that Tom Merry had flung the dictionary at his head, so absolutely assured that Tom had been at the window all the time, that it hardly seemed like a lie to him. The young ruffian had done it, and was not going to escape: that was Knox's dominant thought. Why should the young rascal escape by telling untruths when Knox, by stretching a point a very little, could pin him down. That was Gerald Knox's view.

Tom Merry gave a violent start.

He did not expect fair play from Knox: but that startled him. He had certainly not expected false witness. He stared blankly at the bully of the Sixth, almost doubting whether he had heard aright.

The Head's face became very grave.

'Knox, are you certain of this?' he exclaimed.

'Absolutely certain, sir.'

'I gathered from Kildare that it was after he arrived on the scene that you and he looked up and saw Merry at his window — a matter only of moments, perhaps, but long enough for Merry's explanation to be possibly true.'

Knox, for a second, felt a palpitation. But he had gone too far for retreat.

His voice was steady as he answered.

'Both Kildare and I saw him there, sir — but I saw him as I fell — the very moment that I was knocked over.'

Tom Merry panted.

'It's not true!' he almost shouted, 'Knox did not see me then—he couldn't have, I was not there then. It's not true.'

'Silence, Merry!' exclaimed Mr. Railton. The house-master's face had hardened: so long as there was an element of doubt, he was more than willing to give Tom the benefit of it. But there was no element of doubt now — in face of Knox's positive assertion.

Tom's eyes blazed.

'I will not be silent. I tell you Knox is lying — he never saw what he says he saw — it's untrue —'

'Silence!' It was the Head's voice this time, hard and sharp, and Tom was silent. Dr. Holmes went on, 'You are quite sure of what you say, Knox?'

'Quite, sir.'

'You actually saw Merry at his window above you, when you were struck down by that missile?' Again Gerald Knox had an uneasy moment. But he answered:

'Yes, sir!'

'That decides the matter, Mr. Railton,' said Dr. Holmes.

'It does, sir,' said the house-master.

Dr. Holmes' severe glance turned on Tom again.

'Merry! I hardly know what to say to you,' he said. 'You were guilty of this violent act —'

'I was not, sir,' flashed Tom.

'Silence! You have denied it, and in view of your excellent reputation with your house-master and form-master, I had intended to defer judgement. But now there is no occasion for that. If you had answered me frankly, if you had admitted having acted rashly and foolishly in a moment of exasperation, I might have taken a more lenient view: but as it is, I have no choice but to deal with you severely. You will leave this school, Merry.'

Tom's eyes gleamed, and his breath came fast.

'Then, I am to go?' he said, between his teeth.

'You are to go.'

'For no reason, except that Knox is a lying rascal?' said Tom. 'Is that what you call a reason, sir?'

Dr. Holmes started, and a flush came into his face. Knox crimsoned. Railton stared blankly at Tom.

'Upon my word!' exclaimed the Head, 'Mr. Railton, take that boy from my study! Merry, you will pack you box immediately. Take him away!'

The house-master, with a face like iron, stepped to Tom, stretching out a hand to take him by the shoulder. Tom backed from him.

'Hands off!' he snapped.

'What—?' gasped the house-master.

'I don't need help to walk out of this study!' said Tom.

'Upon my word!—'

Tom walked to the study door, dragged it open, and walked out. The Head and the house-master gazed after him, as if petrified. Knox slid a hand over his mouth to hide a triumphant grin. If there had been a ghost of a chance remaining for Tom Merry, it was gone now: he had cooked his own goose, and cooked it very thoroughly. It was Tom Merry's last day at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER XXIII

GOING ?

'MERRY !'

'Hallo !'

Kildare of the Sixth knitted his brows at that answer. It was not precisely the answer a Sixth-Form prefect, and captain of the school, expected from a junior in the Shell.

'I've been looking for you,' he said, gruffly.

'You needn't have troubled.'

'You young ass, you're wanted,' snapped Kildare. 'Can't you understand that you're sacked, and you're going today?'

Tom Merry's lip curled.

It was in the doorway of the school shop that Kildare had found him. Tom had been bidden to pack his box, preparatory to being taken to the station and put into his train for home. Instead of which, he had gone across the quad to the tuck-shop, where Dame Taggles eyed him curiously and commiseratingly as she served him. The school shop was open for morning break: and the St. Jim's fellows were not yet out of the form-room. Tom had the shop to himself for the time: and he gave rather extensive

orders, and he had quite a large bundle in his hand when he left the shop — and met Kildare of the Sixth just outside the doorway. He stopped, as Kildare blocked his way, swinging the bundle in his hand by the string.

'I've been told to find you,' snapped Kildare. 'What the dickens are you doing here, instead of packing your box?'

'Buying grub,' answered Tom.

'You seem to want a lot to eat on the train!' said Kildare, staring at the large bundle swinging in Tom's hand. 'Anyway, you're to come with me now. I'm to see you pack your box, and take you to the station.'

'How good of you!' said Tom. 'But I don't think I'll trouble you, Kildare. I'm not going to pack my box.'

'Not!' ejaculated Kildare.

'Not!' agreed Tom.

'What do you mean, you young ass?' asked the captain of St. Jom's, quite puzzled.

'Only what I say,' answered Tom, negligently.

'You're going —'

'I'm not going.'

'Not going!' repeated Kildare.

'Not at all! Staying,' said Tom. 'You see, Kildare, I'm not going to be walked out of my school because a Sixth-Form prefect is a lying rascal. That's not a reason for a fellow to be sent home.'

'Are you out of your senses?' gasped Kildare.

'No: are you?'

'I don't know what you mean by this cheek, Mer-ry,' said Kildare, breathing hard. 'But I've got my orders from the house-master —'

'Tell him to think again!' suggested Tom.

'By gad! That's enough! Come with me at once, back to the house —'

'Forget it.'

'Eh! did you say forget it?' stuttered Kildare.

'Just that! Who are you, anyway?' asked Tom.

'Who am I?' repeated Kildare, like a fellow in a dream.

'Yes! If I'm sacked, I'm not under your orders any longer,' said Tom, in the same cool tone. 'You're nobody in particular, now, so far as I'm concerned. I advise you to mind your own business, Kildare.'

That was enough for the captain of St. Jim's. He made a stride at Tom Merry, and grasped him by the shoulder.

'Now come —!' he rapped.

Tom's eyes flashed.

'Let go my shoulder, Kildare,' he said, in a low but very distinct voice.

'Come, I tell you.'

'Will you let go?'

Instead of replying again, the captain of St. Jim's dragged. Tom Merry set his lips. He swung up the bundle in his hand, and crashed it on Kildare's chest, knocking him backwards.

'Oh,' gasped the Sixth-Form man, as he spun.

He tottered several paces, lost his footing, and crashed. Tom did not give him a glance, he cut off towards the House at a run, swinging the bundle in his hand.

Kildare sat up, quite dazedly.

'Oh, gad!' he gasped. It was really difficult for the captain of St. Jim's to realise that he had been knocked over by a junior. 'Stop! Tom Merry! You young rascal, stop—'

Tom cut on, Kildare staggered to his feet, red with wrath.

'Stop him, Knox!' he shouted.

Knox of the Sixth had come out of the House. There was a stealthy grin on Knox's face. He was consoled now for his darkened eye and his swollen nose. Tom Merry was 'sacked'! He might have escaped that fate, had not Gerald Knox stretched a point in the Head's study. But Knox had stretched that point, and the young rascal was going. He would be gone by the time the school came out in break. That was very satisfactory to Knox.

He stared round, as Kildare shouted from a distance. He stared again, at the sight of Tom Merry running for the House, swinging a bundle in his hand.

'Stop him!' shouted Kildare again, as he started in pursuit.

Knox ran into Tom's path.

If the young rascal was giving more trouble, now that he was sacked, Knox of the Sixth was quite prepared to take a hand in dealing with him. He was prepared to do so with zest.

'Now then, stop, you young cub!' snapped Knox, in his most bullying tone, as he planted himself directly in front of the running. 'I — Oh — what — Oh — oooooooooogh!'

Knox had not expected what happened next. He had expected Tom to stop, and was ready to grab him if he did not stop at once. But he was not ready for what happened. He had not expected the junior to charge at him headlong like a runaway bull, and land a heavy bundle full in his face.

But that was what happened: and Gerald Knox went backwards as if a cannon-shot had hit him. He sprawled on his back, spluttering.

Tom ran round him, and ran on.

He vanished into the House, as Knox tottered up, and Kildare came up with a rush. He cut to the staircase, and as he did so, a stern voice came to his ears: that of his house-master.

'Merry! What does this mean? Stop!'

Tom, on the staircase, looked back. Mr. Railton stared up at him angrily.

'What does this mean, Merry?' he repeated.

'Guess!' answered Tom.

'What? What?'

'I said guess!'

'How dare you Merry?' gasped Mr. Railton.

'Oh, rats!' snapped Tom.

'Upon my word! You—you—I—I—!' The house-master fairly stammered, 'Merry, you are expelled from this school — you are to go to the station at once with Kildare —'

'Rats again!' said Tom. 'I know I'm sacked! Knox has got away with his lies, and you're fool enough to believe him —'

'What? What did you say?'

'You're fool enough to believe him. That's what I said, and that's what I mean. But I'm not going just yet.'

'Boy! You are going at once —'

'Go to sleep and dream again!' answered Tom.

Railton made a stride up the stairs. For a moment, he was in danger of being knocked back by a swinging bundle, as Kildare and Knox had been. But Tom, wildly excited and burning with angry indignation as he was, stopped short of that. He turned his back on the house-master, and raced up the stairs.

'Merry!' shouted Mr. Railton. 'Stop!'

'Rats!' floated back.

'Merry! I tell you —'

'Go and tell somebody else.'

Tom Merry vanished across the study landing, leaving the house-master staring blankly. There was a patter of footsteps above, and then a door was heard to slam in the Shell studies.

'Bless my soul!' repeated Mr. Railton, blankly.

Kildare and Knox came hurrying in: Kildare red and angry, Knox almost foaming.

'Have you seen Merry, sir?' exclaimed Kildare. 'He ran into the House —'

'He has gone up to the studies,' answered Mr. Railton. 'The boy seems to be utterly out of hand. Follow me, Kildare.'

He mounted the stairs, followed by the two prefects. They crossed the study landing, into the Shell passage. Mr. Railton turned the door-handle of Tom Merry's study. The door did not open. It was locked on the inside.

The house-master rapped on the door.

'Are you there, Merry?' he called out.

'Adsum!' came a mocking voice from within.

'Open this door at once.'

'No fear!'

'You are to be taken to the station —'

'Not just yet, old bean.'

'Unlock this door immediately.'

'Not likely.'

'Merry!' Mr. Railton tried to speak calmly, 'Merry! You are expelled from the school. Does this wild conduct mean that you desire to create a disturbance here before you go?'

There was a laugh from within.

'What a brain!' came the answer, through solid oak. 'You've guessed it, Railton. I'm going to give

you all the trouble I can — right up to the limit! Go back to the Head and tell him that Knox is a lying rat, and that he had better think again.'

Gerald Knox turned almost green: he heard that. Kildare gave him a very sharp and curious look.

Mr. Railton rapped on the door again.

'Merry!' he snapped.

'Hallo! still there, Railton?'

'I can scarcely understand this insolence, Merry—'

'Sit it out with a wet towel round your head for an hour or two, and you may be able to think it out!' came the retort from No. 10 study.

'Will you unlock this door or not?'

'Not!'

Mr. Railton stood gazing at the door for some moments. Then he turned away. Obviously he could do nothing, for the moment. Kildare stared very hard at Knox, as the house-master went back down the passage.

'Look here, Knox —!' said the captain of St. Jim's.

'Well?' Knox gave him a stealthy, sullen glance.

'I've heard what you said to the Head! Are you quite sure?' Kildare scanned the sullen face, 'You said nothing about it yesterday — I suppose that you saw the kid at his window when I did, not before that — but now you've said that you saw him sooner — just as the dick was flung — are you quite sure of that, Knox?'

'Think I'd have told the Head so, if I wasn't sure?'

HOLDING THE FORT

'WHERE'S TOM?'

'Is he gone?'

Manners and Lowther asked one another questions, as they came out of the French master's classroom. In the French set, they had not been thinking much about the beautiful language of France which Monsieur Morny had been striving to impart to his pupils. Never had Mossoo had two more inattentive fellows in his set. Their thoughts were with their chum, and their anxiety was keen.

'They can't have bunked him,' muttered Lowther.

'They can't! But — where is he now?'

Obviously, Tom Merry could not still be with the Head. That interview in the Head-master's study must have been over long before the French set ended. That Tom had been 'bunked', that he was no longer at St. Jim's, was too dismaying to be believed. Yet, if the Head's sentence had been so drastic, it was most likely that he had been sent away while the school were in class. Was that what had happened?

'Seen Tom?' asked Lowther, as the Shell fellows

came out into the quad, and encountered Study No. 6 there. The Fourth were just out of their form-room.

'No!' answered Blake. 'Know what's happened?'

'Not yet.'

'He can't be gone,' said Digby.

'Wathah not!' said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. 'The Head is a downy old bird, deah boys, and he wouldn't make a mistake like that. I am suah it is all wight.'

'Um! Where is he, then?' asked Herries.

Cardew came across to the worried group. For once, Ralph Reckness Cardew was looking serious.

'You fellows know how it's gone with Tom Merry?' he asked.

'A fat lot you care!' said Monty Lowther, savagely. 'Sheer off, if you don't want another smack on your cheeky face, like you had from Tom.'

Cardew coloured.

'If he's sacked —!' he began.

'If he's sacked, it's all your fault,' snapped Manners. 'You had to shove your oar in, and put it into his head to cut Extra yesterday — that was what did it.'

'I didn't put it into his head to buzz that dick at Knox!' snapped back Cardew. 'That was entirely his own idea.'

'Weally, Cardew —'

'Tom never did that!' said Lowther. 'He says so, and that's good enough.'

'It doesn't seem good enough for Railton and the

Head,' retorted Cardew. 'If he's sacked, I'm sorry: but he couldn't expect anything else. But I'd be jolly glad to hear that he's pulled through somehow. If he's had the sense to own up to what he had done, there might have been a chance —'

'That's enough from you!' interrupted Lowther. 'Get away before you're kicked.'

Cardew shrugged his shoulders, and walked away.

'We've got to know about Tom,' said Manners. 'There's Kildare — let's ask him.'

Kildare had come out of the House. Six juniors bore down on him.

'What about Tom Merry, Kildare?' asked Manners. 'What's happened?'

'Sacked,' answered Kildare, briefly.

'Bai Jove!'

'But — but he can't be!' exclaimed Lowther. 'Look here, Kildare, even if they think he did it, nobody saw it done — they can't sack a man like that —'

'Knox saw him,' said Kildare. 'It comes out that Knox saw him at his window when the dick was flung down.'

'Oh, crumbs!' said Blake.

'Knox saw him — chucking the dick!' exclaimed Manners, blankly.

'Yes. That settles it.'

'It doesn't settle it!' exclaimed Lowther, hotly. 'Knox can't have seen him doing what he never did. Knox is making a mistake —'

'Knox isn't making a mistake,' said Manners. 'He's telling lies!'

Kildare knitted his brows.

'That will do!' he said, sharply. 'You're speaking of a Sixth-Form prefect. That will do.'

'Sixth Form prefect or not, he's telling lies!' said Manners, savagely. 'And I'll tell him so too.'

'Steady the Buffs!' said Blake. 'Look here, Kildare. Where's Tom Merry now? Do you mean that he's gone?'

'He would be gone but —'

'He's still here?' exclaimed Lowther, eagerly.

'Yes. He's locked himself in his study,' said Kildare. He paused. 'You can go up, if you like, and speak to him — try to make him look at things sensibly and come out without further fuss. What he's doing can do no good — he will have to go, and kicking up a shindy like that will not get him anywhere.'

The juniors hardly stayed to listen to Kildare's concluding words. They ran into the House, and up the stairs. In barely a minute they were outside No. 10. Study in the Shell, and Lowther was rapping on the door.

'Tom!' he shouted.

'You're here, old man!' exclaimed Manners.

'Tom Mewwy, deah boy —'

'Tom, old chap —'

There was the sound of a movement in the study. Then, Tom Merry's voice came through the door.

'Sorry I can't let you chaps in! I'm sporting the oak.' Tom Merry's voice was quite cool.

'We've just heard, Tom —!' faltered Lowther.

'It's a wotten shame, deah boy,' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'I am weally surprised at the Head!'

'Oh, the Old Boy isn't to blame,' came Tom's reply. 'What could he do but take the word of his precious prefect? Everything pointed to me — except that there was no eye-witness. Knox manufactured that at the last minute.' Tom Merry laughed: a laugh that had a bitter ring in it. 'You see, Knox believes that I did it, and he saw that I was pulling through — so he put the lid on! Just one little lie did it.'

'The rotter!' breathed Lowther.

'The wotten wascal!'

'But what are you going to do, Tom?' asked Manners. 'You can't stick in that study very long, old chap.'

'I shall stick it as long as I jolly well can,' said Tom. 'I've done nothing to be sacked for, and I'm not going to be sacked, if I can help it. I'll give them all the trouble I can at any rate.'

The juniors in the passage looked at one another. It was obvious that Tom Merry was in a very unusual mood. It was utterly unlike him to take such a line. But the determined note in his voice told that, unlike his old sunny self as it was, he was going to follow that line, with a stubbornness that had never been apparent in his character before.

'Tom, old man, —!' muttered Manners, miserably.

'They'll root you out, old chap,' said Blake.

'They can try, as soon as they like,' answered Tom. 'I've got a bundle of grub here, and I've nailed down the table inside the door. They won't find it so jolly easy to root me out.'

'Oh, gweat Scott!'

'There'll be an awful row!' muttered Blake.

'I'm expecting that!' came back from the study. 'The biggest row they've ever had on their hands, before they get shot of me.'

'Let us in!' said Lowther, through the keyhole, 'let us in, old chap, and we'll back you up, to the finish.'

'Yaas, wathah!'

'Open the door, Tom, and let us come in,' said Manners. 'We'll back you up all along the line, whatever happens.'

'No!' came Tom's answer, 'I'm not dragging you fellows into this. But there's one thing you can do, if you want to get busy.'

'What's that Tom?'

'Try to spot that fellow who buzzed that dick at Knox,' answered Tom. 'Nothing else is any use.'

'But who —?' said Manners, helplessly.

'Goodness knows! I haven't the foggiest. There was hardly a fellow in the House while the cricket was on, but somebody must have been here — somebody who dodged out of this study just before I came into it. Whoever it was seems to have bagged

a cake from the cupboard while he was here — it's gone, anyway. Somebody was here—but who it was is anybody's guess. But you might be able to spot any fellow who was in the House at the time.'

'We'll try!' said Manners.

'Yaas, wathah!'

'Some reckless ass like Cardew —!' said Blake.

'Bai Jove! Pewwaps it was Cardew!' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'He is mad ass enough to do that or anythin' else.'

'We'll jolly well ask him, at any rate!' said Lowther. 'We'll make him tell us where he was at the time, anyway, if he left the cricket ground. By gum if it came out who really did it, that would be one in the eye for Knox, after what he's said. We'll do our best, Tom.'

'Wely on us, old scout!'

'Stick it out, Tom, as long as you can, then,' said Manners.

'I'm going to!'

There was a step in the passage and Knox of the Sixth came up, with a scowling face. He gave the group of juniors a glare.

'Get out of here,' he snapped.

'Weally, Knox —!'

'Get out, I tell you!'

Never had Knox of the Sixth been nearer to the ragging of his life. Six juniors looked at him, almost as if they could have eaten him. But they restrained

their longing to lay forcible hands on the bully of the Sixth, and went quietly down the passage.

Knox scowled after them, and then rapped at the study door.

'You still here, Merry!' he snapped.

'Yes, you rat.'

Knox breathed hard. By that time, Tom Merry should have been gone from St. Jim's: and all would have been safe for Gerald Knox. All was safe now, so far as could be seen: but he was uneasy so long as the expelled junior remained in the school. He believed, without a shadow of a doubt, that Tom was the culprit, and had no fear of anything coming out that could clear him. Nevertheless, he had not seen what he had told the Head that he had seen: and the knowledge that he had lied gave him a lingering uneasiness. He could not feel quite at ease till Tom Merry was gone: and Tom was not gone. The unexpected line he had taken astonished and enraged Knox: he had never dreamed that an expelled fellow could or would take such a line. All was safe — all was secure — and yet he felt that there was danger in the air, so long as Tom was still in the school.

'You young fool,' he said, 'what good do you think this will do you? How long do you think you can stick in that study?'

'Long enough, perhaps, for the Head to find out that you were pulling his leg,' answered Tom Merry, coolly, 'and I wouldn't like to be in your shoes, Knox,

if the Old Boy finds out that you lied to him.'

'You young ruffian, you know you did it —'

'I know you believe so,' came Tom's contemptuous voice, 'but that's no excuse for telling lies about it, Knox.'

Knox gritted his teeth. For a moment he wondered whether the junior was, after all, possibly telling the truth, and whether that 'dick' had been hurled by some other hand. If that was possibly so, and if the facts came out, certainly the position would be extremely unpleasant for Knox. But he dismissed the thought at once. He passed his hand over his darkened eye, and gave the locked door a savage kick.

'If you stick in there the door will be forced!' he snarled.

'Get on with it.'

Knox gave the door another kick, and stalked away. When the bell rang for third school, and the St. Jim's fellows went back to their form-rooms, Tom Merry was still in his study: and by that time, all the school knew that the junior who had been expelled was still at St. Jim's — refusing to go: and both Houses buzzed with excitement. For the time, at least, Tom Merry was holding the fort: and all St. Jim's wondered how it was going to end.

NO CATCH!

'MERRY!'

'You again!'

Victor Railton compressed his lips.

Perhaps he did not expect much respect, or even civility, from a junior who was under sentence of expulsion, and who, as soon as he could be extracted from his study, was to be taken to the railway station and bundled into his train for home. But that reply irked him all the same.

'Will you open this door, Merry?'

'I've answered that one.'

'This must end!' said the house-master.

'That's easy,' came the reply from the locked study.

'What? What do you mean, Merry?'

'I mean that you've only got to find the right man, and bunk him instead of me. That's your duty, as house-master.'

'Bless my soul!' murmured Mr. Railton, 'Merry, this insolence —'

'I wouldn't call it that! You'd be sorry yourself if you knew you were hoofing out the wrong man. Get down to it, and find the right one.'

'Merry! I am here with two prefects, and implements to force the door. Will you open it, and save a useless disturbance?'

'The more disturbance the merrier, Railton. Go ahead with the jolly old implements — it will amuse the fellows in the form-rooms.'

Kildare and Darrell, of the Sixth, standing behind Mr. Railton in the Shell passage, exchanged a glance, and Darrell grinned faintly. It was quite unusual to hear a junior talk to a house-master in this strain: and Darrell seemed to find it rather entertaining. But his face became grave at once as Mr. Railton looked round.

'As the boy remains obstinate, there is nothing for it but to force the door,' he said. 'Make as little noise as possible.'

'Yes, sir,' said Kildare.

Mr. Railton was very anxious that no din should be made to echo and re-echo through the House. This amazing and unprecedented state of affairs was to be ended as quickly, and as quietly, as possible. The St. Jim's fellows were all in the form-rooms now, in the summer afternoon. Railton had allowed time to elapse, in the hope that the mutineer would surrender. But there was no sign of surrender from Tom Merry: and at length the house-master had resolved upon drastic action. All was to be over, and Tom Merry gone, before the school came out again.

Hammer and chisel banged on the lock of the study door. Railton hoped that the banging did not reach so far as the form-rooms. As a matter of fact, it did, and caused form-masters to pause, and fellows to stare at one another.

'Bai Jove! They're goin' it!' Arthur Augustus D'Arcy whispered to Blake, in the Fourth-Form room.

Blake nodded glumly. All the juniors could guess what that echo of distant banging meant.

In the Shell room, Manners and Lowther heard it, and gave one another anxious glances.

'That's our study,' whispered Monty Lowther, 'they're after Tom!'

'It's rotten!' muttered Manners.

'Silence in the form!' said Mr. Linton: and the lesson went on, though few fellows in the Shell gave much attention. Every ear was bent to listen to the sounds from the studies.

The banging went on. But it did not last very long. The lock on the study door was not much of a lock, and chisel and hammer soon dislodged it. Mr. Railton was glad when the banging ceased.

He pushed at the door. It stirred, but did not open. With knitted brows, the house-master pushed harder. Still the door did not open.

'The young ass must have his foot against it, sir!' said Darrell, 'we'll soon stop that! Lend a hand, Kildare.'

The two stalwart Sixth-Form men added their

strength to Mr. Railton's. Certainly, if it had been Tom Merry's foot that jammed the door shut, that hefty shove would have hurled him away. But apparently it was something stouter than a jamming foot that barred the way, for the door did not open.

Mr. Railton breathed hard and deep.

'Merry!' he called out.

'Coming in?' came the mocking reply. 'Try the keyhole!'

'Have you barricaded this door!'

'Guessed it in one!'

'Upon my word!' Mr. Railton turned to the two prefects again, 'the door must be taken off its hinges. Lose no time.'

'Very well, sir.'

The banging re-started after the interval. Once more fellows in the form-rooms listened to the echoes from afar. Mr. Railton stood with knitted brow, in deep anger. Bang, bang, bang!

The hinges followed the lock, cracked to pieces under the chisel and hammer. The door still stood in the doorway, supported by the table nailed behind it. But no longer held by either lock or hinges on either side, it was evidently only a matter of shoving now.

'Merry!' called out Mr. Railton.

No reply.

'Do you hear me, you foolish reckless boy!'
Still no answer.

'Listen to me, Merry! You must see that you cannot keep me out of the study now. Remove your barricade and save further disturbance.'

Silence from the study.

'Kildare! Darrell! Help me here!' said Mr. Railton, through compressed lips. He bent his shoulders to the door, and the two stalwart prefects followed suit. Under their combined strength, the door rocked. There was a sound of creaking and cracking within, as the study table, nailed both to the door and the floor, resisted the strain. But it could not resist for long.

Inch by inch the door was forced back, forcing the nailed table along with it, till it fell inwards, across the table. Mr. Railton stepped in, and pushed both table and door out of the way.

'Now, Merry—!' he rapped.

He broke off, staring round the study.

'Merry! Where are you!'

He stared blankly. Kildare and Darrell stared in at the doorway. But they did not see Tom Merry.

The defences were down. Neither the house-master nor the prefects had thought of doubting that, once the defences were down, the mutinous junior would be within their grasp. But Tom Merry was not within their grasp. He was not to be seen in No. 10 Study in the Shell.

'Where —!' gasped Kildare.

'What —!' ejaculated Darrell.

Mr. Railton strode across to the window, which was wide open. He leaned from the window and stared down. Under the window, thick old ivy, almost as old as the ancient walls of the School House itself, clustered. Tom Merry was gone: and there was only one way by which he could have gone.

'Upon my word!' breathed Victor Railton. His eyes fixed on a figure below. Tom Merry was just dropping from the ivy to the ground.

'Merry!' shouted Mr. Railton.

Tom looked up. He was a little breathless from the descent of the ivy. But he shouted back:

'Hallo!' He laughed, 'did you think you had me, Railton! My dear man, I had the window open ready, in case the door went! Like to climb after me!'

The house-master turned from the window, without answering that. His face was red with anger.

'Go down at once, Kildare, Darrell!' he exclaimed. 'Merry has climbed down from this window — go down at once and secure him. Do not lose a moment.'

'Yes, sir!'

The two prefects went down the passage at a run. They cut across the study landing, and descended the stairs two at a time. They came out of the House into the sunny quad at a breathless rush.

But they did not find Tom Merry there. They had not lost a moment — and neither had Tom! He had vanished before they emerged from the House: and they stared round for him in vain.

'He's cut!' muttered Kildare.

'Game young rascal!' said Darrell. 'Where is he now?'

'Ask me another.'

Mr. Railton followed the prefects out of the House. If he expected to find Tom Merry in their hands, he was disappointed.

'Search for him,' he rapped.

Kildare and Darrell proceeded to search. They might as well have searched for a needle in a haystack. They had to give up the search at last, and report to the house-master that Tom Merry was not to be found. Where Tom Merry was, was anybody's guess: but one thing was not doubtful: he was still within the walls of St. Jim's, and he was not going outside those walls if he could help it. And it began to look as if he could help it!

JUST LIKE CARDEW

'OH!' GASPED Cardew.

He was taken by surprise.

In both Houses at St. Jim's excited discussion was going on, on the single reigning topic in the school—the 'bunking' of Tom Merry, and its amazing sequel. Tom, 'bunked', was not gone: he was no longer in his study, but he was somewhere in the school: where, nobody knew. There were a hundred nooks and crannies among the ancient buildings where a fellow could hunt cover, and it seemed that the expelled junior had hunted it successfully. At all events, he had not been found so far: and nobody supposed that he had left. Ralph Reckness Cardew, strolling on the path between the old elms and the school wall, with his hands in his pockets, was thinking about that strange state of affairs, like every other fellow at St. Jim's. But he was not expecting to see the missing junior. Now quite unexpectedly, he saw him suddenly.

There was a rustling, slithering sound, and a figure dropped from a leafy branch over his head. Before he knew what was happening, Cardew was

in the grasp of two strong hands that backed him up against the trunk of an elm. In utter amazement he stared at the face of Tom Merry, and met the glinting blue eyes that fixed on him.

'Oh!' he repeated, gasping, 'You!'

'Quiet!' said Tom, in a low, menacing tone, 'You give one call to let them know I'm here, and you'll get hurt.'

Cardew flushed crimson.

'Think I'd give you away?' he snapped.

'Well, don't, if you know what's good for you!' said Tom. His strong grasp on the dandy of the Fourth did not relax.

'Mind lettin' go?' asked Cardew, nonchalantly. 'You're rumplin' my collar, and disarrangin' my tie.'

'Keep quiet!' said Tom.

'Quiet as a lamb!' yawned Cardew.

Tom released him, but stood quite close, ready to grasp him again if he showed a sign of seeking to get away. But Cardew was not thinking of getting away. He stood leaning on the elm, smiling, and arranging his collar and tie.

'This is rather a surprise,' he drawled, 'I suppose you know that the pre.'s of both Houses are huntin' for you all over St. Jim's.'

'I know that!' answered Tom.

Cardew chuckled.

'And you've been up a tree!' he said. 'What a game! But isn't it risky to show up like this — that

is, if you're thinking of keeping up the game? Anybody might come along this path and see you.'

'I'm chancing that,' said Tom, quietly. 'I want a word with you, Cardew. When I saw you coming along, I saw my chance.'

'Two if you like,' said Cardew, amiably, 'or three—even four. In fact, I'll listen in as long as you like, if you feel an urge to chew the rag. If you want my advice —'

'I don't!' snapped Tom.

'I'll hand it out all the same. If you take my tip, you'll give yourself up and get it over,' said Cardew. 'What on earth's the use of hanging on like this? It won't get you anywhere.'

'You can keep your tips,' said Tom. 'I was fool enough to listen to you yesterday: and this is where it's landed me. I'm not giving up: and I'm not leaving the school: perhaps you'd feel safer if I did.'

Cardew stared at him.

'I don't quite follow,' he said; 'How come?'

'Who buzzed that dick at Knox?' asked Tom.

'You did!'

Tom Merry set his lips.

'I did not,' he said, 'and what I want to know is, whether you did, Cardew.'

'Wha-a-at?'

'Plenty of fellows here take my word about it,' said Tom, scornfully. 'So would Railton and the Head, if Knox hadn't thought up a lie at the last minute.'

You've been singing out pretty loud that I did it —'

'Good gad!' breathed Cardew. He stared blankly at Tom's set face. 'Good gad! Do you think that if I did a thing, I'd leave it on another man?'

'It's just one of your mad tricks,' said Tom. 'I can't think of any other man in the House who'd be mad enough. Did you do it?'

'No: you did.'

'Where were you at the time?'

'Find out!'

Tom's eyes gleamed like blue fire.

'I'm going to find out,' he said. 'That's why I dropped from the tree when I saw you. You've got to answer, Cardew. After my wicket went down yesterday, you followed me into the field. Did you go to the House?'

'Same answer as before — find out.'

'Did you go up to my study, and get Knox with that dick?'

'Not at all — but I know who did.'

'Who then?'

'You!' grinned Cardew.

Tom Merry clenched his hand. He barely restrained himself from dashing it in the grinning, mocking face before him. He had thought and thought over the puzzle, and the only fellow he could think of, in the School House, who could have played that reckless trick, was Cardew. He was not likely to think of a fat junior far away at Greyfriars School.

'Keep its ickle temper!' grinned Cardew. 'You won't get anywhere by punching my face, old scout, and getting yours punched as hard.' Then his grinning face became more serious. 'Look here, Merry, you know you did it — and all St. Jim's knows you did it — so what's the use of this?'

'You worm!' breathed Tom, 'did you do it?'

'If you did not —' Cardew paused.

'I did not.'

'If you did not, do you fancy I've been telling the world that I believe you did, to keep suspicion off me?'

'It would suit your book!' said Tom savagely.

'Oh gad! If that's what you think of me, I'm rather glad you dropped on me here!' Cardew's eyes glittered, 'You can put up your hands, and I'll knock that back down your neck.'

'Get on with it!' said Tom.

In another moment there would have been fighting under the shady branches of the elm. But at this moment, a figure came in sight, coming along the path by the school wall. It was Kildare of the Sixth, and he uttered an exclamation as his eyes fell on the missing junior.

'Merry!'

The captain of St. Jim's broke into a run. Tom stared round at him, heedless of Cardew, with clenched fists. But Cardew caught him by the arm.

'Cut!' he breathed.



Cardew caught him by the arm. 'Cut!' he breathed

'Too late —!'

'I'll stop him!' hissed Cardew. 'Cut, you fool - I tell you I'll stop him and give you time. Cut!'

Tom Merry stared at him blankly for a second. He could hardly believe that the mocking, sardonic dandy of the Fourth was in earnest. But if Cardew meant what he said, it was a chance. Tom raced away up the path, with Kildare coming on at a burst of speed. Undoubtedly he would have been run down in a few moments, but as Kildare came racing up, Cardew rushed into his way, and the captain of St. Jim's crashed into him, and reeled back, and fell. Cardew was sent spinning and sprawling from the shock.

'Oh!' gasped Kildare. He leaped to his feet, panting, 'You clumsy young fool — Oh!'

He stayed for no more, but resumed the chase. But a few moments gained had been enough for Tom Merry. He had vanished before Kildare started in pursuit again.

Cardew sat up, panting.

'Oh, gad!' he murmured.

He picked himself up, and stared after Kildare.

Pursued and pursuer had disappeared already. Cardew shrugged his shoulders, dusted his clothes, and walked away. A few minutes later he came on Levison and Clive in the quad.

'You fellows guessed it yet?' he asked.

'Guessed what?' asked Levison, staring.

'Who buzzed that dick at Knox,' said Cardew. 'It's dawned on me, after all, that it wasn't Tom Merry, just as he's said! I might have remembered that our inestimable Thomas always hands out the frozen truth. But who the dickens was it, my beloved 'earers?'

'Nobody knows,' said Clive.

'Somebody's going to know!' said Cardew. 'The cleverest fellow at St. Jim's is going to concentrate all his wits on the problem.'

'And who's that?' asked Levison.

'Little me!' said Cardew airily.

'Fathead!' said Levison and Clive together.

Cardew laughed, and sauntered on, humming a tune.

CHAPTER XXVII

A CLUE ?

'GUSSY!'

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not reply. He adjusted his eyeglass in his noble eye, and fixed it on his relative, Ralph Reckness Cardew, with all the scorn that could have been conveyed by a contemptuous eye gleaming through a gleaming monocle.

Blake and Herries and Dig looked round at Cardew, as he appeared in the doorway of Study No. 6. All three frowned at him. Evidently, Cardew was not *persona grata* in that study at the moment.

'Get out!' said Blake, briefly.

'Buzz!' snapped Herries.

'You're not wanted here!' said Digby.

'Wathah not!' said Arthur Augustus. 'Pway wetire, Cardew, and do not have the cheek to address me as Gussy, eithah. I wefuse to speak a word to you — I decline to uttah a single syllable addressed to you, Cardew.'

'Dear me!' said Cardew, quite unmoved, 'I almost think that I'm not popular in this study.'

'Weally, Cardew —'

'Have I done anything to offend your high-might-

iness?' asked Cardew, meekly. 'In what unfortunate way have I come between the wind and your nobility, Gussy!'

'I wegard you as a wat!' said Arthur Augustus. 'Poor old Tom Mewwy is down on his luck, and all his fwiends are vewy much distwessed about it, and you appawently wegard it as a mattah for mockin' and jeewin'. And I warn you vewy sewiously that if you have come heah to uttah a single word implyin' that Tom Mewwy has not told the twuth in this affaih, I shall punch your cheeky face.'

'Me too!' said Herries.

'And me!' said Blake.

'And me!' said Dig.

Cardew shook his head sadly.

'You're forgetting your grammar in this study,' he said. 'If Lathom were here, he would point out that you should use the nominative case —'

'Oh shut up!' said Blake. He did not seem in a mood for grammatical instruction from Cardew. 'And look here, anything more about Tom Merry, and you will get damaged.'

'Are you going to damage Raiflton, and the Head, too?' asked Cardew, with a grin. 'I've only been expressing their views.'

'That wat Knox has taken them in, with his wotten pwevawications,' said Arthur Augustus, 'but we believe evey word Tom Mewwy has said —'

'What a coincidence - so do I!' said Cardew affably.

'Bai Jove!'

'So you've changed your mind, have you!' snapped Blake.

'Right round!' assented Cardew. 'Right round the compass. I believe the worthy Thomas now just as much as you fellows do.'

'And why?' snapped Blake. 'Nothing's come out that I know of.'

'I've seen Thomas —!'

'You've seen Tom Merry!' exclaimed Blake. 'Where is he, then?'

'Ask me another! The last I saw of him, he was putting up a sprint that Chris Chattaway wouldn't be ashamed of, with Kildare on his track,' drawled Cardew. 'But I don't think Kildare got him—a fellow barged into him just in time and caused a spot of delay.'

'Bai Jove! That was wippin',' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'Who was the fellow who barged in?'

'I!' said Cardew, 'or to use the grammar you seem to prefer in this study — me!'

'You!' said Blake, blankly.

'Little me!' assented Cardew. 'I'd had a talk with Thomas — hence my change of mind. That's why I came here.' He chuckled, 'I've heard that you fellows, and Manners and Lowther, have been askin' questions about my proceedings yesterday — apparently with the idea of fixing it on me! Tom Merry had the same idea. Poor little me!'

'It's the sort of mad trick you would play,' growled Blake. 'But Levison and Clive say that you were with them the whole time of the innings, so you couldn't have been in the House at the time.'

'Quite a sound alibi!' grinned Cardew. 'Have you thought of anybody else!'

Blake shook his head.

'It is a vewy deep mystewy,' said Arthur Augustus. 'Of course, it does not mattah a wap about Knox gettin' a bang on the nappah, and it is wathah amusin' than otherwise to see him blinkin' with a black eye. But Tom Mewwy gettin' sacked for it makes it vewy sewious indeed. It does not mattah about Knox, but it mattahs vewy much indeed about poor old Tom Mewwy.'

'Somebody did it,' said Cardew.

'Have you worked that out in your head?' asked Blake, sarcastically.

'Tell us something we don't know,' suggested Herries.

'That's the point of departure,' explained Cardew. 'Somebody did it—that's where we begin. Now we've got to find that somebody, before they snoop Thomas and hoick him into a train for home.'

'Fat lot you care!' grunted Dig.

'To follow the noble example of Thomas, and tell the frozen truth, I don't care an awful lot,' admitted Cardew, with a nod. 'Never did care very much about any fellow but R. R. Cardew. All the same,

fair play's a jewel. Likewise, I had a hand in getting Thomas into this scrape, and I'd like to have a hand in extractin' him from it. Brief, as the French say, I'm on to it. To be more explicit, I'm after it like a dog after a bone, and I'm goin' to exercise all my extensive intellectual powers to solve the jolly old problem.

'If any!' grunted Blake.

'Somebody did it, to begin with,' said Cardew. 'If we spot that somebody, we can persuade him, by gentle means, such as booting him on his trousers, to do the decent thing and own up.'

'If!' snorted Blake.

'Almost everybody was out of the House,' said Cardew, musingly, 'but some fellow was in - the fellow who buzzed that tome at Knox. He won't say anything about it, of course. But if he was seen —'

'Think we haven't been into that?' grunted Blake. 'I've asked every man in the Fourth, and Manners and Lowther have been asking every man in the Shell: but no fellow was in the House — or will admit it, at any rate.'

'Somebody's keeping it dark,' said Cardew.

'Do tell us something more we don't know!' said Herries.

'If anybody was seen about the studies at the time, we want to know who it was,' said Cardew, unheeding. 'Any chap who was up in the studies

might have done it, or might have seen the chap who did it. If there was anybody up in the studies at all —'

'It seems that there wasn't,' said Blake.

'Nobody,' said Arthur Augustus, 'exceptin' Buntah,' he said.

Cardew stared.

'Bunter! Who's Bunter?' he asked.

'That fat chap who came ovah with the Gwey-fwiars team,' explained Arthur Augustus. 'He was up in this study —'

'Why the dickens —'

'You see, he was botherin' me at the cwicket, and I sent him up heah for a cake. I wemembahed he liked cake. He was fast asleep in that arm-chair when I looked for him aftah the innings, and snorin' like a gwampus!'

'Bunter!' repeated Cardew. 'I remember him — a sort of barrage balloon with specs on — that's the chap.'

'That is wathah a diswespectful way of descwibin' a visitoh to the school Cardew: but it is wathah like him —'

'He was in this study?'

'Yaas, wathah! Fast asleep and snorin', aftah he bolted the cake.'

Cardew whistled softly.

'Might have seen somebody about with those big specs of his. I wonder!'

'Weally, Cardew, Buntah can hardly have seen anybody about when he was fast asleep, and snorin' like a gwampus.'

'Hardly,' said Blake.

'Rot!' remarked Herries.

'Rubbish!' said Dig.

Cardew laughed.

'You don't seem to have a lot of use for my bright ideas!' he said, and he turned and lounged away down the passage. Study No. 6 were not sorry to see him go. His change of mind on the subject of Tom Merry did not make them forget the line he had taken earlier. Nor could they believe that the careless, volatile dandy of the Fourth was seriously interested in the fate of Tom Merry: or in anything else, for that matter.

But Cardew's face was serious, as he went out on the study landing. Talbot of the Shell was there, leaning on the balustrade with a thoughtful, troubled face. Talbot was deeply concerned about Tom, whether Cardew was or not.

'Know where your Beak is, Talbot?' asked Cardew. Talbot glanced at him.

'Mr. Linton's in his study, I believe,' he answered.

'Then I must count him out. Know where Railton is?'

'No — in his study or Common-room, very likely.'

'Bless him!' said Cardew. 'Perhaps I'd better patronize my own Beak. Think Mr. Lathom would let me

use his telephone, if I told him I was anxious about my grandfather's health?

'I expect he would,' said Talbot, puzzled. 'Is Lord Reckness ill?'

'Not that I know of.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'I mean that I want a telephone for a trunk call,' drawled Cardew, and he passed Talbot, and went down the stairs, leaving the Shell fellow staring.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A TALK ON THE TELEPHONE

'BUNTER!'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter's reply to the call from Harry Wharton was not polite. It was in fact morose.

Bunter was, indeed, feeling morose. Nobody had lent him that stamp: and so far, he had not written that letter to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at St. Jim's, on the important subject of the summer holidays. So Billy Bunter's reply to the captain of the Remove was short, if not sweet.

Bunter was, at the moment, extended in the most comfortable arm-chair in the 'Rag'. He was not disposed to stir, or even to look round. He answered Wharton over a fat shoulder, without looking round.

'You fat ass —!'

'Yah!'

'You're wanted, fathead,' said Harry. 'Quelch has just told me to send you to his study.'

'Oh!' Billy Bunter sat up, and took notice at that, 'I say, what does Quelch want? Just like him to pick on me! I never had the bickers.'

'The what?'

'If they've missed the biscuits from the box in the Common-room, I don't know anything about it. If Quelch thinks —'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'You fat chump, if you've been snooping bickers in Common-room —'

'I haven't,' yelled Bunter, indignantly. 'I'm not the fellow to snoop bickers, I hope! I never had them! There were only six or seven, to —'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' snapped Bunter. 'Pretty thick, I call it, sending for me because they've missed a few biscuits from Common-room. Look here, go back and tell Quelch that you can't find me.'

'You howling ass —'

'Beast!'

'It isn't the biscuits, you fat chump — Quelch says it's a telephone call from St. Jim's, and you can take it.'

'Oh!' Billy Bunter's expression changed at once. 'Good! why couldn't you say so at first? That must be my old pal, D'Arcy —'

'Quelch says it's Cardew —'

'Cardew? Who's Cardew?'

'He played in the cricket match yesterday for St. Jim's. A relation of D'Arcy's, I've heard. Anyhow you'd better go and take the call.'

'What-ho!' said Bunter. He heaved his weight out of the arm-chair, 'I expect Gussy's asked him to

ring me up about the hols, if they're relations.'

And Billy Bunter rolled out of the 'Rag', and put on unusual speed in making his way to his house-master's study. The Remove master was not there but the receiver was off the hooks, ready for Bunter: and he rolled across to the telephone and picked it up. His fat face was no longer morose. Somehow or other — Bunter did not quite know how — he hadn't had a chance of discussing the 'hols' with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at St. Jim's: but if Gussy, or a relative of Gussy's, had rang him up specially on the telephone it looked promising to Bunter.

'Hallo!' he squeaked into the transmitter.

'Hallo!' came back, 'is that Bunter?'

'Bunter speaking! Who's that?'

'Cardew at this end. Your form-master has given me leave to speak to you, as I told him it was important —'

'What-ho!' trilled Bunter, 'why hasn't Gussy come to the phone? Tell him it's all right.'

'What?'

'Right as rain! The fact is, I was going to speak to him about the hols while I was over at St. Jim's yesterday: that really was why I came.'

'The hols! I'm not speaking about the hols, Bunter. It's quite another matter.'

'Oh!' Billy Bunter's fat face fell. 'If it ain't about the hols, what do you mean? You said it was important!'

'Well it is, rather. You know Tom Merry — ?'

'Eh! Yes! What about Tom Merry?' asked Bunter, peevishly. If that telephone call was not going to be about the 'hols', Bunter preferred the arm-chair in the 'Rag'. He was certainly not interested in Tom Merry.

'He's in trouble,' came Cardew's voice over the wires.

'Is he?' said Bunter. 'Nothing to do with me, I suppose. Good-bye.'

'Hold on — it's really important, Bunter! I won't keep you long. Hold the line, for goodness' sake.'

'But if it isn't about the hols — !'

'Do listen! Something happened here yesterday, while the cricketers from your school were here: and there's a row about it. It happened in Tom Merry's study —'

Bunter gave a little jump.

'It wasn't me!' he exclaimed, in a great hurry.

'Eh!'

'I never had that cake.'

'That cake?'

'Yes. I never went into Tom Merry's study at all. I was in D'Arcy's study all the time. I never went into Tom Merry's study — and I never even looked into the cupboard while I was there —'

'Oh, gad!'

'And I never saw any cake there, either. If there was a cake there, I never saw it — never thought of

such a thing. I hope I'm not a fellow to snoop a cake at another fellow's school. If Tom Merry makes out that I had his cake —'

'Great pip!'

'If that's all —!' said Bunter.

He heard a gasp over the telephone. The St. Jim's junior at the other end was undoubtedly surprised, still more undoubtedly interested. Cardew had had the idea, at least the hope, that Bunter might have seen something, during his sojourn in the School House on Wednesday afternoon, that might prove useful. But he had not expected this, or dreamed of it. He knew now that the fat Owl of Greyfriars had actually been in Tom's study. And if that was so, it was highly probable that Billy Bunter did know something that might be useful to investigation at St. Jim's.

'That's not all, Bunter — hold on to the line!'

'I've got to get back to the Rag.'

'Hold on, I tell you —'

'Look here, I tell you I don't know anything about Tom Merry's cake. I never had it, and never ate it in his study: and it wasn't much of a cake, either — hardly any plums in it —'

'Listen to me, Bunter. It's not about a cake. Something happened in Tom Merry's study that he's in trouble about. Somebody chucked a big book from the window at a prefect's head and knocked him over.'

'He, he, he!'

'A Sixth-Form man named Knox —'

'He, he, he! I know the beast! Was he hurt?'

'He was knocked over, and banged his face on the ground, and it blacked his eye and gave him a nose like a beetroot.'

'He, he, he!'

Billy Bunter's fat chuckle went along the wires.

Bunter was amused — distinctly amused! He had not been aware that the damages to the bullying senior, who had pulled his fat ear, had been so extensive. But he was quite pleased to hear it.

'It may seem funny to you, Bunter —'

'He, he, he!'

'But it's not funny for Tom Merry. He's up for it, and in trouble.'

'I don't see why, as he never did it,' answered Bunter. 'What makes them think Tom Merry did it?'

'Nobody knows who did —'

'He, he, he!'

'Tom Merry's sacked for it —'

'Oh, crickey!'

'He's still here, but he's got to go, unless the facts come out. That's why I've rung you up. We can't find out whether any fellow was up in the studies at the time, except Tom Merry. Did you see anybody about? Any fellow about the studies, or in the passages, or —?'

'He, he, he!'

'It's pretty serious, Bunter.'

'He, he, he! I can tell them that it wasn't Tom Merry,' chuckled Bunter.

'Oh! Good! Did you see any fellow in his study?'

'He, he, he! Only me.'

'What?'

'He, he, he! I don't mind telling you,' chuckled Bunter. 'That bully Knox can't get after me here. I'm jolly glad I gave him a black eye for pulling my ear.'

He heard almost a yell over the telephone.

'You!'

'He, he, he!'

'You buzzed that Latin dick at Knox's head!' almost shrieked Cardew.

'Why shouldn't I?' demanded Bunter. 'He pulled my ear, and smacked my head — and me a visitor from another school! I can jolly well tell you I jumped at the chance when I spotted him under that window.'

'Oh, great gad!'

'He, he, he! Perhaps Knox is sorry he smacked a fellow's head, now! Did he really get a black eye? He, he, he!'

'Bunter, old scout, you wouldn't want a fellow here sacked for it! They can't do anything to you for it — you a Greyfriars man! You're safe as houses over there, if you shout it out from the house-tops. Look here, there's still plenty of time to catch the

post — will you write a letter saying what you did — it will be here in the morning —'

'Oh!' Bunter ceased to chuckle, 'I — I don't want to get into a row, you know.'

'You can't let them sack Tom Merry for what you did.'

'Oh! No! But —'

'It won't hurt you, Bunter. You say Knox smacked your head —'

'Yes, the beast — jolly hard, too. I'd have knocked him spinning, only — only — I — I couldn't, you know,' explained Bunter, 'so I heaved that book at his cheeky head! Jolly glad his eye was blacked! He! he! he!'

'Serve him right, too! Look here, Bunter, you're safe as houses over there — suppose you write to D'Arcy, and tell him all about it — you're all right now you're back at Greyfriars.'

Billy Bunter reflected for a moment or two. Certainly, he did not want a St. Jim's man sacked for his exploit in Tom Merry's study. Bunter was not very deeply concerned for any person apart from William George Bunter: still as no risk or discomfort to his fat and important self was involved he was not long in making up his mind.

'O.K.' said Bunter, cheerily, 'I'll tell Gussy all about it, if you like, and he can tell your Beak. I fancy Wharton will lend me a stamp, when I tell him how it is. I was going to write to Gussy about

the hols, but they were too jolly mean to lend a fellow a stamp —'

'You'll write at once?'

'Oh, yes, rather, if one of the fellows will lend me a stamp —'

'Wharton will do that fast enough, if you tell him about Tom Merry. Don't lose a minute, Bunter.'

'Right-ho!'

Billy Bunter put up the receiver and rolled out of his form-master's study. He rolled back to the "Rag" with a cheerful fat face.

'I say, you fellows —' The Famous Five were in the 'Rag', and Bunter was sure of the stamp now!

'I say — about that stamp —'

'Roll away, barrell!' said Bob Cherry.

'If you'll lend me a stamp —'

'I'll lend you a boot —!' said Johnny Bull.

'I've got to write to my old pal D'Arcy —'

'Bow-wow!'

'Oh, all right,' said Bunter, loftily. 'If you'd rather Tom Merry was sacked from his school, because you're too jolly mean to lend a fellow a stamp —'

'What?'

Harry Wharton a Co. all exclaimed together.

'You see,' explained Bunter, 'they think he did it.'

'They think he did what, you fat ass?'

'Didn't I tell you? Buzzing that Latin dick at that beast Knox! You see it was Tom Merry's dick, and I chucked it at Knox from Tom Merry's window, and

I suppose that's why they think he did it. He's sacked for it —'

'Oh, crumbs!'

'I'm going to tell Gussy, so that he can tell the Beak. Only I haven't got a stamp —'

'You fat, frabjous, footling fathead!' roared Bob Cherry.

'Oh, really, Cherry —'

'You terrific ass —'

'Oh, really, Inky —'

'Cough it up you fat chump—and tell us what's happened at St. Jim's!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

And when Billy Bunter had 'coughed it up' the required stamp was forthcoming on the spot: and not only that, but Harry Wharton sat the fat junior down at the table in the 'Rag' to write the letter without delay, and did not take his eye off William George Bunter until that letter was written, sealed in an envelope, stamped, and safely dropped into the post.

A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

BANG!

'Oh!' roared Knox.

It was very unexpected.

Knox had come along to his study in the Sixth. He was in rather a hurry. He turned the door-handle, pushed the door, and stepped forward at the same moment, to enter the study with the opening door. That was quite a natural and normal proceeding: and if the door had opened, as a door should in such circumstances, all would have been well.

Unexpectedly, the door did not open.

The result was that Knox did not enter the study with the opening door—he banged his nose on a door that remained shut. It was quite a hard bang. It was painful as well as utterly unexpected. Knox's rather prominent nose was still red and raw from the bang it had had on the cold, unsympathetic earth the previous day. The last thing that Knox wanted was another bang on that red, raw nose. Now he got it.

'Oh!' Knox almost bellowed.

Darrell looked out of the next study.

'What on earth's up?' he asked.

'Oh! ow! I've banged my nose on that dashed door!' gasped Knox, 'what the thunder's the matter with it. It's jammed somehow.'

He wrenched savagely at the door-handle, and pushed hard on the door. But if it was jammed, it was jammed fast. It did not yield a fraction of an inch to Knox's angry push.

He pushed again, harder. Still the door remained immovable. He kicked angrily at the lower panels. Darrell laughed.

'That won't buy you anything, Knox,' he remarked. 'Better keep your temper.'

Knox gave him an angry scowl.

'What the thump's the matter with the dashed door?' he breathed. 'The rotten thing won't open.' He rubbed his nose, and kicked the door again.

'Have you locked it?' asked Darrell.

'Oh, don't be an ass.'

'Looks as if somebody has!' said Darrell.

'Oh, rot!'

But now that the suggestion had been made, it dawned on Knox, in spite of his angry answer, that the door was locked. His face crimsoned with rage.

'It's locked!' he said. 'Somebody's locked it, and taken away the key! Some cheeky fag playing tricks — by gum, I'll give him toco —' He broke off, at the sound of a laugh within the study. 'Oh, gad! Somebody's there—in my study—locking me out!' He

thumped on the door with an angry fist. 'Here, who's in there?'

'Guess!' Came the answer in a well-known voice.

Knox almost staggered, in his surprise. He knew that voice. Ever since Kildare, owing to Cardew's timely intervention, had failed to capture Tom Merry, all St. Jim's had wondered where the missing junior was. Knox knew now where he was — in Knox's own study, with the door locked!

'Tom Merry!' breathed Knox.

'What's that?' exclaimed Darrell, staring.

'Tom Merry—in my study! We've got the young rascal now!' breathed Knox. 'He's in my study—the cheeky young scoundrel.'

'Oh, gad!' said Darrell. He came out into the passage, and tapped on the locked door. 'Here, is that you in there, Merry?'

'Guessed it!' came back Tom's voice.

'Open the door, then!'

'Guess again!'

'You'll have to get in at the window, Knox,' said Darrell, grinning.

Tom Merry's laugh sounded from the study again.

'That won't be easy,' came his voice. 'I got in at the window, old bean, but Knox won't get in, in a hurry. He can try, if he likes.'

Knox breathed fury.

'I — I — I'll skin him!' he gasped.

He strode away down the passage to the lobby

at the end. It was past lock-ups, but Sixth-Form prefects came out and went as they liked after lock-ups. Knox hurled open the lobby door, and strode out. He strode, or rather stamped, round to the window of his study.

Sixth-Form studies in the School House were on the ground floor. They were bedrooms as well as studies, at night. The windows were high from the ground: Knox had to pull himself up with his elbows on the broad stone sill, to look into the room. It was dark in the quad, but the light was on in the study, and Knox had a clear view of the interior. What he saw there made him grit his teeth.

He glared at Tom Merry: and then his glance wandered round the study. On the table lay a screw-driver, a gimlet, and a number of screws. How long Tom had been in the study, Knox did not know: but he knew that the junior had made good use of his time there. The door was not only locked: it was screwed. A screw sticking half out of the wood was visible: the junior had evidently been at work with the screw-driver when Knox's arrival at the door had interrupted him.

'Open this window!' roared Knox.

Tom Merry laughed.

Knox clambered on the window-sill. He grasped at the sash. It was as immovable as he had found the door.

The catch was in place. Knox was too excited and

enraged to care about a little damage. He reached in and pushed back the catch.

Tom Merry watched him, coolly. He did not seem to mind if Knox unfastened the window-catch. Knox very soon learned why: for when he heaved and wrenched at the sash again, it was still immovable.

'You young rascal!' Knox almost choked. 'Have you screwed this window?'

'You're good at guessing.'

'I — I — I'll —!' Knox spluttered with fury.

'Go it!' said the junior, mockingly. 'My dear man, I've borrowed tools and screws from Taggles' woodshed. There are a dozen screws in the door already, and half a dozen in the window. I've got a lot more to go in.'

'You — you — you —!' panted Knox.

'You see, I had to have a lodging for the night,' explained Tom, in the same cool tone. 'Quite nice weather, but I'm not camping out, Knox—I prefer to bed under a roof. Thanks for lending me your bed.'

'You — you —!' Knox gurgled.

He glared in at Tom Merry, through the orifice of the broken pane. Really, if looks could have slain, Tom Merry's campaign might have come to a sudden end on the spot. Knox was fairly foaming. There was no entrance either by door or window: Tom Merry was in possession, and evidently intended to remain in possession.

'You mad young ass, how long do you fancy you can keep this up?' panted Knox.

'Long enough for the Head to find out that you were lying to him, I hope,' answered Tom, coolly. 'I'm not gone yet, at any rate.'

'You'll be rooted out of this —'

'It won't be so easy to root me out this time! I'm chancing it, anyway. Now take your face away—and take this along with it.'

Knox rather regretted, the next moment, that he had burst in a pane and left a clear passage. Tom Merry picked up the inkpot from the table. There was a sudden swish in the air, and before Knox knew what was coming, a stream of ink splashed in his face.

'Urrrrggh!' gurgled Knox. He started back, lost his lodging on the sill and rolled off it to the ground. There was a loud bump, and a louder yell, as he landed on the earth.

Gerald Knox scrambled up, with ink streaming down his face. He gibbered with fury as he clawed and dabbed at it.

Tom looked from the window, laughing.

'Going?' he asked, 'or do you want the inkpot after the ink?'

Knox, evidently, did not want the inkpot after the ink. Clawing at his streaming face, and gurgling with rage, he stamped away. Before long, all the School House knew where the missing junior was —

in Knox's study in the Sixth, with door and window screwed, holding the fort again: and every fellow in the House from the Sixth down to the Second, wondered what was going to be the end of the most exciting episode in the history of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER XXX

LETTER FROM BUNTER

'ONE FOR YOU, D'Arcy.'

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not heed.

He was not interested in letters that morning.

Cardew was looking over the letter-rack, when the Lower School came out in break in the bright sunny morning. Most fellows, as a rule, gave the rack the once-over. But on that particular morning, Tom Merry's friends seemed to have forgotten all about correspondence, and possibly 'tips' from the old folks at home. If Arthur Augustus heard Cardew call, he heeded not: he walked out into the quad with Blake and Herries and Dig.

Cardew laughed aloud.

That letter to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was addressed in a sprawling, round hand, with a blot and smear, and the post-mark of Friardale in Kent. It was, as Cardew knew, from William George Bunter at Greyfriars School: the letter written in consequence of his telephone call the previous day. It was, in fact, a very important communication, if Gussy had only known it.

Of that telephone call, Cardew had said nothing.

He had discovered the truth, in a mystery that had all the school puzzled and in the dark. He did not choose to say a word on the subject. Even to his pals, Levison and Clive, he had said nothing about it. He would have shrugged his shoulders contemptuously at the idea of claiming any credit for it. He was looking forward with some amusement to the surprise, the sensation, that would be the result, when the facts came out. But he was quite content to be a looker-on, only himself knowing that he had pulled the string.

But D'Arcy's indifference to the letter awaiting him in the rack was a little disconcerting. Unless D'Arcy read that letter, and acted on what was written therein, there was no hope for Tom Merry. Cardew laughed, at the thought of Tom Merry hooked out of Knox's study, and packed into a train for home, while the proof that would have cleared him was in an unopened letter addressed to D'Arcy of the Fourth, still sticking in the rack.

Certainly it was no part of his plan to allow that to happen. He laughed, reached up to the letter, and took it down. He strolled out of the house with the letter in his hand.

There was a crowd of fellows in the quad, most of them staring at the window of Knox's study in the Sixth, and buzzing with excitement. Everyone knew that Tom Merry, sacked by his Head-master, was in that study: with door and window screwed:

under orders to go, and determined not to go. What the Beaks were going to do about it, nobody yet knew: nothing at all had been done so far. Obviously, the present state of affairs could not last: Tom Merry had found a lodging for the night, in Gerald Knox's study: but it was not to be supposed that he would be allowed to remain there.

Blake and Co. had joined Manners and Lowther in the quad. From a distance, they looked at Knox's window: but it was impossible to approach it for a word with Tom. Darrell of the Sixth, evidently under the house-master's orders, was standing there, to warn off the juniors who came that way.

'He's still there!' Monty Lowther was saying, as Cardew came towards the group. 'They won't let us speak to him—but he's there.'

'Yaas, wathah,' said Arthur Augustus, 'poor old Tom Mewwy! Wathah a bwight ideah to turn that wat Knox out of his quartahs: but —'

'But it can't last long,' said Blake.

'The Beaks don't know what to do,' said Lowther. 'It's a bit of a poser for Railton. But —'

'They'll have to break in, as they did in our study,' said Manners. 'Railton doesn't seem keen to get going in that line. But he can't let it go on.'

'Tom's still here, at any rate!' said Lowther. 'There's still a chance for him, if it came out who really did it —'

'I keep on thinkin' it ovah,' said Arthur Augustus,

'but I weally cannot think of the silly ass who buzzed that dick at Knox. I wathah thought it might have been that weckless ass Cardew, but —'

'Tom thought so,' said Lowther, 'but Levison and Clive both say he was on the cricket field at the time. But who else?'

'I wondah!' said Arthur Augustus, sadly. 'If a fellow only knew—weally it is wathah a pity that it was not Cardew—it would be evah so much bettah for Cardew to be sacked than poor old Tom Mewwy —'

'Thanks,' said a drawling voice at D'Arcy's elbow.

Arthur Augustus's eyeglass turned on his relative, Ralph Reckness Cardew. He frowned at him.

'You are vewy welcome to heah my wemarks, Cardew,' he said, stiffly. 'I wepeat that it would be evah so much bettah for you to be sacked than poor old Tom Mewwy. I assuah you that there would be plenty of dwy eyes if it happened.'

'Sorry I can't oblige,' drawled Cardew. 'I've been looking for you —'

'Pway go and look for somebody else, then.'

'Don't you want your letter?'

'What lettah?'

'There was one for you in the rack —'

'Oh, wats! It can wait,' answered Arthur Augustus, curtly. 'I am not worrying about lettahs, with poor old Tom Mewwy up against it like this.'

'Might be important,' suggested Cardew.

'That need not worry you,' snapped D'Arcy.

'It doesn't,' drawled Cardew, 'but I've brought you your letter, all the same. Here it is.'

He held out the letter.

Arthur Augustus, with unconcealed impatience, took it from his hand. He glanced at it, and uttered a sound resembling a snort. Evidently the 'fist' on the envelope was familiar to his noble eyes.

'Only Buntah!' he snapped, and he put the letter into his pocket.

'Aren't you going to read it?' asked Cardew.

'I am not goin' to wead it now, Cardew. I am not interested in lettahs from Buntah. Pway don't bothah.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Cardew.

'Bai Jove! What are you laughin' at, Cardew?' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'If you want to cackle like a hyenah, Cardew, pway go somewhah else and cackle.'

'You're not going to read that letter from Bunter?' grinned Cardew.

'Not at pwesent.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you persist in cacklin' at my wemarks, Cardew —'

'My dear chap, you'd make a stone image cackle,' said Cardew, laughing. 'Don't you remember what you told me yesterday in your study—about that fat chap Bunter being in the House when that Latin dick happened to Knox —?'

'I wemember perfectly, Cardew, but I fail to see any weason for weadin' a lettah from him —'

'Didn't I say he might know something about it?'

'Yaas, I wegarded that as wubbish.'

'Rubbish or not, you'd better read this letter,' drawled Cardew. 'I've got an idea that Bunter did know something, and I wouldn't wonder if he's mentioned it in that letter.'

'Wubbish!'

'May as well open it, fathead,' said Blake. 'Cardew's only talking out of his hat, as usual, but you may as well look at it.'

'Weally, Blake —'

'Open it, fathead,' said Monty Lowther. 'Look here, Cardew, what do you know about it?'

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

'What should I know?' he drawled.

'I can see that you know something, if Gussy can't,' snapped Lowther. 'You haven't taken the trouble to fetch and carry for D'Arcy for nothing. You are up to something. What is it?'

Cardew laughed.

'To tell the truth — a thing I sometimes do, at off times — I fancy there's something in that letter that would interest the lot of you,' he said. 'Might be the clue to the jolly old mystery.'

'Wubbish.'

'Open that letter, fathead!' hooted Blake.

'Open it, ass,' said Herries.

'Open it ditherer,' said Dig.

Cardew had succeeded in interesting all the group in that letter from William George Bunter at Greyfriars School. Whatever it might be that William George had to say, they all wanted to know, after what Cardew had said.

'Oh, all wight!' said Arthur Augustus. 'It is wathah wot to bothah about a lettah fwom a silly ass like Buntah, at such a time as this: but I will look at it if you fellows like.'

And Arthur Augustus drew the letter out of his pocket again, and in his usual leisurely manner, slit the envelope with his penknife, and drew out the missive from within. He glanced at it carelessly enough: but that carelessness vanished the next moment, and the expression that came over his aristocratic countenance was extraordinary. His eye-glass dropped from his eye, and he gasped:

'Bai Jove!'

Cardew, smiling, strolled away. But all the other fellows gathered round Arthur Augustus with eager looks. Obviously, there was something in that letter that surprised, amazed, indeed astounded, the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He gazed at it like a fellow dumbfounded.

'Buntah!' he gasped.

'What —?'

'It was Buntah —'

'What was Bunter?' yelled Blake.

'It was Buntah did it —'

'Did what?'

'Buzzed that dick at Knox!' gasped Arthur Augustus.

'WHAT!'

'Buntah all the time — that fat ass Buntah — oh, cwickey!'

SOMETHING LIKE A SURPRISE

DR. HOLMES frowned.

Mr. Railton coughed.

Neither the Head-master of St. Jim's, nor the house-master of the School House, looked either cheerful or amiable that sunny summer's morning. Both were thoughtful, troubled, uneasy.

Outside, in the sunny quad, crowds of fellows, out in break, were discussing the one topic — the amazing campaign carried on by Tom Merry of the Shell: sacked from St. Jim's but still in the school. One group in particular, gathered round an elegant junior with a letter in his hand, displayed more excitement than all the rest put together. In the Head's study, that topic was also being discussed — not with excitement, but with troubled faces.

'The boy is still here, Mr. Railton,' said Dr. Holmes.

'He is still here, sir.'

'I can scarcely understand it,' said Dr. Holmes, slowly. 'Such action is utterly unprecedented — amazing — in all my experience as a school-master, Mr. Railton, I have never known anything like this. It would almost seem —' He paused, frowning.

'Measures will be taken, sir, to deal with the boy,' said the house-master, 'but —'

'But what, Mr. Railton?'

The School-House master hesitated. Dr. Holmes gave him a sharp look.

'What can Merry's motive be in carrying on in this manner?' said Mr. Railton, after a pause. 'He knows — he must know — that it cannot last.'

'It would almost seem —!' repeated the Head. 'Mr. Railton, but for Knox's definite assurance on the subject, I should be driven to conclude that an error has been made, and that Merry's object is to remain in the school, in hope that a discovery may be made —'

'The same thought was in my mind, sir!' confessed Mr. Railton. 'Is it possible, sir, that Knox may have been mistaken?'

'It appears scarcely possible — what he stated was absolutely definite. He actually saw Merry at the study window when the book was thrown.' The Head spoke very slowly. 'Yet, unless Merry hopes that something may transpire in his favour, it is impossible to understand his action. He is, I believe, by no means a wild or insubordinate boy —'

'Far from it, hitherto,' said the house-master. 'I confess, sir, that I cannot understand his conduct, unless it is caused by a sense of injustice — which would imply that an error has been made —'

'I intend to question Knox on the subject — he

will be here in a moment,' said Dr. Holmes. 'If he adheres to what he has already said, with absolute certainty, we must take it as conclusive.'

'I think it is as well to question him once more, sir.'

'I shall do so, Mr. Railton.'

Tap!

'Come in!'

The door opened. It was Gerald Knox, of the Sixth, who entered the Head-master's study.

There was a faintly uneasy glimmer in Knox's eyes, and his glance at the Head-master and the house-master was almost stealthy. The falsehood he had uttered was on Knox's mind, if not on his conscience. He was, in his own opinion, justified in stretching a point, as he regarded it, to make sure that the young ruffian who had assailed him did not escape the penalty. But he could not help feeling uneasy, so long as Tom Merry was still in the school: and this summons to Dr. Holmes's study added to his uneasiness.

'You sent for me, sir,' said Knox.

'Yes, Knox. In view of what has occurred since Merry was expelled on your evidence, I desire to hear your statement again,' said Dr. Holmes. 'It may be possible — barely possible, at least — that in the confusion of the moment, you may have made an error.'

Knox breathed hard.

'I made no error, sir,' he answered. 'I know what I saw.'

'You are assured, beyond a doubt, that you actually saw Merry looking down from his study window, when the dictionary was thrown?'

Knox's heart beat unpleasantly. But he answered steadily:

'Yes, sir!'

'If that be the case, Knox, there can be no doubt on the subject,' said the Head. 'You are absolutely assured that it was at that moment that you saw Merry at the window, and not a minute later —'

'At that moment, sir.'

'Please reflect, Knox, on so very serious a matter,' said Mr. Railton, quietly. 'You had just received a violent blow on the head, and no doubt you were in a state of some confusion.'

'I know that it was Tom Merry, sir.'

'You have no doubt whatever in your mind?'

'None, sir.'

That much, at least, was true: Knox had no doubt on the subject. To do him just, he would never have stretched that point, but for his absolute certainty that the missile had come from Tom Merry's hand.

'Very well,' said the house-master: 'but there was a lingering tone of doubt in his voice. Measures will be taken, sir, to remove Merry from the study where he had taken refuge, while the school are in the form-rooms —'

'Quite so!' said the Head. 'And —'

Dr. Holmes was interrupted.

Bang!

It was not a tap at the door! It was not a knock! It was a bang! It made the three in the study jump.

Dr. Holmes frowned — Mr. Railton stared round — Knox started. The bang was followed by the door flying open.

A breathless junior, with an eyeglass fluttering at the end of its cord, rushed into the study.

For once, if for once only, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had totally forgotten the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. He was wildly excited. His aristocratic face was pink. He panted for breath. He rushed into his Head-master's study, as unceremoniously as his younger brother, Wally of the Third, might have rushed into the locker-room. Pink with excitement, panting for breath, he waved a letter in his hand.

'D'Arcy!' The Head fairly thundered. 'How dare you —'

'Pway excuse me, sir!' gasped Arthur Augustus.

'Leave this study instantly!' exclaimed Mr. Railton. 'I will deal with you later —'

'Weally, Mr. Wailton —'

'Go!'

'Pway excuse me, sir, for wushin' in like that!' gasped Arthur Augustus, 'but you must see this lettah, sir —'

'Leave this study!' thundered the Head.

'I will take him away, sir,' said Knox, officiously. He stepped towards the junior, with outstretched hand.

Arthur Augustus's eyes flashed at him.

'Hands off, you wottah!' he panted.

'Upon my word!' exclaimed Mr. Railton. 'D'Arcy, are you in your senses? Take him away at once, Knox.'

'Certainly, sir.'

Arthur Augustus dodged the prefect's outstretched hand. He brandished the letter in the air.

'You must wead this lettah, sir!' he gasped, 'it is fwom Buntah at Greyfriars, sir —'

'Take him away, Knox.'

'Let go my collah!' yelled Arthur Augustus, as Knox grasped him. 'You wottah, leggo! Mr. Wailton — Dr. Holmes — it was not Tom Mewwy at all — it was Buntah —'

'What can the boy mean?' exclaimed Dr. Holmes, gazing blankly at the swell of St. Jim's.

'It was not Tom Mewwy buzzed that dick at Knox, sir!' yelled Arthur Augustus, as Knox hooked him towards the doorway. 'We have found out, sir —'

'What?' exclaimed Mr. Railton.

'D'Arcy!' exclaimed Dr. Holmes.

'Come out of this!' breathed Knox. Arthur Augustus's words struck the two masters with surprise. They struck Knox like a blow. But as he whirled

Arthur Augustus to the door, the Head rapped out sharply.

'Knox! Let the boy remain! I must hear him! Now, D'Arcy, explain yourself, and do so at once.'

'Yaas, wathah, sir,' gasped Arthur Augustus. Knox, more uneasy than ever — indeed, his uneasiness now amounted to terror—had to release his collar. Arthur Augustus was going to say his piece, whatever it was.

'D'Arcy! explain yourself at once,' rapped Mr. Railton. 'You have stated that something has been found out —'

'Yaas, sir.'

'That it was not Tom Merry who —'

'Not Tom Mewwy at all, sir.'

'Do you mean that some other boy has admitted the action?'

'Yaas, wathah.'

'Bless my soul!' said the Head.

Gerald Knox turned almost green. He did not believe it—he could not believe it. If this was true, what became of his positive statement that it was Tom Merry's hand that had flung the missile?

'Give me the boy's name at once, D'Arcy!' exclaimed the Head.

'Buntah, sir.'

'Bunter! Bunter!' repeated Dr. Holmes, 'there is no boy of that name in the school, D'Arcy. What do you mean?'

'Not a St. Jim's chap, sir—he belongs to Greyfriars!' gasped Arthur Augustus.

'Greyfriars!' repeated the Head, 'Greyfriars is a school a great distance from here—in another county.'

'Oh, yaas, sir, but Buntah came over with the cricketahs on Wednesday and while he was here, he buzzed that dick —'

'He what?'

'I — mean, he thwew that dictionary at Knox, sir, fwom Tom Mewwy's study window—he has told me so in this lettah —' Arthur Augustus waved the letter from Billy Bunter almost under the Headmaster's majestic nose. 'Pway wead this lettah, sir —'

'Bless my soul!' said the Head.

Then, in silence, he took the letter from D'Arcy's hand: and there was a dead silence in the study while he read it.

CHAPTER XXXII

LIGHT AT LAST!

'BLESS MY SOUL!' repeated the Head.

He gazed at the letter from Bunter.

That epistle which had so astonished Arthur Augustus, and had so wildly excited the other fellows, had also a startling effect on the Head-master of St. Jim's. The information conveyed in it was startling: but no doubt the orthography added to the effect. It ran:

Dear Gussy,

This is just a phew lines to tell you that I should like to hear from you about the summer holes. I was going to speak to you about it while I was over at your school on Wensday but sum how never had a chance. Also I want to tell you about chukking that dick at the beast Knox bekwase he smacked my head, the beastly bulley, fat lot he cared about me being a vissitor at the shool, and I wood have nocked him down for it but he was too big for me. Of course I kept it dark while I was there as the beest would have come after me, but now I am bak at my own skool he can't do a thing and I don't care if he knows — you

can tell him if you like: I'd like him to know that I got back on him for smaking my head like a beestly bully, and I hope that the dick gave him a jolly hard bang on his cheaky head and I don't care who knows that I chukked that dick from Tom Merry's studdy window at the beest while he was leafing abowt, and I'd mutch rather have punched him in the eye but of coarse I coodn't him being too big for me so I chukked the dick at him. I should verry much like a line from you about the summer holes as I am not phixed up yet so no more at pressent from yores synxearly

W. G. Bunter.

'Bless my soul!' said Dr. Holmes, for the third time. Mr. Railton's eyes were on him with anxious inquiry, as he perused that rather remarkable epistle from Greyfriars School. Knox watched him with an unpleasant beating at the heart. Knox was feeling his mind almost in a whirl. Never for a moment had he doubted — but now he had to doubt. Never for a moment had it crossed his mind that the fat school-boy from Greyfriars, whose fat ear he had pulled, and whose fat head he had smacked, had had anything to do with the incident: he had utterly and totally forgotten the fat existence of William George Bunter of Greyfriars. He had to remember him now. When the Head, at last, lifted his eyes from that letter and

fixed them on him, Gerald Knox felt quite sick. What was coming to him now ?

Arthur Augustus's eyes were dancing. Outside, in the quad, Blake and Herries and Dig, Manners and Lowther, were equally gleeful: and half St. Jim's had heard the startling news by the time Dr. Holmes had read Bunter's letter in his study. From the quad came a buzz of excited voices.

'Bless my soul!' It was the fourth time Dr. Holmes had made that remark. 'This is amazing — bless my soul!'

'I take it, sir, that there is something in that letter which lets in light on the matter,' said Mr. Railton.

'Undoubtedly,' said Dr. Holmes, 'read it, Mr. Railton.'

He passed Bunter's letter to the house-master: Mr. Railton read it — with staring eyes.

'Upon my word!' he said. 'Sir, this clears up the matter completely —'

'It certainly does,' said Dr. Holmes.

'It appears that this boy — this — this Bunter — was the person concerned in what happened on Wednesday afternoon —'

'That is clear now, Mr. Railton.'

'It would seem that it was an act of retaliation,' said Mr. Railton. 'This boy, Bunter, was roughly used by a prefect here — by Knox —'

Knox hardly breathed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chimed in happily:

'I twust, sir, that you will excuse me for wushin' into your study, sir, but I thought you ought to see that lettah at once, sir —'

Dr. Holmes glanced at him.

'You are excused, D'Arcy! I am very glad that you brought the letter to me—very glad indeed. It will enable me to rectify an inadvertent act of injustice before it is too late. You may go, D'Arcy.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy retired from the study with a light step. He almost danced down the corridor.

Gerald Knox would have been glad to follow him. But there was no departure yet for Gerald Knox. Both the Head-master and the house-master were looking at him, with grimly expressive looks. Knox made a tentative movement towards the door. The Head's sharp voice stopped him.

'Knox!'

'Yes, sir!' breathed Knox.

'You may read this letter.'

Knox, in silence, took the letter, and read it. His face looked quite sick as he did so. What became now of his positive statement that he had seen Tom Merry at the window at the very moment that the dictionary was hurled? He knew now that it was not Tom Merry, but Billy Bunter of Greyfriars who had hurled that missile: and he knew that his Head-master and house-master knew it also. That fat

fellow in spectacles, whose head he had smacked, and whose existence he had since forgotten — it was from that fat hand that the whizzing dictionary had come! Gerald Knox was too accustomed to smacking heads of fags to remember such trifling incidents. He had not given Bunter a thought. Bunter, evidently, had given him some thought!

In silence, he read the letter, and laid it down on the Head-master's writing-table. He cringed under Dr. Holmes's stern glance.

'It appears, Knox,' Dr. Holmes's voice was very deep, 'it appears, from what the boy Bunter says in this letter, that you ill-used the boy while he was here, a visitor at the school.'

'It — it was nothing, sir,' stammered Knox, 'he was cheeky — I gave him just a flick — it was nothing — I — I forgot all about it —'

'The boy does not seem to have forgotten so easily, Knox,' said Dr. Holmes, 'but that is a very light matter, in comparison with your statement that you saw Merry of the Shell in the act of flinging the missile from his study window, which it is now established was thrown by the Greyfriars boy, Bunter.'

'I — I thought —'

'Only a few minutes ago, Knox, you repeated that statement, which it now transpires was wholly unfounded.'

'I — I — I —'

'That statement, Knox, was wholly devoid of truth!' said Mr. Railton, sternly.

'I — I —!' stammered the wretched Knox.

'On your word, on your positive evidence, Knox, as a Sixth-Form prefect, Merry was condemned, and now it transpires that he was condemned unjustly,' said Dr. Holmes. 'You stated that you had seen what you could not possibly have seen—for had you seen who threw the missile, you would have seen a Greyfriars boy at Merry's study window, and certainly not Merry.'

Knox licked his dry lips. He was only too well aware of that now. He had been so sure—so absolutely certain—that it had seemed quite safe to stretch a point—the end justifying the means! He wished now, from the bottom of his heart, that he had not fancied that the end justified the means.

'I - I was mistaken, sir —!' He stammered almost helplessly, 'I — I must have been confused, as — as Mr. Railton suggested, sir - by that knock on the head — I — I certainly supposed — I — I believed— I had no doubt at all that it was Merry, and—and—'

His voice trailed away.

'Such a mistake, Knox, should not be made by a Sixth-Form boy in the responsible position of a prefect!' said Dr. Holmes.

'I — I know, sir! I — I am sorry — I — I — I —'

'Obviously, you cannot be trusted to carry out a prefect's duties, Knox. Such a mistake is unpardon-

able,' said Dr. Holmes, sternly. 'It has caused me, your Head-master, to commit an act of injustice, though fortunately it is not too late to set that right. You are no longer a prefect, Knox. Whether I can allow the matter to rest there, I shall consider — for the present, you may leave my study.'

Gerald Knox slunk out of the study.

'About Merry, Mr. Railton —!' he said, slowly.

'About Merry, sir —?'

'He has acted wildly, mutinously, but —'

'But —?' said Mr. Railton.

'But, in the circumstances, both of us, I think, are glad he is still at the school, and that this unfortunate error may still be set right. His actions, since his sentence of expulsion, should, I think, be overlooked —'

'I certainly think so, sir.'

'The sentence itself is, of course, rescinded. Perhaps you will be kind enough to inform the boy so, Mr. Railton.'

'I will lose no time, sir.'

And Mr. Railton, in his turn, quitted the Head's study: and in less than a minute was rapping at the door of Knox's study in the Sixth: with news for the junior there that the trouble, at last, was over.

ALL SERENE

TOM MERRY smiled.

He could smile now—his old sunny smile.

He was in the quadrangle, sauntering under the shady branches of the old elms, when the St. Jim's fellows came out after third school. He had been still in Knox's study when they went into the form-rooms: but what Mr. Railton had had to tell him had set him to active work on the screws in the door: with a joyous face and a light heart. Now he was sauntering in the old quad, waiting for his friends to come out: and when the bell rang, and St. Jim's fellows poured out of the form-room, a whole crowd rushed towards him — and he smiled.

'Tom!' gasped Monty Lowther.

'Tom, old man —!' exclaimed Manners.

'Tom Mewwy, old chap —!'

'Gratters, old bean.'

'All serene now, old scout!'

'Hurrray!'

Manners clapped him on one shoulder, Lowther on the other. Blake and Herries and Dig dug him in the ribs. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy beamed on him. Talbot

of the Shell pressed his arm. Levison and Clive, and a dozen other fellows, gave him gleeful grins. Ralph Reckness Cardew regarded him with an amused smile. From a little distance, Knox of the Sixth gave him the blackest of scowls. Knox, no longer a prefect, and in dread of what the Head might consider due to him for that 'mistake' of his, was in the worst of tempers. But nobody heeded Knox of the Sixth. Tom Merry was the centre of attraction, surrounded by a gleeful and congratulating crowd.

'All right now, deah boy?' chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

'Right as rain!' agreed Tom.

'Couldn't be righter!' said Monty Lowther. 'The sack's washed out, Tom.'

'Washed right out!' smiled Tom.

'Jolly lucky you never went, after all, what?' said Blake.

'Well, if I'd gone, I should have come back when the facts came out, I suppose,' said Tom, slowly. 'I — I'm afraid I was a bit hot-headed! But I'm jolly glad I'm still here, all the same.'

'It's weally wippin', deah boy — top-hole, and toppin'. Bai Jove! of course, we knew it wasn't you, as you said so —'

'Thanks,' said Tom, laughing.

'But you can't weally blame Wailton and the Head, old boy — they had to act on what that wottah Knox told them.'

'I'm not blaming them,' said Tom, 'I'm only sorry that I gave them so much trouble, and I've told Railton so. But thank goodness it's come out! Who'd have guessed that it was Bunter all the time.'

'Nobody could have guessed that one,' said Herries.

'Nobody even remembered that fat ass,' said Digby. 'I can tell you his letter to Gussy made us jump.'

'Yaas, wathah! I was weally amazed,' said Arthur Augustus. 'I twied and twied to guess who it was, but nevah thought of Buntah for a moment.'

'Same here,' said Tom Merry, 'the only likely fellow I could think of was Cardew —!'

'Much obliged!' came a drawling voice.

Tom glanced round at the dandy of the Fourth.

'Well, as it turns out, I'm sorry I did,' he said.

'Apology accepted!' said Cardew, airily. 'May I offer my humble but friendly gratters? I'm really glad to see you out of that scrape—especially as I helped to get you into it.'

'Oh, never mind that now,' said Tom. 'It was my own fault, and if I'd listened to you, Manners, old chap —'

'Yaas, wathah,' said Arthur Augustus, sagely, 'I wecommend you, deah boy, to listen to a chap who gives you good advice, and nevah to kick ovah the twaces. It all comes fwom bweakin' detention —'

'There's one jolly good thing about the affair,' said Cardew.

'Eh! What's that?' asked Tom.

'Knox has got that black eye, and nobody's going to get toco for it. Look at him now—with a scowl as black as his eye.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

All the crowd of juniors looked round at Gerald Knox. His scowl, if not quite so black as his eye, was black enough. Knox, evidently, was not so pleased with things generally as everybody else seemed to be.

'The wottah!' said Arthur Augustus, frowning. 'Weally, I would vewy much like to give him anothah eye to match that one.'

'Well, he's got it in the neck,' said Blake. 'He's no longer a prefect — he's pushed out of that, at any rate. He won't be able to handle the ash again, and tell fellows to bend over. No more bullying from Knox! He's nobody in particular now.'

'Bai Jove! That's vewy twue,' exclaimed Arthur Augustus. 'Why, we can all tell Knox what we think of him, if we like, now that he is no longer a prefect.'

Tom Merry laughed.

'Oh, let Knox rip,' he said, 'who cares for Knox?'

'I'd like to see him come the prefect again, though,' said Blake. 'We'd jolly soon let him see where he gets off!'

'Yaas, wathah!'

'What tremendous lück that that fat ass, Bunter, wrote that letter to D'Arcy,' said Talbot, 'but for that —'

'Luck, if you like,' said Tom. 'From what I remember of that chap Bunter, he is the biggest ass going, as well as the fattest. But he's done the right thing at the right time now, and no mistake.'

'Almost as if he knew something was going on here,' said Manners.

'It really does look like it,' said Tom.

Cardew grinned. But he did not speak. He had no intention whatever of telling the rejoicing crowd that he had pulled the string.

'It's wathah wemarkable, too,' said Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully. 'Cardew suggested that Buntah might have seen something or othah of what happened, as he was in the House at the time, but I did not think anythin' of it, or I might have bowwowed a phone and asked him —'

'It seems that Knox smacked his head while he was here,' said Blake. 'Knox all over —!'

'Yaas, wathah!'

'And the fat ass got back on him with a dick from my study window,' said Tom. 'I wonder what he was doing in my study at all.'

Monty Lowther chuckled.

'Didn't you miss a cake afterwards?' he asked.

'Oh!' exclaimed Tom.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'So that was it!' exclaimed Tom, and he laughed. 'That was why he was there, I suppose! Well, he's welcome to the cake — his letter to Gussy was worth

all the cakes in the tuck-shop. I'll stand him another, when I see him again. By gum, you chaps, I'm glad it's all over, and everything right as rain once more.'

'Hurray!' trilled Blake.

'Yaas, wathah — Hip — hip — huwway!'

It was quite a roar in the old quad. It was interrupted by a sharp, bullying voice, as Knox strode up.

'Stop that row!' snapped Knox.

'Bai Jove!'

The whole crowd stared at Knox. Perhaps he had forgotten, for the moment, that he was no longer a prefect: that the power had departed from his hands, and that he was now simply a member of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's, of no more account than any other member of that Form who had not attained the rank of prefect — merely that and nothing more. But if Knox had forgotten it, Tom Merry and Co. had not. Knox was nobody now — he had no more authority over Tom Merry and Co. than they had over him. And they lost no time in reminding him of that circumstance.

'Shut up, Knox!' answered Blake.

'Get out, you bully,' said Monty Lowther.

'Take your ugly face away,' said Herries.

'And bury it,' said Dig.

'Yaas, wathah! Kindly wetire, Knox, and do not intahfeah in mattahs that do not concern you,' said Arthur Augustus, disdainfully. 'I wegard you with contempt, Knox! I considah you a wat!'

'And a rotter,' said Manners.
'And a smudge!' said Levison.
'Get out of it, Knox!'
'Mind your own business!'
'Push off, before you're kicked.'
'Bump him!' said Cardew.
'Hear, hear!'
'Yaas, wathah!'
'Ha, ha, ha!'

An hour ago, the School House juniors would no more have thought of bumping Gerald Knox than of bumping their house-master. But circumstances were altered now—very much altered. Knox was nobody now. And the next proceeding of the grinning crowd of juniors apprised him very forcibly that he was nobody.

The whole crowd surrounded him and collared him. Innumerable hands grasped him, and, big fellow as he was, swept him off his feet. Knox roared and struggled, but his roars were unheeded, and he struggled in vain.

Bump!

'Oh!' yelled Knox, as he smote the quadrangle.

'Give him another!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Bump!

'Oh! Ow! Leggo! Ooooooooooh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'One more for luck!' chuckled Blake.

'Yaas, wathah !'

BUMP !

Then the crowd of juniors streamed away, laughing; leaving Gerald Knox sitting on the earth, considerably dishevelled, and spluttering for breath. It looked like the beginning of trouble for Knox: but it was the end of the Trouble for Tom Merry !

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