

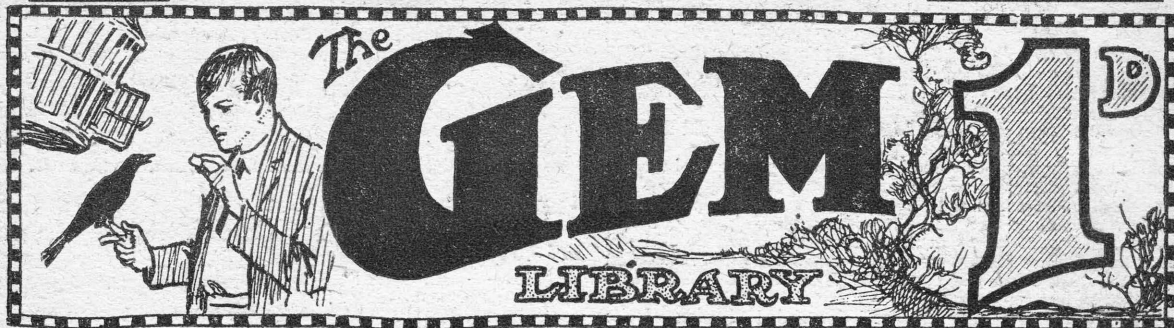
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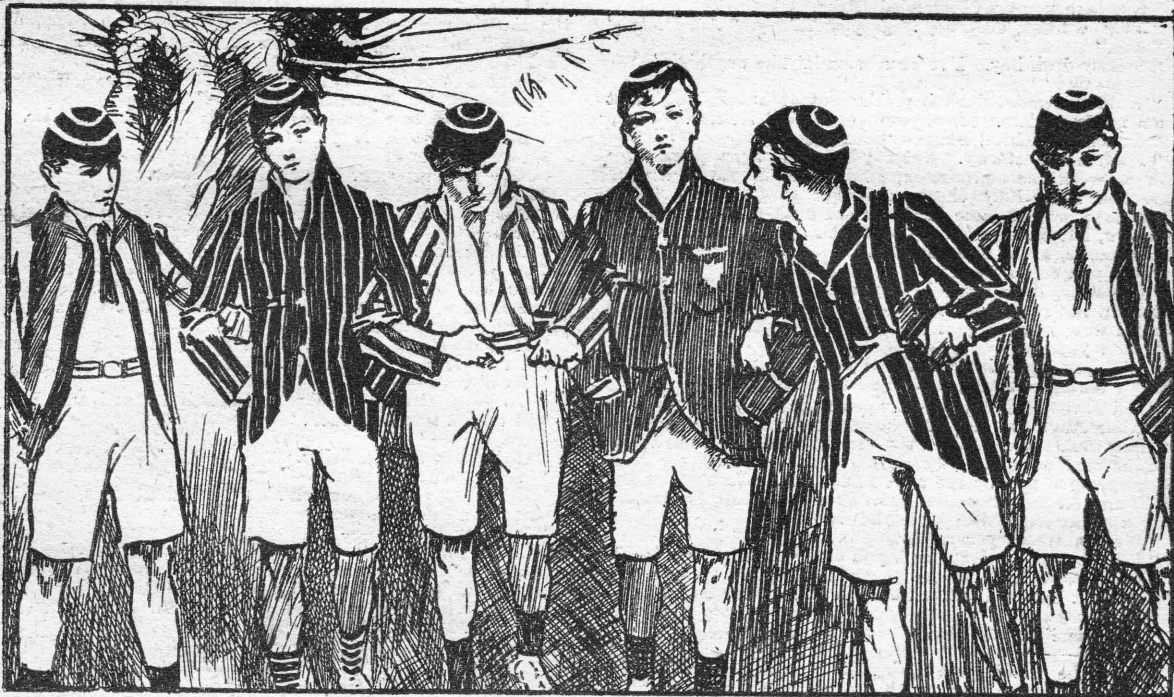


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THE WHIP HAND!

A Splendid, New, Long Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER I. A Sudden Alarm.

TOM MERRY came into the School House at St. Jim's, with a cricket-bat under his arm, and a very cheerful expression upon his ruddy face. Blake, of the Fourth, was standing in the doorway, looking anxiously out into the gathering dusk of the old quad.

"Seen Gussy?" he asked, as Tom Merry came in.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No. He wasn't at the nets."

Jack Blake grunted.

"I know he wasn't. He's gone down to Rylcombe, and I know he'll be late. B-r-r."

"Better get in," said Tom Merry. "It's calling-over now,

and old Selby's taking the roll. There'll be trouble if you don't answer up to your name."

"I'm waiting for Gussy. I told him to buck up."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not much good telling D'Arcy to buck up if he's gone down to Rylcombe to see his tailor," he remarked.

"It isn't the tailor this time," growled Blake. "The ass has got an idea of getting up at five and going down for an early bathe. I told him I'd call him—if I woke up—but he would go down and get an alarm-clock. Old Bunn's got a special line in American alarm-clocks, and Gussy's gone for one."

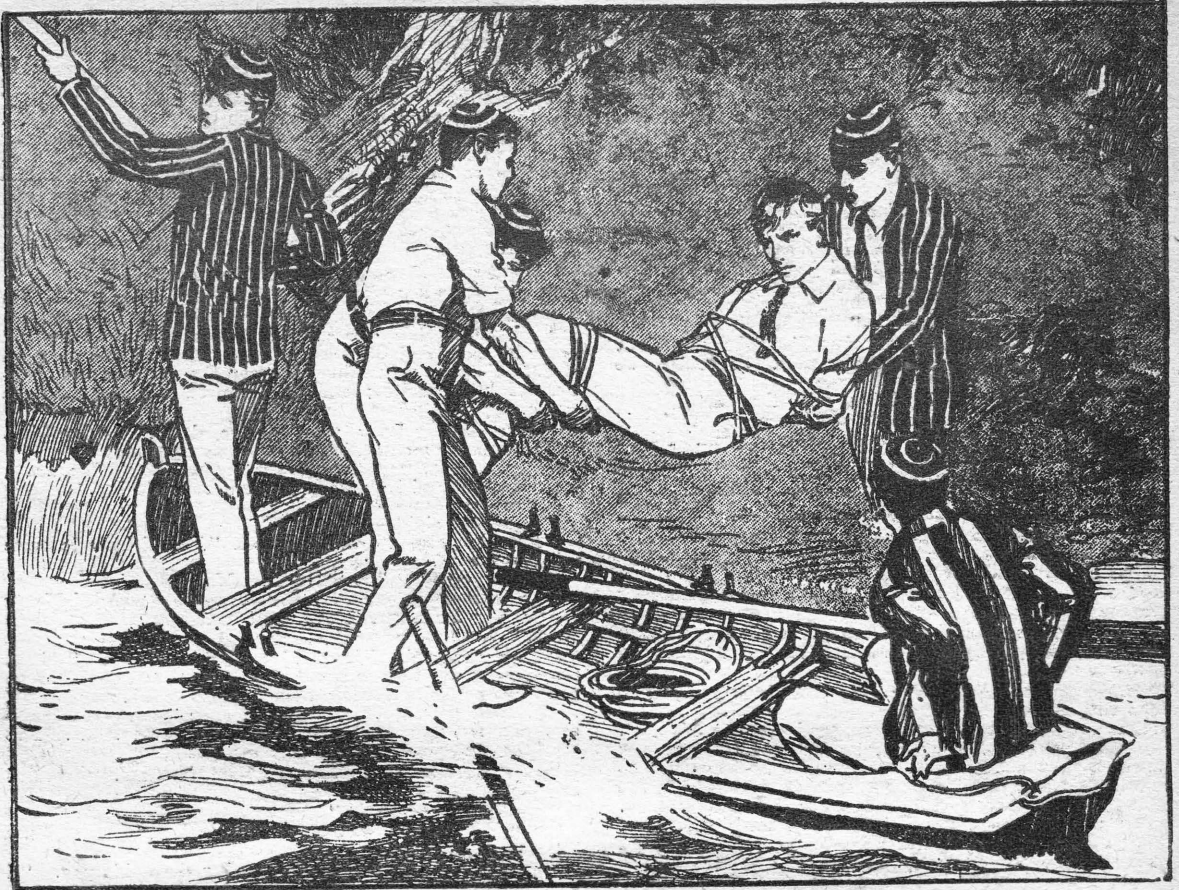
Monty Lowther and Manners, of the Shell, hurried in from the dusky quad, and caught Tom Merry, one by either arm.

Next Thursday:

"AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR!" AND "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

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In a couple of minutes Crooke was a helpless prisoner, bound hand and foot, and three of the juniors lifted him into the boat. Crooke spluttered. "Where are you taking me?" he gasped, "You'll see!" said Jack Blake grimly. "If you make a row, we'll duck you in the water! So be careful." (See Chapter 10).

"It would wake the dead, I should think!" grinned Tom Merry. "But it's an American clock, my son, and they're all guaranteed not to go off at the right time."

"Wats! I have discovahed how to set it now, and how to stop it. These things only need lookin' into," said D'Arcy. "I can work it now like anythin'! It will wake me up at half-past five in the mornin'—"

"And the rest of the school, too, I expect!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, it's a good ideah to wake up early on summah mornings," said D'Arcy. "You chaps ought to turn out early for wovin' pwactice, if you're thinkin' of beating the New House eight next week. If I were boatin' skippah I should keep you up to the mark."

"I'm keeping them up to the mark, you ass!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "We shall beat the New House boat as easy as rolling off a form!"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "Why, I shall be in the boat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shall I call you fellows at half-past five?" asked D'Arcy. "I'm goin' down for an early bathe, and if you like to come—"

"Oh, don't trouble!" grinned Manners. "The rising-bell is good enough for us. I wish you joy of that alarm-clock in the Fourth Form dorm!"

And the Terrible Three went on their way laughing. Blake and Herries and Digby, who had the honour of sharing Study No. 6 with D'Arcy, cast far from pleasant looks at the alarm-clock as they came in to do their preparation. They seemed to think that it might go off again at any moment.

"Is that thing safe?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas, you fathead! It's all wight," said D'Arcy. "I'll show you how to work it."

"Hold on! Don't start that awful thing here!"

"You wind up this," explained D'Arcy unheeding, and there was a loud creaking as he wound up the alarm, "and if you don't want the alarm to go off you pwess this catch,

and it holds the stwukah back, you know. Sometimes the catch falls out of place, but that is only to be expected in an American clock, of course. Now—"

Whirrrrr! Buzzzzzzzzzz!

"Bat Jove!"

"Stop it!" yelled Herries.

"The—the catch won't work!"

"Take it away, then!" roared Blake. "You ass!"

Buzzzzzzzzzz!

Blake jumped towards his cricket-bat in the corner of the study, and then made a rush at the alarm-clock. If the cricket-bat had smitten that triumph of American inventive genius, certainly the alarm would never have sounded again. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy snatched it up just in time.

"Blake, you ass—"

"Take it away, or—!" Blake poked at the alarm-clock with the end of his bat, and succeeded in poking Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's fancy waistcoat, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a howl.

"You ass! Keep off! I—"

Blake made another thrust, and D'Arcy dodged out of the study in haste. Blake followed him into the passage, and the swell of St. Jim's fled to the dormitory. There he succeeded in stilling the raucous voice of the alarm-clock.

Blake growled as he settled down to his preparation. Arthur Augustus came back a little later, with an expression of the most lofty dignity upon his aristocratic face. He sat down to his preparation in lofty silence. Blake and Herries and Digby did not seem to observe that there was anything the matter.

The four juniors worked away busily, and Blake yawned at last and rose.

"That's done," he said. "How's the alarm-clock getting on, Gussy?"

D'Arcy put his eyeglass into his eye, and looked at Blake.

"The alarm-clock is getting on all wight, Blake," he replied. "I wegard you as a widiculous ass! That clock is simply wippin'! You have only to lay it on its side, and then the catch works all wight."

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Blake chuckled.

"You'd better lay it on its side to-morrow morning, then," he remarked. "If that alarm starts at half-past five, you'll get massacred by the Fourth!"

"Wats!"

"We'd better have a jaw to Tom Merry about the boat," said Herries, in a thoughtful way. "It was a mistake to make a Shell fellow skipper, I think. It's curious that Tom Merry can't see that I ought to row stroke."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Don't you agree with me?" asked Herries warmly.

"Wathah not! It is perfectly plain to ewerybody, I considah, that I ought to wow stwoke. What is wequired to stwoke a boat is a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"You! You couldn't stroke a cat!" said Herries disdainfully.

"Weally, Hewwies, you ass—"

"Figgins & Co. are in great form," Blake remarked. "They're going out to practice regularly. Of course, we shall beat them."

"Yaas, wathah; especially if I stwoke the boat!"

"Tom Merry hasn't decided on number eight yet," said Blake. "I should say Kangaroo or Reilly, myself. I hear that Crooke of the Shell wants the place."

Blake sniffed.

"Crooke's no good. Smoking cigarettes in the box-room is more in his line than rowing in a House race."

"Yaas, wathah! I should certainly keep Cwooke out. He is the biggest wottah in the coll. since Levison's gone away."

"Thank you," said a voice at the door.

Crooke of the Shell looked in, with a very unpleasant expression upon his face. He had been passing the open door, and perhaps he had overheard by accident. Though Crooke very frequently did overhear things, whether by accident or not.

"It's like you to talk about a chap behind his back," said Crooke with a sneer.

Arthur Augustus turned crimson, and rose to his feet. He jammed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye, and bestowed a glare upon the Shell fellow which really ought to have withered him to ashes on the spot. But Crooke of the Shell was a hard case, and he did not look withered at all.

"You uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy in measured tones. "Do you mean to imply that I talk about any fellow behind his beastly back?"

"Well, I heard you!"

"I have said nothin' that I will not wepeat to your face. You were Levison's friend while he was here, and now he is gone you are the biggest wottah left in the school," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy deliberately, "and if Tom Mewwy should put you in the cwew for the wace I should wesign."

Crooke sneered.

"That wouldn't be much loss!" he said. "It's only rotten favouritism that makes Tom Merry put his own friends in—"

"That's not twue, you wottah!"

"It's a lie, in plain English," said Blake. "Do you see that door, Crooke? Do you prefer that or the window as a way out?"

"I can tell you—"

"Rats! We don't want to talk to you!" said Blake scornfully. "You've got about as much chance of getting into the junior eight as a Second Form fag has. You're no good. Go and eat coke—or smoke in the box-room, you cad!"

Crooke clenched his hands.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as an uttah wottah, Cwooke, and if you do not immediately wotire fwom this studdy, I shall hurl you into the passage!"

"You tailor's dummy!" began Crooke wrathfully. "I wufuse to be called a tailor's dummy!" Arthur Augustus came round the table, and pushed back his cuffs. "Are you goin', Cwooke?"

Crooke glared at D'Arcy from his extra height of six inches or so.

"No, I'm not going!" he said.

"Bai Jove! Then I shall have no wesource but to chuck you out, deah boy!"

"Go ahead, Gussy!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy laid violent hands upon the cad of the Shell. Crooke struck out, and D'Arcy was apparently not expecting that, for he sat down upon the floor of the study with a bump and gasped.

"Ow!"

Crooke whipped out of the study and vanished along the passage. Arthur Augustus, gasping for breath, jumped up.

"Bai Jove! The awful blightah has had the extwaordinawy cheek to stwike me!" he exclaimed, in astonishment and anger. "I will give him a feahful thwashin—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a silly ass, Blake. There is nothin' to eackle at, Digby. You are a silliah ass than Blake. You are anothah, Hewwies. I am goin' to look for Cwooke!"

And Arthur Augustus quitted the study on the warpath. But Crooke was not to be found, and a quarter of an hour later Arthur Augustus came back to finish his preparation, and the cad of the Shell had not received the fearful thrashing.

CHAPTER 3.

Crooke Means Business!

TOM MERRY laid down his pen and jerked his chair back from the table. He jerked the table in doing so, and Manners gave a howl. Two big blots had dropped from his pen, and they adorned the sheet he was engaged upon. Manners prided himself upon the neatness and clearness of his exercises; and he bestowed a glare upon his chum.

"You ass! Look what you've done!" he growled. "You've made me spill ink on my paper, you ass!"

"Never mind!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It's a waste, but there's lots of ink; we had a new bottle to-day."

"You—you ass—"

"About the eight—"

"Blow the eight!" said Manners. "I shall have to erase this somehow. L—"

"About the eight," resumed Tom Merry calmly.

"Wait till I've done this rotten German!" growled Monty Lowther. "I can't write German and talk boats at the same time!"

"Then chuck the German!" said Tom Merry. "About the eight, I don't know about eighth man, and we ought to settle it, as we're rowing with Figgins & Co. next week. Figgins has got a good crew—Kerr, and Wynn, and Thompson, and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, and Pratt. I've seen them at practice, and they are good!"

"Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an!" mumbled Lowther.

"Shut up, Lowther—"

"Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, gethan."

"Stop it, you ass!"

"Finished!" said Lowther, throwing down his pen. "I—"

There was another howl from Manners. He had erased two blots, and a spurt of ink from Lowther's pen, as he threw it down, bestowed upon him three new ones.

"You awful ass!" roared Manners.

"Oh, sorry! About the eight—"

"Bust the eight!" said Manners, in a frenzy. "I can't take in a sheet of erasures to old Linton. I shall have to do this again."

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Well, do it quietly," he suggested. "No need to make a row about it."

"You—you—you—"

"About the eight," said Tom Merry. "There's the Kangy, and there's Reilly, and there's also Bernard Glyn. They're all good."

The door opened, and Crooke, of the Shell, came in. The Terrible Three looked at him. The Shell fellow looked as if he were in a hurry. He closed the door behind him and nodded coolly to the three.

"Do they all come in without knocking in the casual ward you were brought up in, Crooke?" asked Lowther.

Crooke did not reply to the question.

"I want to see you, Tom Merry!" he began.

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"Well, I'm on view!" said Tom Merry. "Take a good look, and go!"

"It's about the eight."

"What on earth does the eight matter to you?" demanded the captain of the Shell, in surprise. "You don't mean to say that you're taking an interest in sports, Crooke? We shall hear of your playing cricket next!"

"Blow cricket! I can row—"

"Crabs caught in any number at the shortest notice!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Crooke scowled.

"I can row," he repeated; "and I want to row in the junior eight!"

The Terrible Three stared at him. Then Monty Lowther burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crooke gave him a glare.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"The joke!" said Monty Lowther innocently.

"What joke, you ass?"

"Aren't you joking?"

"No, I'm not!"

"My mistake—I thought you were," said Lowther blandly. "I take that laugh back, then. I certainly thought you were trying to be funny."

"I want to row in the eight!" said Crooke, looking at Tom Merry. "The fellows up and down the House say that you don't want any but your personal friends in the crew—"

Tom Merry flushed.

"I suppose the fellows up and down the House are yourself and Mellish?" he remarked. "I don't suppose anybody else would say anything so caddish!"

"Well, it looks it!" said Crooke. "The fellows you've selected are all your own personal friends."

"That's because the fellows I know are all decent!" said Tom Merry. "I should select a fellow I was on fighting terms with, if he could row. But we've got to get the best oars we can to beat the New House."

"You haven't taken the trouble to see what I can do!"

"I'm willing to see what you can do, if you like to turn up to boating practice," said Tom Merry. "You've never seemed to take to it before. And I certainly shouldn't risk putting you in the eight all of a sudden like this. We've got a tussle before us to beat the New House, anyway."

"Well, I want to be in the eight!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Do you mean to say that there's no chance for me, and that you won't put me in under any conditions?" asked Crooke savagely.

Tom Merry nodded.

"You've got it!" he said.

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"And do you call that fair play?" he demanded.

"Certainly! If you like to come down to boat practice, and I should see that you're quite a remarkable oar, I might think of it. But I don't expect anything of the sort."

"I'll come down to practice fast enough, if you're willing to give me a chance!" said Crooke. "I want to take up rowing seriously this summer. I'll be down at the river with you before brekker to-morrow morning."

"Quite welcome!" said Tom Merry. "But, I may as well say plainly, that I don't think there's any chance for you. I've got a better crew without you. Blessed if I can understand your turning over a new leaf like this all of a sudden. You've never gone in for sports of any kind, and you've always grumbled at compulsory cricket."

"I don't care for cricket; but I want to row."

"Well, come down to-morrow morning, and I'll see what you can do!" said Tom Merry. "If you mean bizney, I'm glad to see you taking up something better than smoking and playing nap for pennies, anyway."

"I'll be there," said Crooke; "and if you don't give me a chance, I warn you that there'll be trouble."

"Oh, shut up!"

Crooke left the study and slammed the door behind him. The Terrible Three looked at one another in surprise.

"Blessed if I catch on to this!" said Tom Merry, in wonder. "This is quite a new line for Crooke to take up. I don't savvy at all."

And Manners and Lowther agreed that they didn't savvy, either. Certainly, rowing was not in Crooke's line. Any kind of manly sport was disliked by Crooke, and Mellish, and Levison, and their set, as a rule.

Crooke went down the passage frowning. He stopped at Mellish's study in the Fourth Form passage, and went in. Mellish and Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, were there, and Lumley-Lumley had just finished his preparation.

He rose as Crooke came in.

Time had been when Lumley-Lumley and Crooke and Mellish had been birds of a feather. That time was past, so far as Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was concerned. When Crooke

came to the study now, Lumley-Lumley generally got out of it, as he now proceeded to do. Crooke watched him with a scowl as he went. As Lumley-Lumley closed the study door, Crooke turned to Mellish, who was grinning.

"Got into the eight?" asked Mellish.

Crooke knitted his brows darkly.

"No!" he replied. "But I'm going to get in, and I want you to help me."

"How on earth can I help you?" said Mellish, in surprise.

"I've got nothing to do with the eight. Tom Merry's junior captain of the boats, and he's not likely to listen to advice from me."

"I don't mean that, ass! Tom Merry's as good as said that there's no chance for me."

"I could have told you so before. Blessed if I can see that the game's worth the candle," said Mellish, with a yawn. "I wouldn't row if they asked me!"

"I can row, and I'm jolly well going to!" said Crooke savagely. "Tom Merry and Blake and the rest have all these things to themselves now. It's time somebody else had a chance. I'm going to row!"

"Well, I wish you luck; but I don't think you'll get into the eight, all the same," said Mellish, with a grin.

"You owe me a little sum, Mellish," said Crooke quietly.

"What on earth's that got to do with it?"

"You can't settle up?"

"You know I can't!" said Mellish, in alarm. "You knew that jolly well when you lent me the money. Chaps who have millionaire paters must expect to part with a little cash. You don't mean to say that you're short of tin?"

"Oh, no. I want you to help me in this matter, that's all."

"How can I help you?" said Mellish, with growing uneasiness. "Look here, I've had enough of being dragged into trouble by Levison when he was here, and I don't want—"

"It's not a question of what you want, but of what I want," said Crooke coolly. "You've sponged on me for a jolly long time, and now I want you to help me. I'm willing to make it worth your while, as far as that goes."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Help me, that's all. Tom Merry's determined to keep me out of the school sports, and I'm determined to get in. If I can't do it by fair means, I'm going to do it the other way," said Crooke, between his teeth. "He won't give me a chance unless I get the whip hand of him and make him."

"Make him? That won't be easy! And how are you going to get the whip hand of Tom Merry?" asked Mellish.

"You're talking rot!"

"I've got an idea in my head, and you're going to help me. There won't be any risk for you, and I'll make it worth your while. Listen to me."

Crooke opened the study door and glanced out, and then closed it again hurriedly. Then he began to talk in a low, muttering tone that could not have been overheard in the passage, even if there had been an eavesdropper. And Mellish, whose manner was at first uneasy and rebellious, grew more and more interested, until at length he was in full accord with the cad of the Shell.

CHAPTER 4.

A Little Joke on Gussy.

KILDARE saw the School House juniors off to their dormitories that night, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, before he began to undress, set his alarm-clock at half-past five. The Terrible Three looked into the dormitory on their way to their own quarters. Arthur Augustus was winding the alarm.

"Going strong?" asked Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"It is goin' all wight," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I shall be up at half-past five in the mornin', deah boys, and if you would care to come down and bathe, I'd give you a call."

"I expect you'd have to walk in your sleep to do it," grinned Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

The Shell fellows grinned and went on their way. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy finished winding his clock, and set it on the washstand at the head of his bed. Jack Blake, who was sitting on the next bed taking off his boots, shook a warning finger at the swell of St. Jim's.

"If that blessed thing goes off in the middle of the night, there'll be a row!" he said.

"I guess that's a dead cert.," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, there is no dangah of its goin' off till half-past five, as I have set it for that time. This is a jollay good clock. It is twice as expensive as those which are sold at half the pwice, and—"

"Go hon!" said Blake. "Did you do that in your head?"

"Weally, deah boy—"

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"Well, you know what will happen if it goes off at the wrong time," said Blake. "If you were bound to buy a rotten alarm-clock, why couldn't you get a good one?"

"This one is all wight! I gave five shillin's for it!" said D'Arcy, with dignity. "Of course, it is cheap. Mr. Bunn said it was vewy cheap indeed, and I suppose he ought to know. And a fellow has to be economical when his pocket-money is cut down in a howwidwastic way like mine. Evah since that wotten supah-tax, my patah has made a fuss about sendin' me an extwa fivah. I wote to him for a fivah yesterday, and he sent me a postal-order for ten shillin's. I wogard it as wotten!" Arthur Augustus extracted a postal-order from his jacket-pocket, and held it up to the general contempt. "Look at that!"

The juniors looked at it.

"Isn't it a good one?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I shouldn't let my pater play a jape on me like that," said Blake, with a shake of his head. "If it's not a good one—"

"It is a good one, you uttah ass!"

"Then what's the matter with it?"

"I wogard it as beneath the dig. of a peer of the wealm to send ten shillin' postal-ordahs to a chap!" said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I was expectin' a fivah, and I considah that if my patah did not send me a fivah it would weally have been in bettah taste to send nothin' at all. A wotten postal-ordah for ten shillin's is simply insult added to injury!"

"Not worth acceptin'?" suggested Reilly.

"Quite wight, deah boy."

"Faith, then, give it to me! I'll accept it!" said Reilly generously. "I'll take the insult and the postal-order all together, if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should have weturned it to my govahnah by the next post," said Arthur Augustus, putting the postal-order back into his pocket without accepting Reilly's generous offer, "but upon woflection, I decided to keep it. Aftah all, ten shillings is bettah than nothin'. But I have w'ritten my govahnah a vey plain lettah on the subject, pointin' out that a chap can't be expected to keep up wespactable appeavances if he doesn't have a little cash. I have pointed out to him that by makin' me a considewably largah allowance he could weducer his income below the level w'equired for the supah-tax. But my govahnah isn't a business man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare looked in.

"Not in bed yet?"

And the juniors turned in.

Kildare put out the light, and went along the passage to the Shell dormitory. There was a sound of chuckling in the Shell-room as the captain of St. Jim's opened the door. Kildare looked round suspiciously at Tom Merry & Co.

"What's the joke?" he demanded.

The Shell fellows all looked vey innocent.

"No larks to-night, you know!" said Kildare, frowning. "If I find any of you out of the dormitory, there will be trouble. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Kildare!" chorussed the Shell.

And Kildare put lights out and retired.

There was a chuckle from Monty Lowther's bed.

"It's all serene!" he said. "I'll wait till Kildare's gone to bed. Gussy will be fast asleep in an hour's time, and then I'll scoot into the Fourth Form dorm. and set the clock for half-past three. Gussy will be surprised not to find the sun rising when he gets up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Shell fellows chuckled over the intended joke upon the swell of St. Jim's, till one by one they dropped off to sleep.

Half-past ten chimed out, and then Monty Lowther sat up in bed.

"You awake, Tom Merry?"

"Groo!"

Lowther grinned, and slipped out of bed. He drew on some of his clothes, and Tom Merry peered at him sleepily in the darkness.

"That you, Lowther?"

"Yes, slacker."

"Oh, I'll stay awake till you come back."

"All serene."

Monty Lowther quitted the dormitory.

Tom Merry fully intended to stay awake; but he was sleepy, and he dozed off in a few minutes.

He was awakened by the sound of the dormitory door opening.

He opened his eyes drowsily.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" said Lowther, groping his way towards his bed.

"It's all right."

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"Did you get at the clock?"

"Yes. It's close to Gussy's bed, and he'll hear it when it goes off," chuckled Lowther. "He would have to be jolly deaf if he didn't. I've left the alarm alone, and put the clock on an hour and a half. I had to take it to the window to do it, and I believe I woke somebody up—I heard somebody move, anyway. But it's all right. The alarm will go off at four instead of half-past five, and if Gussy strikes a match and looks at the clock, he'll see it marking half-past five."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther turned in.

"Just as well we didn't tell Gussy to call us," grinned Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Monty Lowther turned over and went to sleep.

CHAPTER 5.

Very Early Rising.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stirred uneasily in his sleep.

He was dreaming that he was rowing in the junior School House eight, and leaving Figgins & Co. in the New House boat helplessly behind. There were crowds of fellows on the bank shouting and cheering, and gradually their cheering took on a more raucous and jarring sound, till it seemed to D'Arcy that his ears were filled with deafening noise. Then he awoke.

Buzz-z-z-z-z-zzzzzzzzz!

Gr-r-r-r-r-z-z-z-zzz!

That was the noise which had mingled with his dreams.

It was the alarm-clock.

There was the faintest glimmer of dawn in at the high windows of the Fourth-Form dormitory.

Arthur Augustus sat up sleepily in bed.

Buz-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-zzzzzzzzz.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I feel awfully sleepay! It's a wemarkable thing that the sun isn't highah—vewy wemarkable!"

Buz-z-zzz!

There was a growl from Blake's bed. Blake had been awakened, too.

"Shut up that row, you silly ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shurrup!" came in a drowsy murmur from Herries's bed.

"I'll gerrout and slay you if you don't shurrup!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Buz-z-z-z-z!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rolled out of bed and grasped the alarm-clock. He felt in the gloom for the catch to stop the alarm.

"Will you stop that?" howled Blake, sitting up in bed. "I told you it would go off in the middle of the night, fathead!"

"It isn't the middle of the night, deah boy. I set it for half-past five, so it must be wight. The sun is wathah late, I suppose."

"Ass! Stop that row! It can't be four yet."

"Weally, Blake—"

D'Arcy shut off the alarm at last, and Jack Blake grunted, and settled down to sleep again. Arthur Augustus glanced at the dark windows, and wondered. There was just a possibility that the clock had gone off too soon, and he struck a match and looked at it. The hands indicated half-past five.

"Bai Jove! It's wight enough!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "That clock is a jollay good one, though I only gave five shillin's for it. Bai Jove, though, I feel wemarkably sleepay for half-past five!"

It was not surprising that D'Arcy felt remarkably sleepy, considering that it was only a few minutes past four in reality. But the swell of St. Jim's was unaware of that little fact.

With a heavy head, and eyes that persisted in closing in spite of himself, D'Arcy dressed himself. He uttered a slight exclamation as he reached out to take his jacket. Arthur Augustus always folded up his clothes most carefully when he went to bed, and his jacket had evidently been disturbed since then. It was rumpled and creased, and the swell of St. Jim's gazed at it in surprise.

"Bai Jove! Some awful wottah has been wumplin' my jacket!" he exclaimed. "Blake!"

Snore!

"Blake, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus shook his chum by the shoulder. Blake's eyes opened, and he glared at the elegant Fourth-Former with a glare like a basilisk.

"You frabjous ass!" he murmured. "Lemme alone!"

"Have you been wumplin' my jacket?"

"Eh?"

"Somebody has been wumplin' my jacket! I wogard it as a wotten twick!"

"Lemme go to sleep, fathead!"

"But have you been wumplin' my jacket?"

"No, ass!" shrieked Blake. "If I get up to you I'll wipe up the floor with you! Let me go to sleep, you dangerous lunatic!"

"I wegard this as a wotten twick. Somebody has been wumplin' my jacket."

"Groo!"

"Blake, dear boy—"

Snore!

"Well, it's wotten!" said D'Arcy, putting the jacket on. "I wegard it as a beastly twick! Are you sure you wouldn't like to come out for an early bathe, Blake?"

Snore!

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and took up his towels, and left the dormitory. The house was strangely silent. D'Arcy's clock indicated a quarter to six, and at that time in the morning there was generally someone astir in St. Jim's in the lower regions. But the earliest of early housemaids was apparently still fast asleep. The passages and the stairs were very dark. The school door was fastened, and Arthur Augustus halted at it, in doubt.

"This is a vewy remarkable mornin'," he murmured. "It is remarkably dark for nearly six o'clock. The sun ought to have wisen by this time in July, but I certainly cannot see it. I suppose the housemaids are oversleepin' themselves because the sun is so late in wisin'. It's wathah unfortunate, as I shall have to get out of a beastly window."

The swell of St. Jim's climbed out of a window, and dropped into the quadrangle.

There was a dim twilight reigning there.

Very much puzzled by the failure of the sun to put in its customary appearance, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made his way down to the school gates.

At six o'clock Taggles, the school porter, certainly ought to have been astir. But there was no sign of Taggles. The porter's lodge was closed and dark, and it was only too evident that Taggles was asleep. As D'Arcy required the gates to be opened to pass out, it was inevitable that Taggles should be awakened. Arthur Augustus tugged at the lodge bell, and a terrific peal rang through the little building.

Ting-ting-jangle-jangle-jang!

"Bai Jove! Taggles must be sleepin' vewy heavily this mornin'," murmured the perplexed swell of St. Jim's. "Howevah, I shall have to wake him up. It will be doin' him a good turn, too, as he is ovahsleepin' himself."

Jangle-jangle-jangle-jang!

A window was slammed up violently, and a head in a night-cap was projected into the dim twilight, and an enraged voice demanded to know what was the matter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed in his eyeglass, and looked up at Taggles.

"Taggles, deah boy—"

"Go away!" said Taggles sulphurously. "I'll report yer!"

"My deah Taggles—"

"Go-away, you limb!"

"I wefuse to be called a limb! It is neahly six o'clock, Taggles, deah boy, and it's time to get up. I want to go out and bathe."

"Is that Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, Taggles?"

"I'll report yer! Go back to bed, you young limb!"

"Weally, Taggles—"

"It ain't a quarter past four yet!" yelled Taggles. "I'll report yer! Go away!"

"You are mistaken about the time, Taggles. The sun is wathah late in wisin' this mornin'. Will you come down and open the gate?"

"No, I won't!" roared Taggles.

"But I want to go out, and—"

Slam!

The slamming of the window cut short further argument. Arthur Augustus, very much surprised and displeased, rang the bell again. But this time there was no response from Taggles, and the junior gave it up at last.

"Evevythin' seems to be wathah remarkable this mornin'," he murmured. "I shall certainly w'rite to 'The Times' about the remarkable fact that the sun has not wisen at six o'clock. I suppose I shall have to get out ovah the wall. It is vewy annoyin'."

And Arthur Augustus got out over the wall.

He walked down to the river in the dim twilight, and stripped under the bushes. It was not pleasant to bathe before the sun was up, certainly, but D'Arcy had come out to bathe, and he could not miss it simply because the sun was acting in an unaccountable and most unwarrantable manner.

But D'Arcy's bathe was a brief one. He had no temptation to linger in the water. There was a shade less dimness as he crawled out and began to towel himself down. The water was beginning to glimmer, but it was pitchy dark

under the trees. The swell of St. Jim's shivered a little as he towelled himself down and dressed on the grassy bank. Then he took his way back to the school.

He had fully expected to find the school gates open now. But they were not open. The iron gate in the old stone gateway was closed fast, and there was no sign of anyone moving in the quadrangle.

Arthur Augustus was amazed.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "It is weally remarkable! It must be past half-past six, and the whole school is fast asleep. Vewy remarkable indeed!"

Arthur Augustus re-entered the school grounds the way he had left them, by climbing the wall. He crossed over to the School House, and found the door still closed, and not a sign of life about the place. He had left the window unfastened, and he entered by it, and went up to the Fourth-Form dormitory. The House was silent and still, and as he entered the dormitory, he found the juniors fast asleep in bed. There was a glimmer of light now at the windows.

Arthur Augustus stood perplexed and wondering.

As he stood there, the hour struck from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

One, two, three, four, five!

Arthur Augustus listened for another stroke.

But it did not come.

"Gweat Scott!" murmured D'Arcy, almost overcome with amazement. "Even the school clock has gone w'ong this mornin'. It's quite an hour slow!"

A suspicion that his alarm-clock might have gone wrong came into his mind, and he rushed at it and looked at it. The clock was ticking away cheerfully, and its hands indicated half-past six. Arthur Augustus approached Blake's bed and shook his chum by the shoulder. Blake's eyes opened.

"You again!" he murmured. "Ass! Fathead! Shurrup! Gerroff!"

"Blake, deah boy, it's a vewy remarkable occurence; everythin' seems to be at sixes and sevens this mornin'. The school clock is slow—"

"Ass!"

"My clock says half-past six—"

"Somebody's put it on, then, fathead! Go back to bed!"

"By Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

He looked at the clock again; it certainly indicated half-past six. He took out his watch from under his pillow, and looked at that. It indicated a few minutes past five. Arthur Augustus stared at it blankly.

"Gweat Scott! Some awful wottah has put the clock on!" he gasped. "That must be the same wottah who wumpled my jacket! It's a wotten joke. Blake—"

"Shurrup!"

"But I say, deah boy—"

Jack Blake sat up in bed and grasped his pillow. There was a sudden whiz, and the pillow smote Arthur Augustus D'Arcy under the chin, and the swell of St. Jim's sat down with great suddenness on the floor of the dormitory.

"Ow! Yawwoh!"

"Now, shut up!" growled Blake. "Go back to bed, and let a chap sleep!"

And he turned over. And Arthur Augustus, after a little reflection, took his advice, and went back to bed.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus is not Able to Pay.

THE rising-bell awoke Arthur Augustus D'Arcy from his second sleep that morning. He sat up in bed and yawned, and watched the rest of the Fourth getting up.

"Didn't the alarm go off, D'Arcy?" grinned Mellish.

D'Arcy frowned.

"Yaas, wathah! I've been to have my bathe!" he replied. "Some awful wottah put my clock on an hour and a half, and I went out at four."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The same wottah who put my clock on wumpled my jacket, too. I am goin' to give him a feahful thwashin' when I find him out. Was it you, Mellish?"

"Ha, ha! No. I was asleep all night," said Mellish.

"One of the Shell bounders, perhaps," said Blake, with a chuckle. "I noticed that Lowther was very interested in your clock last evening."

"Bai Jove! I'll ask the wottah!"

Arthur Augustus rose, and was down last of the Form. He met the Terrible Three when they came in to breakfast. The chums of the Shell grinned at him.

"Did you get up early?" asked Lowther.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and glared at the Terrible Three.

"Did one of you wottahs put my clock on, and wumple my jacket?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I wegard it as a wotten twick. I insist upon knowin' which one of you played that wotten twick on me!" said Arthur Augustus heatedly. "I will let the othahs off."
 "You are too kind, Gussy!" said Lowther blandly. "You are going to let me off if I tell you which one did it."
 "Yaas."
 "Honour bright?"
 "Yaas."
 "Well, I did it!" said Lowther cheerily.
 D'Arcy started. The chums of the Shell burst into a roar.
 "Weally, Lowthah, I wegard it as wotten to catch me in that way. Undah the circs, I shall not be able to give you a fearful thwashin'."
 "Well, you wouldn't have been able to, anyway," said Lowther consolingly.
 "Weally, you wottah—"
 "Did you get a nice bath?" grinned Tom Merry.
 "Nice and early before the sun was up?" chuckled Manners.
 "You fearful wottahs! I wefuse to speak to you."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned away haughtily, and the Terrible Three marched into the dining-room grinning. Arthur Augustus did not condescend to look at them during breakfast time. When they came out after breakfast, the Terrible Three stopped at the letter-rack in the hall and looked over it carefully. There was a letter for Tom Merry, from his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and he opened it eagerly. Funds were rather low with the Terrible Three just then, and Tom Merry was not without hopes that the letter from Miss Priscilla contained a remittance. But there was only a letter—a long letter, containing advice that was more valuable than many postal-orders, on the subject of keeping his feet dry, and wearing flannel next to his skin, and sundry matters of that kind. Tom Merry smiled as he put the letter into his pocket.

"Any luck?" asked Manners.
 "No. What have you got?"
 "A bill for films," said Manners, grunting as he opened his letter. "Queer how items mount up when a chap does photographing."

"There ought to be a letter for me," said Lowther. "I was expecting it last night. I wrote to my uncle two days ago, and explained to him how hard up I was, and it's jolly queer he hasn't answered. He always answers the letters with a lecture on extravagance! but once he sent me a tip—and you never know."

"May come by the next post," suggested Manners.
 "Yes, but it's queer. He's a very methodical old bounder, and never leaves his letters over. It ought to have been here yesterday. Not that it matters much—I don't suppose there would be anything in it."

Arthur Augustus paused and looked over the rack. He was in hopes that his noble governor might have relented, and sent him a fiver after all, but there was no letter for the swell of St. Jim's. D'Arcy sniffed and passed on.

"No fivers?" asked Blake, as he met him going into the Form-room.

D'Arcy shook his head.
 "No, deah boy. I weally wegard this as hardly playin' the game on the part of the govannah. He hasn't even answered my last lettah. I am simply stonay bwoke now, with the exception of a few shillin's and a postal-ordah for ten bob. Wotten, isn't it?"

"Well, I'm stony with the exception of threepence," said Blake cheerfully. "That's worse, my son. I'll help you to cash your postal-order presently."

And when the Fourth-Form came out after third lesson, Blake slipped his arm into D'Arcy's, and Digby followed suit on the other side of the swell of St. Jim's. It was a hot July morning, and ginger-pop appealed to the imaginations of the juniors.

"This way to Dame Taggles," said Blake.
 "Vewy well, deah boy!"

Three or four more fellows joined them en route. Reilly, and Lumley-Lumley, and Kangaroo and Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane, and Gore and Skimpole, all thought that ginger-pop was the proper "caper" just then. Arthur Augustus was nothing if not generous; and he would have stood treat to an enemy—if he had had one—so long as he had a sixpence left. He invited his friends cheerfully to walk up to the counter, and Dame Taggles handed out the foaming glasses of ginger-beer.

Three New House juniors strolled in—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. The School House fellows nodded to them cheerfully. When they were not fighting with the New House Co., they were on the best of terms with them. Fatty Wynn looked at the ginger-pop.

"Feed going on?" he asked.
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"No; a dwink," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway join us, deah boys!"

"Mrs. Taggles has a lot of jolly good tarts in this morning," said Fatty Wynn.

"Shut up, Fatty!" exclaimed Figgins. "You've got to keep off the tarts till after the boat race, you ass!"

"Well, I suppose a couple of tarts won't hurt me, Figgy, especially as the race isn't till next week," said Wynn. "Must keep in form, you know, and you can't keep in form by going off your feed. There's nothing like a solid foundation, you know. Did you say tarts, Gussy?"

D'Arcy smiled.
 "I didn't—but I do!" he replied. "Pway hand some jam-tarts for Wynn, Mrs. Taggles."

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"I could eat twenty," said Fatty Wynn confidentially. "But I won't stick you for so much, Gussy. Six will do."

"Bai Jove!"

"Twopenny ones," said Fatty Wynn cheerfully.

"Oh, yaas, wathah!"

By the time D'Arcy had finished standing treat, he had a sum of seven-and-sixpence to pay Mrs. Taggles. As his loose change amounted to only three shillings and sixpence, he felt in his pocket for his postal-order.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter?" asked Blake.

"It's gone."

"The postal-order?"

"Yaas, wathah! I must have dwopped it somewhah."

"Well, you are an ass. You had it last night when you went to bed," said Blake. "I remember you showed it to us."

"Yaas, wathah, but—" Arthur Augustus paused, looking very troubled. "It's a vewy remarkable thing. I suppose I've dwopped it. I must have dwopped it. But—"

He paused again.

"Pway lend me four bob, somebody, to pay Mrs. Taggles," he said, "I will settle on Saturday, if I don't find the postal-ordah before then."

Kangaroo handed out the required sum, and Dame Taggles was paid. Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with an extremely thoughtful expression upon his face, left the tuckshop, and went in search of the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 7.

D'Arcy Lets the Matter Drop.

THE chums of the Shell were under the elms in the old quad., talking rowing. For the time, the forthcoming contest between the School House and the New House had put cricket in the background as an item of interest. The boat race between the School House seniors and the New House seniors was a big event at St. Jim's, and to Tom Merry & Co., at all events, the junior race was an equally big affair.

Tom Merry, on the one hand, and Figgins on the other, had selected crews for the contest, and the juniors of both Houses looked forward eagerly to the contest between the rival eights. The eights, in fact, almost monopolised interest among the juniors at St. Jim's; and both skippers had been inundated with offers from fellows who fancied that they could row.

Even slackers, like Croke, of the Shell, felt an ambition to shine in the eights—Croke, in fact, had set his heart upon it. Figgins's crew, of New House juniors, was complete, but Tom Merry had not yet finally decided to whom he would assign the eighth place in his skill. There were many candidates. Kangaroo, of the Shell, had the best chance, but Reilly and Lumley-Lumley and Glyn were all very good.

Tom Merry was talking the matter over with Lowther and Manners when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up.

The serious expression upon the face of the swell of St. Jim's caught their eyes at once.

"Anything wrong?" asked Tom Merry. "Have you come to say that you can't row in the eight next week?"

"Wathah not!"

"Then what are you looking like a funeral for?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I wasn't aware that I was lookin' like a funewal."

"You're aware of it now, then."

"But what's happened?" asked Tom Merry. "Shut up, Lowther! I can see you've got something on your mind, Gussy."

ANSWERS

The swell of the Fourth hesitated a moment.

"I've lost my postal-ordah," he said.

"Sorry."

"It is vewy wemarkable that it should be lost," said D'Arcy slowly. "It was in the inside pocket of my jacket. I have nevah dropped anythin' out of that pocket before, you know, and I cannot help wegardin' it as vewy wemarkable."

"Yes?" said Tom Merry.

"I suppose you chaps don't know anythin' about it?"

The Terrible Three stared at him.

"What on earth should we know about it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Well, Lowther, then."

"I?" ejaculated Lowther. "How should I know anything about it?"

"I thought pewwaps it might be a jape. You came into my dorm, last night—"

Lowther flushed.

"I came in and put your clock on," he said. "I suppose you don't think I picked your pocket while I was there, do you?"

"You wumped my jacket—"

"I never touched your jacket."

"When I got up at four this mornin', I found that my jacket had been disturbed, Lowthah," said D'Arcy quietly.

"Well, I didn't touch it," said Lowther testily.

"Somebody did. The postal-ordah is gone. Of course, I may have dropped it. But I thought that pewwaps you were japin' me—hidin' it, or something—"

"I shouldn't be ass enough to touch money for a jape," said Lowther. "And I didn't touch your jacket, either. I put the clock on, and that was all. If your jacket was touched, it was done by someone in your own dormitory."

"Vewy well; I don't doubt your word, of course—"

Lowther glowered.

"You'd better not!" he growled.

"Pway don't lose your tempah, deah boy," said D'Arcy pacifically. "I have merely asked you for information, before I begin huntin' for that postal-ordah. That's all."

Lowther grunted, and D'Arcy walked away.

"Silly ass!" said Lowther. "Just like Gussy to lose his postal-order at the time when I was japing him. I hope he'll find it."

"Oh, he'll find it all right!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I remember he lost his watch once, and found it in his old waistcoat pocket."

And the Terrible Three dismissed the matter from their minds.

Two or three fellows of the Fourth helped the swell of the School House to look for the missing postal-order. They looked in the dormitory, and in Study No. 6, and D'Arcy even followed his own footsteps of that morning down to the river, and looked in the grass and the bushes. But he did not find it. It had not turned up by dinner-time, when the juniors went into the dining-room. Crooke, of the Shell, tapped the swell of St. Jim's on the shoulder.

"I hear you've lost a postal-order," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Know the number?"

"How should I know the numbah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, in surprise.

The Shell fellow grinned.

"Well, the numbers are marked on them, you know, and when one is lost, you can stop it by the-number. You'd better write to your governor and get the number."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"That's all wight," he replied.

"You're not going to let it go surely?"

"I expect it will turn up," said D'Arcy evasively.

Crooke looked at him curiously.

"Do you know what it looks like to me?" he demanded.

"I weally do not know, and I certainly do not care, Cwooke."

"It looks to me as if you suspect somebody of taking it, and don't want to make a fuss and a scandal about it."

"Oh, wats!"

"Isn't it so?"

"Mind your own bizney, deah boy. You are not the kind of fellow I care to hold a discush with, anyway. I will twouble you not to talk to me," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Crooke's eyes glittered as D'Arcy walked away and left him. But the cad of the Shell did not seem displeased.

After dinner, some further search was made for the missing postal-order. But with the exception of Crooke, no one suggested that it might have been stolen. D'Arcy's carelessness with money was well known; and his very extensive wardrobe was well-known, too. It was more than likely that he had changed a waistcoat or jacket with the postal-order in the pocket, and forgotten all about it. And the swell of St. Jim's seemed curiously indifferent on the subject himself.

"Pway let the mattah dwop, Blake, deah boy," he said,

as they went in to afternoon lessons. "It's all wight, you know, the ordah will turn up. And if there's any fuss, some cad like Cwooke or Mellish will start a stowy that it has been stolen, and then there will be a scandal, you know. Bettah let it dwop."

"You ought to be careful, you silly ass," said Blake.

"I wefuse to be called a silly ass, Blake."

Blake grunted and went into the Form-room. During afternoon lessons Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked very thoughtful; but he did not take any of his friends into his confidence as to what he was thinking about. He certainly did not take Crooke's advice of writing to his father for the number of the order.

"Found your postal-order, Gussy?" asked Mellish, meeting the swell of the School House in the passage after lessons.

"I am Gussy only to my friends, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus.

And Mellish sniffed and passed on, without having his inquiry answered.

The Terrible Three stopped D'Arcy a little later. Monty Lowther was grinning cheerfully, all thought of the missing postal-order evidently having passed from his mind.

"Getting up early to-morrow morning, Gussy?" he asked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I shouldn't mind the trouble of setting your alarm-clock for you, you know," said the humorist of the Shell.

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah. Go and eat coke, deah boy."

Tom Merry linked his arm in D'Arcy's.

"Time to get down to the river to practice," he said.

"I'm giving Kangay a trial as eighth man. Come on!"

And the juniors were soon in the boat, pulling away upon the sunny river, under the shade of the big trees, in fine form and in the highest of spirits; and perfectly convinced that when the eights came off, they would beat the New House hollow. And Figgins & Co., who were at practice a little further down the stream, were also turning out quite to their own satisfaction, and were congratulating themselves upon the absolute certainty of knocking the School House crew into a cocked hat.

CHAPTER 8.

Quite a Windfall!

THE Terrible Three came in hungry as hunters after their pull on the river. Tom Merry and Manners went up to the study to get tea, and Monty Lowther lingered to look at the rack in the hall, staring ruefully that there was still a faint, lingering hope that his uncle might have written and enclosed a remittance.

Tom Merry lighted the fire in the study, and Manners opened the cupboard door. He turned out a loaf, a fragment of butter, and a tin of sardines. He looked at them on the table rather lugubriously.

"That all?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's all."

"My hat! I hope Monty gets a remittance, then. Looks to me as if we shall have to cadge a tea along the passage."

said Tom Merry.

"Here's Monty!"

Monty Lowther burst into the study, all smiles. He held a letter in one hand, and a postal-order in the other.

"Hurrah!"

"How much?"

"Ten bob."

"Bravo!"

"Jolly decent of nunky!" said Monty Lowther gleefully.

"The curious thing is that he doesn't mention the remittance in the letter. Listen!"

"Dear Nephew,—My advice to you is to be more careful with your money.—Your affectionate uncle,

"J. LOWTHER."

"Short and sweet!" remarked Manners.

"Doesn't sound like a letter enclosing a remittance," Tom Merry remarked.

"Still, he's enclosed it, so it's all right," said Lowther cheerfully. "I'll go and get this changed with Mrs. Taggles, and bring in some tommy. I won't be long."

"Cut off, then!"

Monty Lowther scuttled out of the study. He returned in ten minutes or so, laden with packages. His face was flushed with running.

"Figgins & Co. sighted me in the quad., and gave chase," he explained. "Jolly near got raided. I dropped a little jar of jam; they're welcome to that. I saw Fatty Wynn bolting it as I came in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther spread his purchases upon the table. They made a good array. The chums of the Shell eyed them with great satisfaction.

"Three bob left," said Lowther. "We shall have to make that last us till Saturday. Eat, drink, and be merry."

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"Kettle's boiling!" said Tom Merry. "I'll make the tea, and you can poach the eggs. That ham looks ripping; and I've got a first-class hunger on."

"Same here!" said Manners emphatically. And the Terrible Three sat down to a merry tea. They had just started when Croke, of the Shell, looked in.

"Hallo! You fellows in funds?" he asked.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Manners.

"Yes, it does. I was going to ask you to tea in my study," said Croke. "I thought I heard you say you were stony."

"So we were," said Tom Merry; "but Lowther's had a postal-order since then."

"Oh, good!" said Croke, with a peculiar glance at Lowther. "You're in luck, Lowther. A big one, I suppose?"

"Ten bob?"

"Ten bob!" repeated Croke, with a peculiar intonation in his voice.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, looking round at Croke, surprised by his tone. "What is there in that?"

"Oh, nothing. I suppose Lowther gets lots of postal-orders from his uncle," said Croke carelessly.

"No, I don't," said Lowther; "only once in a blue moon. But I don't see that it's any business of yours. You seem mighty interested in the matter."

"Oh, not at all!"

"Travel along, then."

Croke left the study. Tom Merry glanced at Lowther rather reproachfully.

"Might have been a bit more polite, Monty, when he said he was going to ask us to tea," he remarked. "Of course, we wouldn't have had tea with him, but—"

"He was only romancing," said Lowther. "That was his excuse for putting his fat head in. He wanted to spy, that's all, as usual. I can't stand that chap."

"I can't, either," said Manners thoughtfully. "He seems to have something up his sleeve just now, too, though I can't make out what it is."

"Oh, blow Croke!" said Lowther. "Pass the eggs."

Kangaroo, of the Shell, and Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn looked in a little later, and were accorded a welcome very different from that which had greeted Croke. They stayed to tea, and Gore and Skimpole came in from the next study, too. There was quite a little party in Tom Merry's study, in fact, to do justice to that excellent feed stood by Monty Lowther with the unexpected postal-order.

Meanwhile, Croke, of the Shell, had strolled down to the tuckshop behind the elms in the corner of the old quad. Dame Taggles came out of her little parlour.

"Monty Lowther changed a postal-order here a while ago, didn't he, Mrs. Taggles?" the cad of the Shell asked.

"Yes, Master Croke."

"Would you mind letting me see it?" asked Croke.

"Lowther wants to know the number."

"Yes," said Dame Taggles, a little surprised, but not seeing any reason to object. And she fumbled in her till and took out the postal-order.

"You give me the number, and I'll jot it down," said Croke.

"Very well." Dame Taggles read out the number: "60186."

"Thank you, Mrs. Taggles!"

And Croke left the shop. In the quadrangle he took a telegram from his pocket, and glanced at it with a grin. It read:

"00186. Eastwood."

"Oh, good!" murmured Croke. "I rather think that I shall row in the School House eight, after all."

Which was certainly a very mysterious remark for the cad of the Shell to make.

CHAPTER 9.

What Croke Knew.

TOM MERRY sat alone in his study. The Terrible Three had done their preparation after that excellent tea, and Manners and Lowther had gone down. Tom Merry had fifty lines to do, and he was staying up to do them before bedtime.

Croke, of the Shell, came into the study abruptly without knocking.

Tom Merry went on writing without looking up.

"Merry!"

"Hallo!" Tom Merry paused. "What do you want, Croke?"

Croke closed the door carefully.

"I want a few words with you, Tom Merry," he said, coming towards the captain of the Shell, and sinking into a chair lately occupied by Monty Lowther. "I've got something rather important to say, and I've come now because Manners and Lowther aren't here."

Tom Merry looked astonished.

"You're jolly mysterious," he said.

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"May as well keep it dark if we can."
"Keep what dark?" demanded Tom Merry.
"What I'm going to tell you."
"Oh, rats! I don't want any blessed secrets with you," said Tom Merry disdainfully. "Go and tell 'em to Mellish. He'll like 'em."

"It's about the eight."

"The eight?"

"Exactly!"

"I don't understand you. What have you got to tell me about the eight that I don't know?" demanded Tom Merry impatiently.

"You haven't decided on No. 8 yet?"

"Yes; I've practically decided on Noble—Kangaroo."

"You'd better undecide again; then," said Croke, with a very unpleasant glance.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I've told you before—what I said to you yesterday—that I want to row in the eight, and I've made up my mind on the subject."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I watched you row this morning," he said. "You didn't do so badly as I expected, but nothing up to the form we want for the eight. You haven't got a dog's chance. Now, will you buzz off, and let me get my lines done."

"Wait a bit! You refuse to put me into the eight?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then I shall have to make you."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Make me!" he repeated, as if scarcely able to believe his ears.

"That's what I said," replied Croke coolly.

The captain of the Shell rose to his feet. Croke did not move, but his eyes glittered unpleasantly as they fastened upon his Form captain.

"You'd better get out," said Tom Merry quietly. "I don't want a row with you, Croke, but I don't allow anybody to talk to me like that. The sooner you get outside this study the better."

"I am going to row in the eight."

"You are going to do nothing of the sort. Now get out."

Croke did not stir.

"I'm not finished yet," he said. "I've told you that I've made up my mind on the subject; and if you don't put me in the crew, I'm going to make you. You don't think I can do it?"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh of contemptuous amusement.

"How could you make me?" he said. "You're not proposing to lick me, I suppose? You couldn't do it, and even if you could, it wouldn't make any difference. Nothing could make me put you into the junior School House eight."

"You are going to put me into the eight," said Croke coolly, "and you are going to take me up generally. You're going to chum with me in public, take me out to rowing practice, treat me with respect, and generally toe the line."

"I suppose you're off your rocker."

"Not at all."

"Then what's going to make me do all this?" asked Tom Merry, in scornful wonder.

"You're going to do it because I've got the whip hand of you, and I'm going to make you."

"The whip hand of me!"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"Your friendship for Monty Lowther," said Croke.

Tom Merry started.

"Lowther! What's Lowther got to do with it?"

"I have only to open my mouth to get him expelled in disgrace from St. Jim's," said Croke icily. "If you want to save him, you've got to toe the line."

"Lowther—expelled!"

"Yes!"

"How? Why? Are you mad?"

"Because he's a thief!"

"Lowther?"

"Yes— Oh!"

Crash!

Tom Merry's fist lashed out like lightning, and Croke went backwards over a chair under the crashing blow.

The chair crashed on the floor, and Croke bumped down beside it, and lay there gasping and panting, and stuttering.

Tom Merry stood over him with clenched fists and flashing eyes.

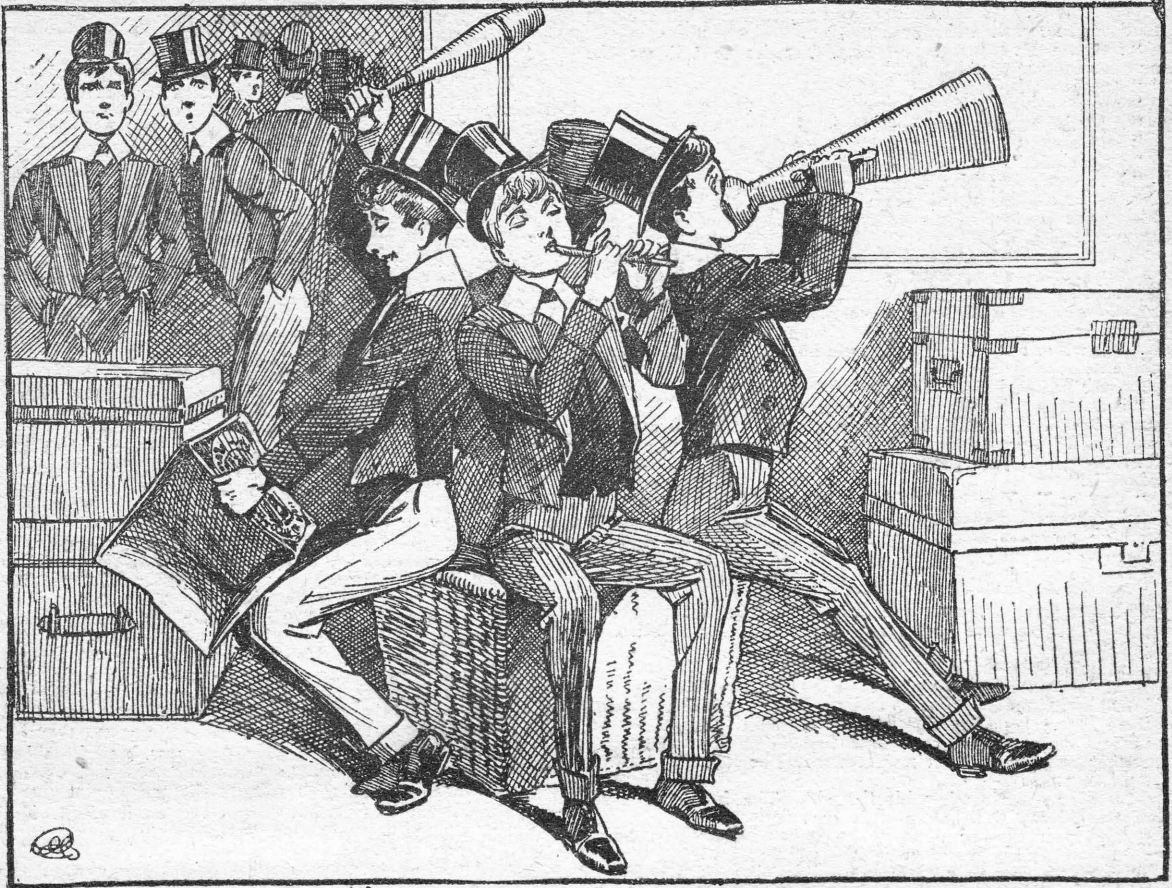
"You hound!" he said, between his teeth. "Get up, and say it again, and I'll give you the licking of your life!"

Croke lay on the floor, regarding him with eyes that burned with deadly hatred.

"Get up!" said Tom Merry scornfully.

"Hang you!"

"Get up and repeat what you said, if you want to be handled again."



The Famous Four sat upon the hamper, and they made their presence heard over the whole station. "It's—it's disgraceful!" gasped Coker. "It's like Hampstead Heath on a giddy Bank Holiday." An incident in the splendid, long, complete tale of school life, entitled: "**THE SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE**," by Frank Richards, which is contained in this week's issue of "**THE MAGNET**" LIBRARY. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

"I won't repeat it here," Crooke muttered, "I'll repeat it in the Head's study, Tom Merry. You shall be sorry that you treated me like this. You could have saved Lowther from being sacked; you haven't chosen to do it. When he goes, remember you could have saved him, that's all. I'm going to the Head."

He rose to his feet, and turned to the door.

Tom Merry watched him in silence.

There was something so determined and decided in Crooke's manner that it struck a chill to the heart of the Shell captain.

Was there anything in the rascal's threat? Was Monty Lowther in danger of being expelled? It was impossible! Yet—What did Crooke mean? He had made the statement, and he could not, of course, expect Tom Merry to accept it without proof. What proofs could he have to offer? What did it all mean?

Crooke's hand was on the door.

Tom Merry made a movement.

"Hold on, Crooke!"

Crooke paused.

"What do you want?" he sneered.

"I want to know what you've got against Lowther. If it's some yarn that you've trumped up about him—as it must be—"

"You'd better accuse D'Arcy of trumping it up, not me."

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "D'Arcy, of the Fourth?"

"Yes, D'Arcy of the Fourth."

"What has he to do with it?"

"It was his postal-order."

"His postal-order!" Tom Merry repeated, his heart sinking. "You're talking in rotten riddles. What do you mean? I remember now that D'Arcy said he had lost a postal-order, but I dare say he has found it by this time. He's always losing things and finding them."

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"He won't find this one," he said, "unless he looks into Dame Taggles' till for it. The postal-order Monty Lowther changed at Mrs. Taggles's to-day was the one D'Arcy, of the Fourth, lost last night."

"It's a lie!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

"The number is the same."

Tom Merry staggered.

"The number! Impossible!"

"Impossible or not, it's true. I asked D'Arcy to write to his pater to get the number of the postal-order, and he wouldn't. As a matter of fact, he more than half suspects that Lowther pinched the postal-order when he went to his dorm last night, under cover of playing that jape with the alarm-clock."

"He—he couldn't suspect Lowther!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Well, at all events, he wouldn't ask his pater for the number of the postal-order. But I meant to know it, because I suspected. I felt jolly sure that Lowther didn't take the trouble to get up in the middle of the night just to play a jape with an alarm-clock. I sent a telegram this afternoon to D'Arcy's father, asking the number of the postal-order, in D'Arcy's name, the reply to be sent to a shop in Rylcombe. I called there in D'Arcy's name, and got the reply wire. I had to do it in D'Arcy's name, of course, or I shouldn't have had an answer from his pater. Here is the answer."

He held out the telegram.

Tom Merry grasped it with an unsteady hand.

"Handed in at Easthorpe.

"00186. Eastwood."

That was all. It was evidently the reply of Lord Eastwood to the wire he had supposed to be sent by his son, asking the number of the missing postal-order.

"That's the number of D'Arcy's postal-order," said Tom Merry.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "**AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR!**" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Merry huskily. "But how dare you say that it is the same as that Lowther cashed this evening?"

"Because I've just asked Mrs. Taggles to tell me the number of that postal-order."

"And she told you?"

"Yes!"

"And the number was—?"

"The same."

"Impossible."

"You can go to Mrs. Taggles and ask her yourself," said Crooke carelessly, "and you can write to Lord Eastwood, asking the number of the order again, if you choose. As a matter of fact, it's all quite clear, and you can see it as well as I can. Lowther pinched the postal-order last night when he was pretending he went to the Fourth-Form dormitory to jape Gussy over the alarm-clock. He pretended to get a postal-order in a letter to-day to account for having one."

Tom Merry started again. He remembered that the letter from Lowther's uncle had not read like a letter in which a tip was enclosed.

Crooke watched him with a sneering smile.

"I don't want to make this public," he said. "If you want to let Lowther off, well and good. Don't say a word to him, and I'll keep mum. But I've got the whip hand of you, Tom Merry, if you want to save Lowther, and don't you forget it."

"You cad! You cad! Listen to me! I shall write to Lord Eastwood, and ask him to tell me the number, and I shall go down to Dame Taggles', and look at that postal-order she has."

Crooke nodded.

"Quite right," he said. "After you've done both, and had your reply from D'Arcy's governor, we'll talk of the matter again. Till then we won't say anything more about the eight."

And he left the study.

Tom Merry sank into a chair.

What did Crooke's coolness and confidence mean?

Tom Merry hoped against hope; but in his heart of hearts he knew that Crooke's confidence had its foundation in the fact that he knew that the numbers would be found the same.

And that meant—

Tom Merry sat in miserable thought. The door opened at last, and Monty Lowther came in cheerfully.

"Ain't you coming down?" he demanded. "I've been waiting to play a game of chess with you."

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"I—I don't feel very well," he stammered. "I—I think I'll go to bed."

Lowther looked at him in concern.

"You were all right when I went down!" he exclaimed. "Jolly queer you should come over like this. What is it?"

"I—I'm a bit seedy."

"You look as if you'd had a shock," said Lowther. "Let me come up to the dorm. with you; you're white as chalk."

"I shall be all right."

"Dash it all, let me take your arm."

Tom Merry jerked his arm back.

"I tell you I shall be all right!" he exclaimed almost fiercely. "I can manage!"

And he hurried out of the study. Monty Lowther gazed after him in silent, blank astonishment. He could see that Tom Merry was not quite himself, but why his chum should have been so ratty with him was a mystery.

"What on earth's the matter?" Lowther muttered, at last. "Tom can't be waxy with me about anything. I say, Manners," he added, as his chum came into the study, "is anything the matter with Tommy?"

"Not that I know of," said Manners, in surprise. "That cad Crooke has been in here, I believe, but I suppose that wouldn't hurt Tommy. Where is he?"

"He says he's seedy, and he's gone to bed," said Lowther seriously. "But he looked to me as much ratty as seedy."

"Oh, rot!" said Manners.

But Monty Lowther thought it over for some time, and when the Shell went up to bed, Monty paused by his chum's bedside. But Tom Merry was apparently asleep.

CHAPTER 10.

The Whip Hand.

TOM MERRY came down the next morning looking very different from his usual self.

There was a wrinkle in his boyish brow, and a pre-occupation in his manner, that his chums noticed at once.

But it was useless to ask him what was the matter.

He replied evasively, or shook his head impatiently and did not reply at all.

"The ass has got something on his little mind," said Monty Lowther to Manners. "He was queer last night, as I told you."

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"Seedy, perhaps," said Manners.

"It's queer."

"Yes, isn't it?"

After morning lessons that day, Tom Merry joined Arthur Augustus D'Arcy when the Fourth came out of their Form-room.

"You haven't found that postal-order yet, D'Arcy, I suppose?" he said abruptly.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Do you know the number of it?"

"No."

"Haven't you written to your pater to ask?"

"No, deah boy."

"Why not?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Oh, I'm goin' to let the mattah dwop, you know," said D'Arcy. "I dare say the wotten thing will turn up somewhere."

"I want to know the number," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know—"

"Will you write to your father and ask—or, rather, wire to him? I want to know it. You needn't ask me why, but I want to know."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I won't ask you any questions, Tom Mewwy, deah boy," he said quietly. "I'll do just as you like. I'll wiah at once, and ask my govannah to write, and I shall get his weply by to-night."

"Thanks very much."

And Tom Merry did not speak on the subject again.

Crooke avoided Tom Merry during that day. It was evidently his intention not to speak again until Tom Merry had obtained the proofs he wanted. Then, when it was clear that the cad of the Shell held the whip hand, it would be time to speak.

The day was a miserable one for Tom Merry.

He avoided his chums; he could not endure their inquiring glances. They had left off asking him questions, but they were evidently very much surprised and hurt by his want of confidence in them.

It was after tea when Arthur Augustus brought a letter to Tom Merry in the quad. Lord Eastwood had evidently replied immediately after receiving the wire.

"It's wathah wemarkable," said the swell of St. Jim's, looking perplexed. "Wead it."

Tom Merry read the letter.

"Dear Arthur—I have already wired you the number, as you asked me. It is 00186. I hope you have found the postal-order by this time. You are very careless, and I am glad it was not the five-pound note you asked me for.—Your affectionate Father."

"I haven't had any wiah, you know," D'Arcy remarked. "Somebody else wired for the number in your name," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! What an awful nerve!"

"00186," said Tom Merry. "That's plain enough."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thank you very much, D'Arcy. By the way, are you going to do anything about this?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Nothin', deah boy."

"You are going to keep that number to yourself?"

"Yaas; I shall destwoy this letter immediately."

"Good," said Tom Merry.

He did not ask D'Arcy his reasons. He knew them already. The swell of St. Jim's suspected Lowther, and he would not be the one to begin a scandal.

Was it possible that Lowther had taken the postal-order? Tom Merry asked himself, as he walked away.

He realised that the question should rather have been—was it possible that he had not taken it?

The order Lowther had declared came in the letter from his uncle bore the same number as the one Lord Eastwood had sent to his son.

Could anything be more clear?

Two postal-orders could not have the same number, and therefore the postal-order was the same—and therefore it was inevitable that Lowther had taken the order, and had pretended to receive it in the letter from his uncle.

Tom Merry's faith in his chum had been complete, absolute. But in the face of evidence like this what was he to believe?

He shrank from speaking to Lowther about it.

What could Lowther say?

Deny that the postal-orders were the same, when Tom Merry knew that they were the same? What could he possibly say? Admit that he had stolen it? It would hardly be possible for him to brazen it out.

Tom Merry shuddered at the thought of such a scene.

What had happened was utterly out of accordance with

Monty Lowther's character. Tom would have staked his life upon Monty's honour.

But it had happened!

The only thing was to keep it a dead secret; to save his chum from the consequences of his dishonest action.

Lowther had acted badly enough, but to see him disgraced and expelled from the school would be too terrible.

To keep on friendly terms with him would be hard enough. Tom Merry would have to try to bury his knowledge, as it were—to forget the horrible occurrence.

But he knew that he could not.

In spite of any efforts he could make, he would not be able to act towards Lowther as if he still believed in him.

And there was another factor in the problem—Crooke.

Crooke had said that he had the whip hand now, and undoubtedly he had it. For he knew the whole story, and he had only to open his lips to disgrace Monty Lowther and ruin him for life.

And if Tom Merry wanted to save his misguided chum, he had to make terms with the cad of the Shell.

Crooke had already stated his terms. He wanted to be taken up, and to be put in the crew next week—that was his price.

Tom Merry went into the Form-room to think it over. He wanted to be alone. But Crooke's eye was upon him. The cad of the Shell followed him in.

Tom Merry turned round upon him, his hands clenched and his eyes gleaming. He would have given a great deal to spring upon the cad of the Shell, and knock him right and left. But he dared not, for Lowther's sake.

"Well?" said Crooke, in his disagreeable tones. "You've seen the answer from Lord Eastwood?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"You've got the number?"

"Yes."

"You've seen Mrs. Taggles' postal-order?"

"Yes."

"Are the numbers the same?"

"Yes."

Crooke grinned.

"Then you know now what Monty Lowther went into the Fourth-Form dormitory for on Tuesday night, when he pretended he was going to rag Gussy's alarm-clock?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"What are you going to do?" asked Crooke. "I suppose it's your duty as captain of the Shell to give Lowther away, and get him sacked?"

Tom Merry shivered.

"That's not my duty, as I see it," he said in a low tone.

"Well, he's a thief, isn't he?"

"Hold your tongue!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"What are you going to do?" he repeated. "You know the truth, and D'Arcy suspects it. I know it, and there's no love lost between me and Lowther, and there never was. I've no reason for keeping his secret."

"I know that."

"Do you want it kept dark?"

"Yes."

"You ask me to keep it dark?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry with an effort.

The cad of the Shell grinned.

"You know the price," he remarked.

"You rotten cad!" said Tom Merry passionately. "If I put you in the eight, the other fellows won't row with such an awful cad as you are. They'll resign."

Crooke laughed.

"I'll risk that," he remarked. "If you chum up with me in a very devoted way, they will swallow me whole, I dare say."

"Chum up with you!" said Tom Merry, with a gesture of disgust.

Crooke nodded coolly.

"Yes! Why not?"

"Do you know what you're doing—this is blackmail!"

"Well, even if it is, a blackmailer is not worse than a thief, and you've chummed up with a thief, haven't you?"

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"Besides, I shall do you credit!" said Crooke coolly. "I can row, and if you give me some good coaching, I shall go ahead splendidly. The fact is, I'm tired of being a black sheep, and having to hang round with fellows like Mellish and Levison, whom nobody else wants to speak to. I'm going in for something better this term; and you're going to help me."

"Something better—and you're beginning by blackmail!" said Tom Merry bitterly.

"Well I must make a beginning somehow. I asked you to put me in the eight, and you refused. Now I've got the whip hand, you can't refuse!"

"I don't know—I—"

"I don't ask you to announce at once that I'm going into the eight. Just let it get out that you're taking me up in a friendly way to coach me in rowing. The rest can be let out later."

"And if I don't—"

"If you don't, I'm going straight to Mr. Linton to tell him that there is a thief in the Shell, and you and D'Arcy will be called upon to give evidence against Lowther."

Tom Merry's lips set.

"You rotten cad! I'm in your hands, and, I suppose, you can dictate your own terms!"

"Exactly. It seems to have taken you a long time to find that out, and I'm glad you've got on to it at last!" said Crooke, with a yawn.

"Get out, now—leave me alone!"

And Crooke got out, contentedly enough. He had the whip hand, and he was using it without mercy, and he was quite willing to be good-tempered and obliging about it.

CHAPTER II.

Tom Merry Causes Surprise!

"WHAT on earth's the matter with Tom Merry?" That question was asked up and down St. Jim's during the next day or two.

Certainly the conduct of the captain of the Shell was unusual and surprising.

Tom Merry had lost much of his old cheeriness of manner, and he did not seem so keen about cricket, and even the question of the eights did not move him to enthusiasm.

He was not so chummy with Manners and Lowther, and avoided being left alone with them.

Strangest of all, he had taken up a new chum.

And that chum, of all people, was Crooke, of the Shell.

It was amazing.

True, Tom Merry was a friendly and cordial fellow, and was always willing to be on good terms with everybody. He had a cheery nod even for fellows like Levison and Mellish. He had taken up Lumley-Lumley, when that youth turned over a new leaf and reformed, and they had been good chums ever since.

But Crooke!

Crooke certainly hadn't turned over a new leaf. He had an ambition to shine as a member of the junior eight; but he was not willing to forgo any of his bad habits as the price of shining thus.

It was perfectly well known that Crooke kept a box of cigarettes in his study and smoked them as much as usual; that he had shady friends outside the school, and had no intention of giving them up.

Yet Tom Merry had taken up with him.

It was not only that he was taking notice of Crooke, but they were seen everywhere together. Crooke would wait for him when classes were over, and link arms with him and walk with him into the old quad. He would go down to the river with him, and they would row together, and Tom Merry was evidently very keen in coaching Crooke.

He had a reason for being keen about that. Crooke demanded a place in the junior eight as the price of his silence—and if he did not get it, he would speak. And Tom Merry, as captain of the boats, could not think of putting a fellow into the crew who could not row. If Crooke, by means of practice and assiduous coaching, could so improve his form as to be able to take his place in the eight without letting the side down, one of Tom Merry's great worries would be gone. He would be able to pay Crooke's price without dereliction of his duty as junior captain.

Tom Merry's new friendship for Crooke was far from being approved by the other fellows.

If Crooke had been decent, no one would have objected. But he wasn't decent; and for Tom Merry to take up the waster of the Shell in this way was exasperating to the other fellows.

Manners and Lowther felt very sore about it.

Hitherto the steady friendship of the Terrible Three had been unbroken. There had been little rubs and troubles at times, certainly, but they had always blown over. The three were inseparable; the idea of anything happening to separate them, and make them cold to one another, had never occurred to any of them.

But it was coming now.

Tom Merry avoided Monty Lowther; and as he could not explain, and would not explain why he did it, Manners naturally took Lowther's side in the matter.

The consequence was, that Tom Merry saw less and less of Manners.

It looked as if the captain of the Shell had thrown over his two tried and true old chums for the sake of a new friend.

Disloyalty of that kind was utterly unlike all that was known of Tom Merry, and the fellows simply could not understand it.

For some days Manners and Lowther nursed their injuries

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in silence, growing more and more sullen about it, but too proud to say anything on the subject to Tom Merry. If he did not want them, if he preferred the society of the cad of the Shell to theirs, he could have his own way, that was all.

They were bitterly hurt; but they would not speak. Indeed, the more they were hurt, the less likely they were to speak.

But that could not last; and it came out after a time. On Saturday afternoon there was practice with the boats. It was a blazing July afternoon, and the river was flowing golden under the big trees, when the juniors turned out. Tom Merry called the eight together for practice, and they gathered outside the School House. Kangaroo, of the Shell, joined them. The Cornstalk junior had hopes of being No. 8 in the boat when the race was rowed with the New House juniors. Crooke, of the Shell, came out in a blazer, looking more fit than usual. The rowing of the past few days had certainly done him good, and there was more colour in his pasty face, and a new alertness in his movements.

"We're going to have the eight-oar out for a run as far as the Pool," Tom Merry said.

"I suppose I'm coming?" said Crooke.

"Yes!"

Monty Lowther uttered an exclamation.

"Is Crooke going to practice with the eight, Tom Merry?"

"Yes!"

"What about Kangaroo?"

"Nothing!"

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Kangaroo in dismay. "I was beginning to count on it, Merry, old man. I don't want to shove myself in, of course, but I think you might give me a run with the eight. I know Reilly and Lumley-Lumley are good enough; but it's a bit thick putting a chap like Crooke over my head!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon Tom Merry disapprovingly. "I weally weald regard that as wathah thick, Tom Mewwy!"

Crooke sneered.

"Who's captain of the junior boats?" he demanded.

"Tom Mewwy is! But—"

"Well, then, can't you allow your own skipper to know his own business best?"

"Weally, Cwooke—"

"If Tom Merry says I'm to row, I'm going to row, and you and Noble can go and eat coke!" said Crooke.

Tom Merry looked worried.

"I haven't decided to put Crooke into the eight next week, yet!" he said. "But I want to see how he shapes in practice with a full crew to-day."

"But you don't mean to say that you think Crooke's form is up to Kangy's?" demanded Jack Blake.

"I should weald regard such a view as wiculous!"

"What-ho!" said Manners emphatically.

Tom Merry made an irritable gesture. During the past few days his temper was not so kind as of old.

"Oh, for goodness' sake let's have a little less jaw!" he exclaimed. "If you fellows don't want me to skipper the boat, I'm willing to resign."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Nobody's suggesting that!" said Kangaroo quietly. "I suppose I'd better say nothing; but I don't understand this, that's all, Tom Merry!"

And the Cornstalk walked away.

"And I jolly well don't understand it, either!" said Monty Lowther warmly. "I don't understand passing over a decent chap and a good oar to put in a fellow like Crooke, and that's plain!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. "The less you say about it the better!" he exclaimed.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Oh, rats! Let's get down to the river!"

And Tom Merry walked away to the boat-house, and the rest of the crew followed, in an extremely bad humour.

It was not the humour in which to do good rowing.

The School House junior crew contrasted very much with Figgins & Co., of the New House, who were also on the river for practice on that golden afternoon.

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Figgins & Co. were in splendid form.

The sight of the New House junior eight pulling away in fine style increased the ill-humour of the School House crew.

They certainly did not make so good a show at practice, whatever they might do when the actual race came off the following Saturday.

After the practice, when they landed, Monty Lowther and Manners walked away by themselves, without saying anything to Tom Merry. Crooke had slipped his arm through Tom Merry's in a very familiar way, and the sight of that made the chums of the Shell simply wild. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave Crooke a glance through his eyeglass, and walked away after Manners and Lowther. Blake looked curiously at Tom Merry; the captain of the Shell had his eyes on the ground, and Blake was quite keen enough to see that he disliked Crooke's familiarity, and he was very much puzzled to know why Tom Merry did not resent it.

Blake slipped his arm into Tom Merry's other arm. The fellows lined up arm-in-arm to walk back to the school; Crooke, at all events, in a good temper and high spirits. He knew how everyone there resented his presence, but that only gave him a sense of power and added a zest to his enjoyment.

"We shall beat the New House all right," he remarked.

Blake grunted.

"We sha'n't beat them if we don't do better than we've done this afternoon," he said tartly.

"Oh, you fellows will have to buck up!"

"Shall we?" exclaimed Blake angrily. "I think it's Tom Merry who will have to buck up, and kick you out of the eight, Crooke. That's all we want to make us win."

"Yes, rather," said Herries.

Crooke swung round angrily towards Blake.

"Mind your own business," he said savagely. "Tom Merry will please himself about whom he puts in the crew, I suppose?"

"He's not pleasing himself," said Blake bluntly. "I don't know what the little game is, or how you're working it, but Tom Merry doesn't want you with us any more than we do."

"Jolly plain to see, that is," said Clifton Dane, the coxswain of the School House boat.

Tom Merry coloured. The Canadian junior spoke the truth; his expression was more candid than his tongue with regard to Crooke.

"Let Tom Merry speak for himself," said Crooke. "Didn't you ask me to come down to boat-practice this afternoon, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Crooke."

"Well, I can't make it out," said Blake. "Blessed if I understand you at all lately, Tom Merry. Looks to me as if you're off your silly rocker!"

And Blake went into the School House very much puzzled.

CHAPTER 12.

The Old Chums or the New?

TOM MERRY came into his study in the Shell passage, and found a cheery scent of frying permeating that apartment. There was a frying-pan on the fire, and there was bacon in the frying-pan, sizzling away merrily. Manners was cooking it, and Monty Lowther was cutting

bread at the table—and incidentally cutting the table-cloth. But he did not notice it. He was in a very preoccupied frame of mind. He did not look up as Tom Merry came in, but Manners looked round from the fire. Manners's face was a deep crimson. The July weather was warm, and the fire made the study very hot, and Manners seemed to be cooking himself almost as much as the rashers in the frying-pan.

"Hallo!" said Manners, not quite so cheerily as of old. "We've got tea nearly ready. I suppose you're hungry after the river, Tommy?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"Good! There's plenty of rashers for tea."

"I—I— Crooke's asked me to tea in his study," said Tom Merry hesitatingly, and Manners gave him a look, and turned back to the frying-bacon without another word. He jabbed savagely at an unoffending rasher, however.

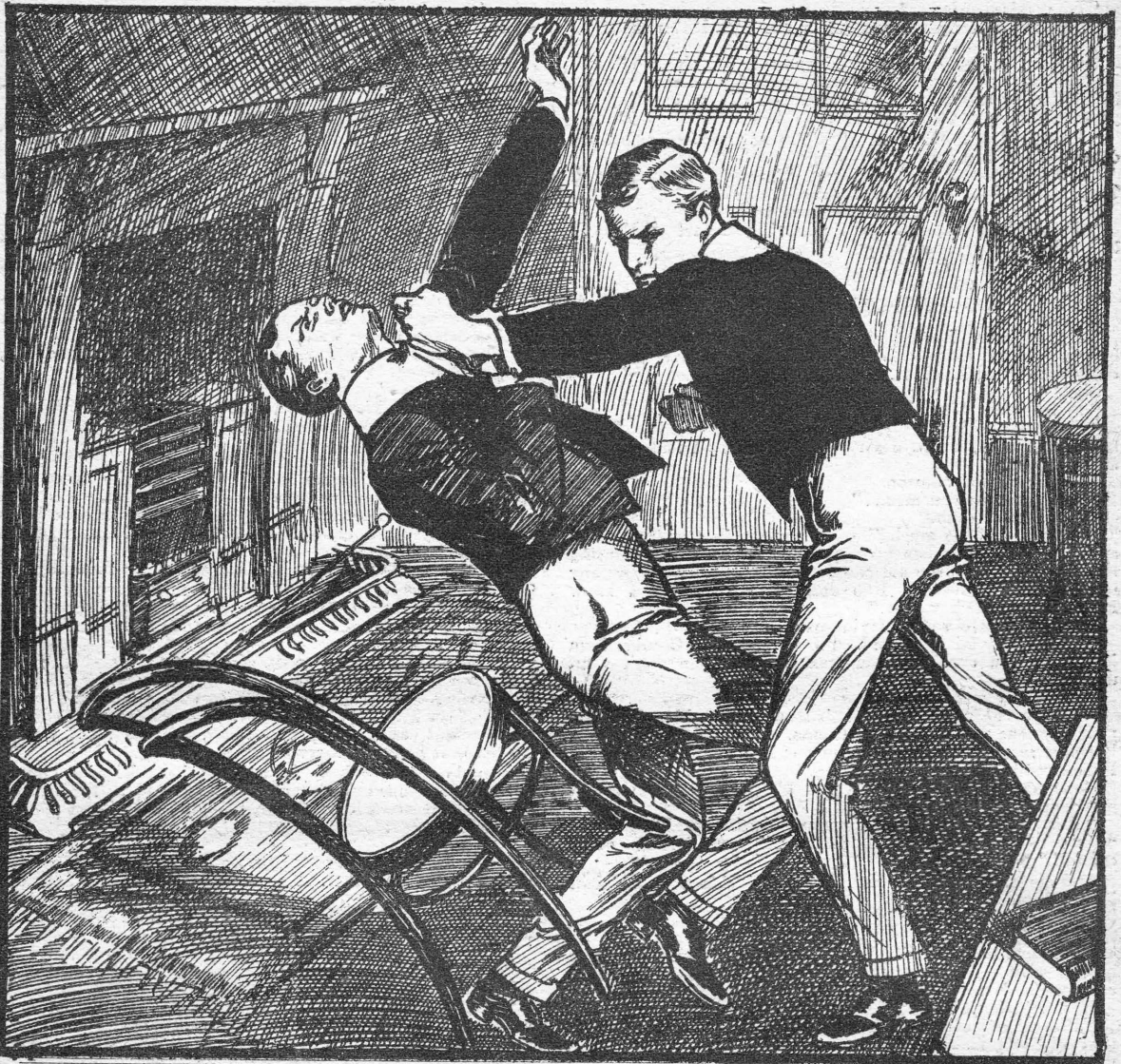
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"I have only to open my mouth to get Lowther expelled in disgrace from St. Jim's," said Crooke. "He's a thief— Oh!" Crash! Tom Merry's fist lashed out like lightning, and Crooke went backwards over a chair under the crashing blow. (See Chapter 19.)

Monty Lowther laid down the loaf he was dissecting, and looked at Tom Merry. There was a disagreeable tightness about Lowther's lips.

"You've refused?" he asked.

"No."

"You're going to tea with Crooke?"

"I told him I would."

"Without asking us whether we wanted you or not?"

"Well, I—I thought I could have tea with Crooke, you know."

"Crooke—the rottenest cad in the school since Levison went," said Monty Lowther. "I must say I can't compliment you on your choice of friends."

"Very likely," said Tom Merry bitterly.

"Look here," said Lowther. "I'm getting fed up with this. I don't know what to make of it, and I don't like it. I didn't mean to say anything, but it's getting too thick!"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Manners agrees with me, I know that," added Lowther. "Don't you, Manners?"

"Well, yes," said Manners, stirring the bacon. "I wasn't going to say anything, either, but since you mention it, I think it is rather thick."

"If you want to throw over your old friends for new ones, Tom Merry, you'd better say so out plainly," said Monty Lowther abruptly. "If that's the case, it's your own business if you pick out the worst cad in the School House to chum with, I suppose."

"Quite so," said Manners.

"You can take up Crooke, if you like, but we're jolly well not going to," said Lowther. "If it were possible, I should fancy that the rotter had some kind of a hold over you."

"Looks like it," came from Manners.

"He's a rotter all the way through," went on Lowther. "Only this morning I caught him bullying little Joe Frayne of the Third, and gave him one in the eye."

"I'd have given him one in the other if I'd been there," said Manners.

Tom Merry was silent.

He could not say that he thought exactly the same of the cad of the Shell as his chums did; and that every friendly advance Crooke made revolted him.

His conduct appeared singular enough now; and it would certainly appear more singular still if he gave expression to the feelings with which Crooke inspired him.

And he could not admit that Crooke had a hold upon him; that it was for the sake of his chum that he was enduring the intolerable familiarity of the cad of the Shell. That, at least, must remain a dead secret.

"Well," broke out Lowther, "what have you got to say?"

"Nothing."

"You're going to tea with Crooke?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"What have you taken him up for?"

No reply.

"Are you going to put him in the eight?"

"I haven't decided yet."
 "You know Kangaroo and Reilly are both better men?"
 No answer.
 "Well, I'm sick of it, and Manners is fed up, too," said Lowther savagely. "If you want Crooke for a chum, you can have him, or any other blackguard you like to dig up; but you can't have us too."
 "Exactly," said Manners. "We're not particular, but we draw the line at Crooke."
 "I don't want to part with you, Manners, old man," said Tom Merry, in a constrained voice.
 Monty Lowther flashed out at once.
 "That means that you don't mind if you part with me?" he exclaimed.
 Tom Merry did not reply.
 Lowther's eyes blazed.
 "Have you got anything up against me, Tom Merry?"
 Silence.
 "If you have, I want you to speak it out like a decent fellow, and not keep it to yourself and brood over it like a sulky cad," said Lowther.
 Silence.
 "Is there anything, I say?"
 "I've got nothing to say," said Tom Merry quietly. "You know best whether you deserve a decent chap's friendship or not."
 Lowther turned crimson.
 "I! What do you mean?"
 "I've said enough."
 "You've said too much!" said Lowther, in a white heat of anger. "You've taken up a new chum, and you're hunting for excuses to drop the old ones. Well, I won't give you any need to find excuses. I've done with you, and I know Manners will stick to me."
 Manners turned round, frying-pan in hand.
 "That's only fair," he said. "I can't swallow Crooke, Tom Merry, if you can. If you want Crooke, you don't want us."
 Tom Merry was very pale.
 "You can change into Crooke's study, if you like, and have your precious new chum noon, and night," said Monty Lowther scornfully; "and if you put him in the boat's crew, I shall resign, I give you warning."
 Manners nodded.
 "Same here," he said.
 "Resign, and be hanged to you!" broke out Tom Merry angrily. "I can find fellows to fill your places easily enough."
 And he strode out of the study, and slammed the door behind him.
 Manners and Lowther looked at one another.
 "What's the matter with him?" Lowther exclaimed, his anger fading away. "He looks frightfully worried—and he's in the wrong—he must know that he's in the wrong—and it's not like him to stick it out like this."
 Manners shook his head.
 "Blessed if I can make it out!" he said. "I don't believe that at heart he likes Crooke any more than we do. He's got under his influence somehow, but I'm blessed if I can understand how."
 Monty Lowther wrinkled his brows in thought.
 "Crooke is a cunning rotter," he said. "He's about as deep as they're made. But I don't see how he could get Tom Merry under his thumb unless Tom Merry chose."
 "It's jolly queer altogether."
 Lowther's face set grimly.
 "Well, if he chooses to stick to Crooke, that settles it—I mean what I told him. I am not going to chum with a fellow who chums with that awful outsider!"
 And Manners nodded assent.

CHAPTER 13.
 A Change of Attire.

FIGGINS burst into a sudden chuckle.
 Figgins & Co. were drifting gently along the Ryll, under the wide-spreading branches of the trees on the bank, and looking towards the shallow portion of the Pool where the juniors of St. Jim's were accustomed to bathe. Heads were dotting the water and glimmering in the bright July sunshine. Several fellows in bathing costume were on the bank under the trees. They were all School House fellows, enjoying a dip in the river on that blazing afternoon, after the eights' practice was over.
 But it was not the sight of the bathers that made Figgins chuckle. Standing up in the boat, the captain of the New House juniors could see something that was hidden from the view of the School House bathers.

Redfern, of the Fourth, was among the trees on the shore, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 230.

carefully and cautiously creeping down to the riverside, with all the cunning and skill of a Red Indian or a Boy Scout.

Redfern had a big bundle in his arms, evidently containing clothes. He reached the last belt of thicket separating him from the bathers, and there he deposited the bundle of clothes.

The New House boat drifted down towards the bathers. Figgins & Co. called out to them cheerily:

"Hallo! Having a much-needed wash?" asked Figgins.
 "Has the order gone forth that the School House shall bathe every week or so?" asked Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The School House juniors glared in response.
 "Oh, sheer off!" said Manners. "Go and eat coke!"
 "Yaas, wathah! Pway cleah off, you New House wottahs!"

"Oh, rats! We're going to watch the extraordinary phenomenon," said Lawrence, of the Fourth. "We don't see the School House wash every day."

"We don't see the results of much washing, either," remarked Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Get out, you New House rotters!"
 "Let's swamp the blessed boat!" shouted Blake.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Hurrah!"

A crowd of swimmers started towards the boat. The School House fellows on the bank jumped into the water and joined the rest. Figgins & Co. put out their oars and pulled gently away—just enough to keep out of reach of the swimmers.

Redfern, on the bank, chuckled as he watched Figgins's cunning manoeuvre from the bushes.

Figgins had drawn Blake & Co. away from the shore where the clothes of the bathers were deposited, and given Redfern his opportunity.

Redfern did not let it pass.
 He ran out of the thicket and whipped up the clothes in a twinkling. While the School House swimmers had eyes only for the New House boat, Redfern was gathering up trousers, and jackets, and shirts, and socks, till his arms were so loaded that he could carry no more.

Then he plunged back into the bushes. Figgins had one eye on him from the boat all the time, and as Redfern disappeared, laden with plunder, Figgins called out cheerily to his comrades:

"Buck up!"
 The New House rowers bent to their oars, and the boat shot away up the river. The swimmers were left hopelessly behind.

Figgins waved his hand to the infuriated School House fellows.

"Ta-ta!" he called out.
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Yah! You rotter!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co. "Get on with the washing! You need it! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the boat glided away. The swimmers returned to their bathing-ground, and the New House fellows pulled further up the stream and in to the shore. Redfern came out of the wood laden with raided clothes.

"Here we are again!" said Redfern, with a chuckle.
 Figgins roared.
 "Ha, ha, ha! They've got a change of clothes, so they can't grumble. Get 'em into the boat, in case any of the bouncers come along the bank."

"Good egg! Here you are!"
 The School House garments were tossed in a heap into the boat.

Redfern jumped in after them, grinning, and took his place at the oars. The boat pushed off from the shore again.

"We'll go and see 'em dress," grinned Kerr.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 And the New House boat glided down towards the Pool once more. A yell from the bathers greeted them as they came in sight:

"Here come those New House rotters again!" exclaimed Brooke, of the Fourth. "We'll have the boat over this time!"

"If they come near enough," said Lowther. "But they won't."

Figgins stood up in the boat and waved his hand.
 "Hallo, School House! Ain't you nearly clean enough yet?"

"Bai Jove!"
 "Isn't it time you got your togs on?" asked Redfern. "I thought you'd like a change, and I've provided you with one. No extra charge."
 "What?"

Kerr held up an armful of trousers and jackets to view.

There was a roar from the School House fellows in the water:

"They've got our clothes!"

"The rotters!"

"Bai Jove, the awful watahs! Take care of that waist-coat, Kerr, you ass—that's mine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the New House juniors.

The bathers went scrambling furiously shoreward.

They raced through the reeds and grass to where they had left their clothes. Two or three odd garments lay scattered about.

"The rotters!"

"They've waided all our clothes!"

"What on earth's this?" exclaimed Herries, dragging open the bundle Redfern had deposited by the bush.

"Clothes, by George!"

"Gals' clothes!" shrieked D'Arcy. "The awful wottahs!"

"My hat!"

There was a yell of laughter from the New House boat. The School House fellows on the bank held up the garments Redfern had provided for them, in a frenzy of rage.

Skirts and blouses galore were there, but no attire of the masculine variety.

"The fearful wottahs!"

"Done!" growled Blake. "Done brown! Br-r-r-r!"

"Yah! You New House cads! Bring us back our clothes!" roared Kangaroo.

Figgins yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha! You can have them at St. Jim's."

"At St. Jim's!" gasped Blake.

"Yes. Ha, ha, ha! Come on, you fellows!"

And the New House juniors rowed cheerfully away.

"Come back!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I uttably wefuse to return to St. Jim's in a skirt and blouse like old Watty the othah day. Come back! I ordah you to bwing back my twousahs at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come back, you rotters! Come back, you wasters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The boat pulled up the river towards St. Jim's, and vanished behind a curve in the bank. The yells of laughter from the New House juniors rang back along the river till they died away in the distance.

The School House juniors gazed in blank dismay at the garb left to them.

"Bai Jove! We can't go back to St. Jim's in bathin' costume, you know!" said Arthur Augustus. "It—it wouldn't be respectable."

"We can't go in rotten girls' clothes!" growled Kangaroo.

"Seems to me there's no choice in the matter," said Monty Lowther. "The New House have done us brown this time, and no mistake."

"The rotters! We'll make 'em sit up for this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"At present we're going to do the sitting up, it looks to me, intirely!" grinned Reilly. "We shall have to put these things on, bedad!"

"But it's imposs., deah boy!"

"It's that or bathing costume, D'Arcy, darling, and I think these things will look a little better than the others, intirely!"

There was no doubt that Reilly was right. One by one the bathers towelled themselves down, breathing fury, and donned the garments that had been left to them.

Then they returned to the school slowly and with crimson faces. And the remarks that people passed as they caught sight of them reduced them to a state bordering on lunacy before St. Jim's was reached.

CHAPTER 14.

Crooke Wins.

"HERE they come!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. were crowding round the gateway of St. Jim's as the unhappy bathers came in sight, in a very queer-looking procession.

A yell of laughter rang from the whole quadrangle.

With towlsed heads, and long, bare legs sticking out from underskirts, and arms coming out of blouses that certainly did not fit, the School House juniors presented a very strange spectacle indeed.

The New House juniors roared; and so did everybody else who caught sight of the queer procession.

The Sixth Form had been playing cricket, and they were coming off the ground as the bathers came home. They stopped to look on, roaring with laughter. Fellows gathered round from all sides, School House as well as New House, and shrieked.

The bathers, with crimson, furious faces, tramped across the quadrangle towards the School House.

The Head glanced out of his study window as he heard the yells of laughter, and he smiled—he could not help it.

In the doorway of the School House, Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, met the bathers, and he peered at them over his spectacles in utter amazement.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "What—what does this mean?"

The queer procession, with a crowd of yelling juniors behind them, halted in the doorway and on the steps of the School House.

"Blake! Is that you, Blake?"

"Yes, sir!" growled Blake.

"And D'Arcy—is that D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"What—what does this mean? How dare you come to the school clad in feminine attire—or, rather, half-clad?" gasped Mr. Lathom.

"Weally, sir—"

"It wasn't our fault, intirely!" said Reilly.

"Wathah not, sir! Surely you cannot suspect us of dwessin' in this wicidulous mannah on purpose, sir!" gasped D'Arcy.

"We've been bathing, sir," said Kangaroo, "and some awful rotters have hidden our clothes!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom.

"They left us these rotten things, sir—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the quad.

Mr. Lathom glanced out at the crowd of almost convulsed New House juniors, and perhaps he understood. He smiled.

"Well, well; go and change at once!" he said. "I hope you will recover your lost clothes again."

"Oh, that will be all right, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! Figgins will bwing them back—ow! What silly ass was that twampin' on my feet?"

But Mr. Lathom was tactful; apparently he had not heard D'Arcy's remark. He walked away smiling, and when his study door had closed upon him, he laughed.

Arthur Augustus glared at Blake.

"What did you twead on my beastly foot for, you ass?" he demanded.

"Because I couldn't tread on your silly head!" snapped Blake. "Let's get to the dorm. and get these rotten things off!"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"Oh, buck up, and don't jaw!"

The juniors tramped upstairs. Crooke, of the Shell, met them in the passage, and he burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! You fellows look a sight! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You look—ow—legoo—whoop!"

Crooke of the Shell was swept over, and the juniors walked over him. Crooke looked a sight himself by the time all the bathers had passed.

The juniors hurried into their dormitories. There, as they expected, they found their clothes. Figgins & Co. had taken the garments there. With red and furious faces they changed into more suitable attire.

When they came downstairs again they were met by a general grin.

"Never mind!" growled Blake. "We'll beat the New House bouders in the eights, and that will make 'em sing small."

"That's not likely to happen!" growled Monty Lowther.

"Why not?" demanded Blake.

"I'm not going to row."

"I don't see that that will make much difference," said Blake cheerfully. "We can have a Fourth-Form chap instead, you know."

"Why, you ass—"

"I thought all the time that Tom Merry was putting in too many Shell fellows," Blake remarked, with a shake of the head.

"Yaas, wathah! I should wecomend young Weilly of the Fourth. He is a wippin' oar; and I say that although he does not weally tweat me with pwopah wespsect, as a wule."

"But why aren't you going to row?" asked Herries.

"Because Crooke's in the crew."

"Crooke?"

"Yes," growled Lowther. "I told Tom Merry that I wouldn't row with that cad, and I mean it. If Crooke rows, I don't!"

"Bai Jove! I don't know that I care to wov with that wottah, eithah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"It's wathah wuff on a fellow's personal dig., you know, to wov with an awful cad like Cwooke."

"I don't like the idea, so far as that goes, but we can't go back on Tom Merry," said Blake thoughtfully. "Is it finally settled, Lowther?"

"Crooke says so."

"Oh, Crooke!" said Kangaroo. "Crooke wasn't born in THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 230.

the Palace of Truth, you know. I'd prefer to hear it from Tom Merry."

"Manners isn't going to row, either."

"Good! Lumley-Lumley will be all right, and it will really be making almost a Fourth-Form affair of it," remarked Digby thoughtfully. "I think that's a good idea myself."

"Oh, rats!" growled Lowther.

"But I don't believe it yet," said Blake. "Where's Tom Merry?"

"Blessed if I know, or care either."

"Hallo! Trouble in the family?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Here's Crooke!" said Lumley-Lumley, as the cad of the Shell came into the common-room. "I guess he can give us the office. Is it true you're going to row in the eight next Saturday, Crooke?"

Crooke nodded coolly.

"Yes."

"Did Tom Merry say so?"

"Yes."

"Well, I guess it beats me."

"It's all rot!" exclaimed Blake angrily.

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"Here's Tom Merry—you can ask him," he said.

Tom Merry had just come in. He did not look at either Manners or Lowther. His face was very clouded. He started as his name was shouted from all sides.

"Tom Merry—"

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy—"

"Is it true, Merry?"

"What do you mean, you bounder?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"They want to know whether you've decided to put me into the eight," said Crooke, in explanation, as Tom Merry cast a troubled look round.

The captain of the Shell flushed.

"Oh, that?" he said. "Yes, you fellows. Crooke has been improving very much, and he pulled very well to-day. If he keeps up the practice steadily, I've told him he can row in the eight next Saturday."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Lowther and Manners say they won't row with Crooke," said Blake.

"Other fellows will!" sneered Crooke.

Blake looked very much troubled. He came over towards Tom Merry, and looked him in the face. The captain of the Shell did not meet his eyes.

"What are you putting Crooke in for, Tom Merry?" Blake asked directly.

"I think he will be all right."

"Do you think he'll be as good as Noble or Reilly?"

"I hope so."

"But do you think so?" persisted Blake.

Tom Merry made an irritable gesture.

"Oh, don't catechise me!" he exclaimed. "Crooke's going in, if he's good enough—and I think his form will be all right. He's panned out wonderfully well the last few days. And I'm not going to argue about it, either."

"A giddy Czar, and no mistake!" said Glyn, with a sniff.

"Yaas, wathah; Tom Mewwy, I object—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Crooke's going in, if he seems good enough next week, anyway," said Tom Merry, "and that settles it. And now don't jaw me any more; I'm fed up with the subject."

"Then there's only one thing we can suppose," said Blake angrily, "and that is, that Crooke has worked this somehow. He's got the whip hand of you in some way we don't understand, and he's made you do this."

Tom Merry's face flushed crimson, and then it went deadly pale. He turned away without answering, and left the common-room. He left the room in a buzz behind him, but Jack Blake did not talk with the rest. Blake was very silent and thoughtful, for Tom Merry's look had made Blake feel quite certain that he was correct in his surmise, and he was trying to think it out.

CHAPTER 15.

D'Arcy Knows.

JACK BLAKE came into Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage, and threw his cap into a corner, and grunted.

It was two or three days since the announcement by Crooke of the Shell that he was to row in the eight—the announcement which had not been contradicted by Tom Merry.

During that time there had been a great deal of unrest among the School House junior oarsmen.

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Nobody wanted to row with Crooke.

Although there was nothing definite to base such a surmise upon, some of the fellows felt that there was something underhand in the matter—that Tom Merry had yielded to the cad of the Shell for reasons which he had not stated in public.

Tom Merry had declared that, with the practice Crooke was undertaking and the coaching he was giving him, Crooke would be able to "keep his end up" when the time came for the two eights to contest on the waters of the Ryll.

It was quite possible that that would be the case, and, indeed, nobody believed that Tom Merry would, upon any consideration, put a man into the crew who was not suited for the work, and who would be sure to let the House down.

But there was nobody in the School House, excepting Crooke himself, who thought that Crooke would be so reliable as Lumley-Lumley, or Reilly, or Harry Noble.

What was Tom Merry thinking of?

Why had he yielded to Crooke? Why had he taken up with the cad of the Shell at all? It was impossible to say. It was not as if Crooke had reformed, as Lumley-Lumley had done. Crooke was certainly going in strong for boating practice, but in other respects his ways were unchanged.

He was the last fellow at St. Jim's whom Tom Merry might have been supposed to want to chum with. Yet Tom Merry was chumming with him, at the expense of practically breaking off with his hitherto inseparable comrades.

Most of the fellows could not understand it, and they were very restive about it, though no one went so far as Manners or Lowther as to declare that he would not row with Crooke.

Manners and Lowther, too, felt that they had been a little hasty in that. They did not want the School House to lose the eights.

Blake was most puzzled and worried of all. As he came into his study on this particular afternoon he looked it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sitting by the window carefully polishing his silk hat, and he glanced up at Blake sympathetically.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?" he asked.

Blake sniffed.

"Oh, that bounder Crooke!" he growled.

"What has he been doin', Blake?"

"He was swaggering down on the towing-path," grunted Blake. "It seems to be settled that he rows in the eight."

"Wotten!"

Blake threw himself into a chair and frowned, and fixed his eyes upon the swell of the Fourth.

"What does it all mean, Gussy?" he demanded.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I'm quite at a loss, deah boy," he replied. "Unless Tom Mewwy has gone off his wockah, I cannot get on to it at all."

"Crooke's got some influence over him."

"It certainly looks like it, deah boy."

"But what is it?"

"I give it up, Blake. As a wule," said D'Arcy thoughtfully, "you can generally wely upon me, as a fellow of tact and judgment, to tell you what's wrong, but in the present case I admit that I simply cannot get on to this mystewy at all."

"All the fellows are surprised," went on Blake, frowning. "Lowther and Manners hardly speak to Tom Merry since he's taken up with Crooke."

"It's not at all surpwisin'."

"Crooke swaggers round as Tom Merry's friend, but anybody can see that Tom Merry doesn't like him any more than he did, and he almost shudders when Crooke slaps him on the shoulder and calls him old chap and old fellow."

"No wondah, deah boy."

"The only explanation is that Crooke has got a hold over Tom Merry somehow," said Jack Blake, with an emphatic nod. "What can it be?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Can't you guess?"

"Not in the least."

"And I can't, either," growled Blake. "But look here, Gussy, we've got to get on to this, and stop it. If Crooke's got some rotten influence over him it's got to be stopped before the eights are mucked up. Figgins & Co. are swanking about the race as if it's as good as won, now that they know Crooke is rowing on Saturday."

Arthur Augustus polished his silk topper very thoughtfully. He was as puzzled and worried about the matter as Blake was.

"The worst of it is that we can't get anything out of Tom Merry on the subject," said Blake. "I've asked him, and he's told me to shut up."

"That was wathah wude."

"I'd have dotted him in the eye," said Blake, "only the poor beggar looks so worried and generally rotten I forgave him. He's feeling this more than anybody else is, though most of the fellows can't see it."

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"I wegard that as vewy pwoob. It is vewy mystewious." Figgins & Co. are just as surprised as we are at Crooke being included in the crew. Redfern asked me if Tom Merry was potty. He says the race won't be a trial at all with a waster like Crooke in our boat. He thinks Crooke will crack up when there is a spurt, and I agree with him, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tom Merry can't see it, or won't see it. What are we going to do?"

"I weally don't see that we can do anythin', Blake. Tom Mewwy is captain of the boats, and he can put Cwooke in if he likes."

Blake rose to his feet, and began to pace the study restlessly.

"If a chap could only get on to what's the matter something might be done," he exclaimed. "Tom Merry can't have done anything to put himself under Crooke's thumb. He's not the kind of fellow to have broken bounds at night, or gambled, or done anything that would give a cad a hold on him."

"Imposs, deah boy!"

"Then how is it that Crooke has him under his thumb?"

D'Arcy shook his head. It was too hard a conundrum for him, and he gave it up.

"Mannahs or Lowthah might guess," he suggested.

"I've talked to them about it. Lowther says that Tom Merry was very queer on Wednesday evening last week, and Manners says that Crooke had just been in to see him then. Until that time nothing was noticed, but he was ratty with Lowther over nothing then. So Lowther says, and he doesn't understand it any more than we do."

"Watty with Lowthah—last Wednesday?"

"Yes," Blake looked quickly at his chum. "What are you thinking about, Gussy? I can see you've got some idea in your noddle."

Arthur Augustus was silent. He had flushed a little, and there was a thoughtful frown upon his aristocratic brow.

Blake crossed over to him, and shook him by the shoulder. He glared down at the swell of St. Jim's in wrathful inquiry.

"I can see you've thought of something," he exclaimed sharply. "What is it?"

"Bai Jove! I—I—"

"Out with it, Gussy!"

"If I tell you, deah boy, you'll have to keep it dark," said D'Arcy slowly. "I suppose Cwooke knows, and he's holdin' it o'vah Tom Mewwy. I was an ass not to think of it before, but I nevah dweamed that Cwooke could know anythin' about it."

"What are you talking about?" shrieked Blake.

"Pway don't shake me, Blake, deah boy! It throws me into a fluttah, and—"

"Will you come to the point?"

"Certainly, deah boy, if you don't keep on intewwuptin' me. You wemembah what happened last Tuesday night?"

"Blessed if I do!"

"Lowther came into our dorm. and put my clock on, and I got up vewy earlay the next mornin', you know."

Blake grinned.

"Yes, I remember that. What's it got to do with this?"

"My jacket was wumpled—"

"Blow your jacket!"

"But the next day I missed my postal-ordah."

Blake started.

"I'd forgotten about that. Haven't you ever found it?"

"No, Blake; and I sha'n't find it, either!"

"It will turn up, I expect—"

"It has turned up."

"What!"

"It has turned up, deah boy!" said D'Arcy quietly.

"When I found it gone, and wemembahed about my jacket bein' wumpled, I asked Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah about it. I thought Lowthah might have taken it for a joke, meaning to weturn it to me. He denied knowin' anythin' about it. The same day he cashed a postal-ordah for ten shillin's with Mrs. Taggles."

"You don't mean to say you think Lowther pinched your postal order, Gussy?" exclaimed Blake incredulously.

"Tom Mewwy thought so! I knew he thought so, when he asked me to write to my patah and get the numbah of it. Somebody else had wiahed to my patah for the numbah, too, and I know now it must have been Cwooke. He knows."

"But—but—but you don't mean to say that the numbah was the same?" Blake exclaimed, aghast. "Did you see Lowther's postal-order?"

"Yaas, wathah! I asked Dame Taggles to show it to me, latah, to make sure, because I didn't like to be suspectin' a chap for nothin'. The numbah was the same—and she mentioned that two fellows had asked to see it already. I knew one of them was Tom Mewwy, and, I suppose, the othah was Cwooke, now."

"Good heavens!" said Blake.

"It was my postal-ordah that Lowthah pwetended to weceive in a lettah fwom his uncle," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I don't like suspectin' him of such a thing, but it was my postal-ordah, and my postal-ordah couldn't have got into a lettah fwom his uncle, could it?"

"I suppose not," said Blake.

"I never meant to say a word about it, and I could see that Tom Mewwy was goin' to keep it dark for Lowthah's sake," said D'Arcy. "I think it's wathah wotten to let a thief off, but I didn't want to get any chap into awful twouble. But it looks to me now as if Cwooke knows all about it, and he's got the upper-hand of Tom Merry. That accounts for Tom Mewwy bein' watty with Lowthah, too. He knows he had the postal-ordah, you know. Cwooke knows, and he's blackmailin' Tom Mewwy."

Blake clenched his hands.

"The cad! The awful cad!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But how did Crooke know—how did he get on to it in the first place?" Blake exclaimed suddenly. "I want to know that, D'Arcy. Doesn't it strike you that this business of the postal-order has happened just in time to suit Crooke's little game about getting into the eight?"

"Yaas, that's quite twue."

"Suppose he's worked it somehow—suppose Lowther never took the postal-order at all?" Blake exclaimed quickly, breathing fast.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"But Lowthah said he had the postal-ordah in a lettah fwom his uncle, Blake!"

Blake was a little staggered.

"H'm, I suppose Crooke couldn't have pinched it, and put it into Lowther's letter?" he said. "But—but—Look here, Gussy, I'd rather believe anything than that Lowther stole the postal-order. It's too thick!"

"I wasn't willin' to believe it, deah boy; but the evidence was so cleah—"

"Yes; but we've got a new light on the matter since," said Blake keenly. "When it happened, it didn't look as if anybody had any reason to plant such a thing on Lowther. But now we see that Crooke is using it as a lever for jerking himself into the eight. So there's a chance, at least, that Crooke worked the whole bizney from the start."

"Bai Jove! It's poss, of course!"

"We're going to find out!" said Blake determinedly.

"I don't see how, Blake! You see, even if Cwooke worked it somehow, he's not likely to own up, and unless he does—"

"He can be made to!"

"But—I say—"

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake. "We'll look into it! I'll get two or three fellows to help me handle Crooke, and we'll make him talk. I'll get Dig, and Herries, and Kangaroo—and you and I—we'll be enough! Come on!"

"But weally, Blake—what—"

"Come on!" roared Blake.

"Vewy well; but let me put my toppah away—"

"Blow your topper!"

And Blake rushed the swell of St. Jim's from the study.

CHAPTER 16.

Getting at the Truth!

ROOKE of the Shell strolled along the towing-path in great good humour.

He had been at practice with the eight again that afternoon, and he was satisfied with himself. The fact that he would probably crack up under the strain of the race, owing to his being out of condition, did not trouble Crooke much. He did not think so himself; but even if it happened, at all events, he would have had the honour of rowing in the junior eight, and he would be able to swank upon that subject for ever and ever afterwards.

Crooke had begun, in fact, to swank already. The dark looks of the other members of the crew did not trouble him. He did not care twopence for what they thought of him and his presence in the eight. He was going to row, he was going to get his cap for the eight, and show it about at home in the next holidays. That was all he cared about—and he did not care very much even if his boat did lose.

Mellish met him on the towing-path, and nodded, with a grin.

"It's all serene?" he asked.

"Quite all right!" said Crooke. "I'm in the eight! It's settled!"

Good luck! And not one suspicion?"

"Hush! No—nothing of the kind! How could there be?" Mellish chuckled.

"Quite so; how?" he agreed. "You can lend me five bob, I suppose, Crooke?"

"Rats!" said Crooke. "I promised you a sovereign, and I've given it to you!"

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"You'll lend me five bob, as well, I think!" said Mellish unpleasantly. "It will be safer, you know!"

Crooke gritted his teeth. "You blackmailing cad—" he began.

"Oh, come off!" said Mellish impatiently. "What are you doing with Tom Merry, if not blackmailing him, if you come to that?"

"Mind your own business, hang you!"

"It's my business to make something out of it, too. You get into the eight. I don't care twopence about the eight; but I'm hard up. Shell out!"

Crooke gave him a deadly look for a moment; and then, without another word, he counted out five shillings into Mellish's palm, and strode on down the towing-path.

Mellish slipped the clinking coins into his pocket, and walked away grinning. Crooke's face was a little clouded now. His scheme had been perfectly successful; but there was this little weakness in it, that it placed him at the mercy of his confederate, who was no more scrupulous than he was himself. He had the whip hand of Tom Merry, but Mellish had the whip hand of him, in his turn. Until after the eight was rowed, at all events, he would have to keep on good terms with the cad of the Fourth. It was likely to prove expensive to him; and Crooke, although he had plenty of money, was not generous. But it was the price he had to pay for his success.

"Anyway, I'm in the eight!" he muttered. "Hallo, Blake!"

Blake had stepped out of the trees upon the towing-path. Herries and D'Arcy were with him, and Kangaroo, of the Shell. The juniors surrounded Crooke without a word, and the cad of the Shell looked alarmed. He noticed that a boat was moored a little further up the towing-path, and Digby, of the Shell, was standing in it, evidently waiting for the others.

"I—I say, anything up?" asked Crooke uneasily.

"We want you!" said Blake tersely.

"Well, here I am!"

"Got the rope, Herries?"

"Yes; here!"

Crooke backed away as Herries produced a coil of rope from under his jacket. He backed into Noble, who promptly collared him. Crooke struggled, and four pairs of hands were laid upon him at once. He was bumped upon the towing-path, and the rope was tied round him and knotted. In a couple of minutes he was a helpless prisoner, bound hand and foot.

He opened his mouth to call for help, but Herries jammed a handkerchief into it, and the cad of the Shell spluttered into silence.

"Got him!" said Blake, with satisfaction.

Crooke spluttered.

"Bring him along!"

Crooke spat out the handkerchief with an effort.

"Where are you taking me?" he gasped.

"Into the boat."

"But—but what for?"

"You'll see. If you make a row you'll be ducked in the water," said Blake grimly. "For two pins we'd drop you in and tow you behind the boat, so be careful!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Three of the juniors lifted Crooke and carried him to the boat. Blake stepped in, and helped Dig. to receive him. Kangaroo and Herries and D'Arcy handed Crooke into the boat, and followed him in.

The cad of the Shell was laid on the thwarts, and Blake pushed off.

He had at first surmised that this was some rough jest, but the grim faces of the juniors warned him that it was something more than that.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, at last.

"To the island," said Blake.

"What for?"

"To leave you there."

"What!"

"Unless you tell us the truth about how you've got Tom Merry under your thumb."

Crooke turned deadly pale.

"I—I—" he stammered.

Blake held up his hand.

"We were watching you when you handed that five bob to Mellish a few minutes ago," he said. "We saw how you looked, and how he looked. It's pretty clear to us that he has helped you in this scheme of yours, or else that he has found you out, and he's making money out of you. If we wanted any proof, there it is. You've made Tom Merry believe something against Lowther, and we're going to know all about it. Understand?"

Crooke gritted his teeth.

"I've got nothing to tell you," he said, "and you can't make me say anything. If Mellish has told you anything, he's told you lies."

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"THE SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE!"

"Mellish hasn't told us anything yet," said Kangaroo. "You're going to tell us. You've made out that Monty Lowther stole that postal-order."

"So he did!" growled Crooke. "D'Arcy knows it."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head.

"I don't know anything of the sort," he replied. "I certainly did think so, but now I know what use you have made of the thing, I suspect you of havin' got it up from the beginnin'."

"I didn't. I—"

"Here we are," said Kangaroo, as the boat bumped upon the shore of the island in the river. "Yank him out!"

Crooke was carried ashore. He was tossed down upon the thick green grass under the trees on the island. He lay bound upon the earth, looking up with dilated eyes at the juniors' grim faces. Crooke was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and he did not know how far the juniors' anger might carry them.

"Now, are you going to tell us the whole truth?" demanded Blake.

"I've got nothing to tell you."

"Sure?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"Very well; we needn't stay here any longer," said Blake. "Get back, you fellows."

The five juniors turned towards the boat. Crooke uttered a yell.

"You're not going to leave me here?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but it's getting dusk now, and—and—"

"That's your look-out!"

"You dare not!" yelled Crooke, beside himself with fear.

"You can't leave me here tied up to stay out all night. You dare not!"

"You'll soon see about that."

The juniors stepped into the boat. Crooke yelled out threats and entreaties, to which no answer was returned. He struggled with his bonds, but they were too firmly tied. Blake pushed off, and the juniors took up the oars and settled into their places.

Crooke's heart almost stood still. Night was coming on, and to lie bound on the island all night was a terrifying prospect. He knew that the darkness and the solitude would drive him to distraction. In flood time, too, the island was covered by the waters of the Ryll. A flood was not likely just then, certainly, but it was barely possible, and the possibility was enough for Crooke. He yelled frantically to the juniors as they bent to their oars.

"Come back! Come back and take me off! You dare not leave me here!"

The oars beat time in the water.

"Blake! D'Arcy! Noble! Come back! You'll be expelled for this! Come back!"

No answer; but the boat glided away in the deepening shadows. Crooke sat up, bound as he was, and peered after it with haggard eyes.

"Come back!" he shrieked. "Come back, and—and I'll confess! Come back!"

Blake stood up in the boat and looked round. His face was hard and grim. Whether he intended to fulfil his threat to Crooke, or not, he certainly looked as if he meant it.

"Do you mean that?" he called back. "Mind, if you bring us back for nothing, you won't get a second chance!"

"I—I mean it! For mercy's sake don't leave me here!" whimpered Crooke.

"Pull back, you fellows!"

The juniors rowed back to the island, and landed. Crooke's face was white, and his eyes dilated with fear. Blake looked down upon him sternly.

"Well, you dirty blackmailing rotter, what have you got to say?" he asked.

"I—I—I—"

"Out with it! In the first place, you've made Tom Merry make friends with you, and promise you a place in the eight, by threatening to tell about Lowther?"

"Ye-és," muttered Crooke, through his trembling lips.

"You managed to fix it on Lowther somehow, so as to be able to use it to twist Tom Merry round your finger?"

"It—it was really a joke!"

"No lies!" said Blake grimly. "By Jove, I've a jolly good mind to take you straight up to the Head now, and Mellish too, and let him put you through it. I'll bet he'd get the truth out of one of you!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should wecommend doin' so!"

"Hold on!" panted Crooke. "I'll—I'll tell you about it. It was really Mellish's idea as much as mine. He got the postal-order out of D'Arcy's pocket."

"He wumpled my jacket, then?" said D'Arcy severely.

"Shut up, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake, it's wathah a sewious mattah to have one's jacket wumpled!"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "Go on, Crooke. You put Mellish up to getting the postal-order out of Gussy's pocket, I know that. But how did you manage the rest?"

"I—I—I—" "Lend me your belt, Herries. I'll make him talk faster!" "I—I'll tell you!" gasped Crooke. "I—I had seen a letter for Lowther on the rack, and I—I took it, you see. I opened the envelope with steam, and when Mellish gave me the postal-order I put it in, and sealed it up again. The next day I put the letter on the rack again. As the postal-order wasn't filled in, Lowther naturally imagined that it had been sent him by his uncle. It—it was knowing that D'Arcy's postal-order hadn't the name filled in that first put the idea into my head."

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I shall write to my governah about that. He's always waggin' me about bein' careless with money, and I wathah think this will be one for his nob, you know."

"Of—of course, I never meant the thing to get out," gasped Crooke. "I never meant that Lowther should ever be accused. It was only to work it so that I could get into the eight. I never meant any real ham."

Blake's lip curled. "Well, I'll believe that of you!" he said. "You wouldn't have had the nerve to carry the matter through, and get Lowther expelled, I know that. You worked up the whole bizney so as to get Tom Merry under your thumb, through his regard for Lowther. If Manners had come into our dorm, to jape Gussy over the alarm-clock, you'd have fixed it on Manners instead."

"Well, I—I—" "Or on me, perhaps," said Kangaroo, "or on anybody that Tom Merry was very friendly with, so as to get the whip hand of him, you cur!"

"I—I—" "Chuck him into the boat," said Blake contemptuously. "You can't untie him. I've half a mind to chuck him into the river. Look here, Crooke, I'm going to have you and Mellish in Tom Merry's study when we get back, and you're both going to own up. You've busted up a friendship in that study, and you're going to set it right. Do you savvy?"

"I—I—" "And if you don't do it, we'll take you straight in to the Head. I dare say you'd be villain enough to deny what you've just confessed; but if you did, Mellish would give you away, and I don't think you'd have nerve enough to brazen it out, either."

Crooke whimpered. He was only too well aware that he would not have nerve enough to brazen it out before the stern eyes of the Head, and the sentence of expulsion loomed up before his eyes. In his mind's eye he could see the crowded hall, the Head's stern face and raised hand, the scornful looks of his schoolfellows, as he had seen them on the occasion when Sleath, of the New House, was expelled.

"I—I'll do as you wish," he muttered.

"You'd better." And with Crooke sitting white and dejected in the stern, the boat pulled back to St. Jim's. The cad of the Shell was beaten, and the game was up. He realised that only too clearly, and from the bottom of his heart he wished that he had played the game, and he wished that still more fervently half an hour later, when he stood with pale face and downcast eyes in Tom Merry's study, under the indignant gaze of the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 17. The Winning Eight.

TOM MERRY had surprised the School House, and St. Jim's generally, by his sudden and unaccountable friendship with Crooke, of the Shell.

But the breaking off of that sudden and unaccountable friendship was more sudden and unaccountable still.

On Wednesday afternoon Crooke was chummy with Tom Merry, and it was understood by all that he was to row in the eight on Saturday.

On Wednesday evening, Crooke was seen to leave Tom Merry's study headfirst, and to land with a bump on the linoleum in the passage.

A minute later, Mellish, of the Fourth, was seen to leave in the same unceremonious manner, alighting beside Crooke with a wild yell.

The two cads of the School House picked themselves up, with dark and savage faces, and walked away, without replying by a single word to the many kind inquiries the Shell fellows made as they passed.

It was evident that Tom Merry's friendship with Crooke was at an end.

Curious fellows questioned Crooke and Mellish, but they obtained no satisfaction. The cads of the School House had nothing to say, or, if they had anything to say, at all events they did not say it.

It was equally useless to question Tom Merry & Co. They

had nothing to say, either. Only when asked whether Crooke was to row in the eight, Tom Merry gave a very emphatic answer in the negative. Kangaroo was to take No. 8 place, and Crooke was quite out of it.

Crooke said nothing about it; he did not even complain of being dropped from the eight. He was only too glad to let the matter sink into oblivion, and avoid the risk of an inquiry into his conduct.

Whatever Tom Merry's motives had been for dropping the cad of the Shell, the whole House was glad to hear that he had dropped him, and that the Cornstalk was to row in the eight against Figgins & Co. when the race came off.

After Blake and his chums had gone that evening from Tom Merry's study, and the Terrible Three were alone, Tom Merry turned to Lowther, with a very red face.

"I'm sorry, Lowther, old man," he said. "I—I know I oughtn't to have believed anything against you."

"You jolly well oughtn't!" said Lowther. "It—it was too rotten for anything. But—but how was I to know, when—when you yourself thought the postal-order was yours. You owe Gussy ten bob."

Monty Lowther grinned. "I'll settle up on Saturday," he said. "Upon the whole, I can't blame you, Tommy, when you saw me claiming a postal-order that you knew belonged to D'Arcy. Of course, I couldn't guess that an awful rascal had opened my letter by steam and put a postal-order in—how could a chap guess a thing like that?—though I was surprised at my uncle sending me ten bob for a tip, too."

"It's all Lord Eastwood's fault for not filling in Gussy's name when he sent the postal-order," said Manners. "So there you are; and you two can shake paws over it."

And Tom Merry and Monty Lowther shook paws.

The cloud between the chums of the Shell had passed away, and Lowther and Manners, of course, were to row in the eight. The crew was complete, and every day that week the junior crew were hard at practice. Figgins & Co., too, were keeping it up, and both crews were in great form, and looking eagerly forward to the Saturday.

It was a glorious afternoon when the juniors turned out for the race.

Nearly all St. Jim's crowded down to the river to see it. Loud cheers rang over the wide river as the two crews were seen carrying their boats down to the water.

The Head had come out, with Mrs. Holmes, to see the start. Kildare was the starter, and half the Sixth and Fifth, and all the juniors, were looking on. Grimes, the grocer's boy from Rylcombe, had paused on the towing-path, basket on arm, to look on. And when the signal was given, and the two crews bent to their oars, a thunderous yell rolled along the river.

"Go it, School House!"

"Buck up, New House!"

"Pull, you beggars, pull!"

And they did pull!

It was, as all St. Jim's agreed, a ripping race. How Figgins & Co. led at the start, and how Tom Merry & Co. gained on them inch by inch, and passed them; how the New House pulled level, and kept level for half the distance, and then stole half a length; how Tom Merry & Co. put on a spurt, and drew ahead; how New House pulled level once more, but could do no more, though every gallant oarsman was rowing as if for his life; and how the School House shot a quarter of a length ahead at the finish—all this was discussed over and over again in both Houses of St. Jim's that night, and it was agreed that both crews had deserved well of St. Jim's.

"School House wins!" came a roar along the bank from the fellows who were racing along the towing-path. "Hurrah! Hurrah! School House wins!"

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"Hurrah!"

And Tom Merry, with a muffer round his neck, was shouldered by an enthusiastic crowd, and carried off in triumph. But after the race, both crews met in a great feast in the School House, and victors and vanquished hobbled together on the best of terms. When the New House fellows took their leave Fatty Wynn said, almost with tears in his eyes, that he would never forget the occasion. He said it was ripping.

"Yaas, it was a wippin' wace!" said D'Arcy, with a nod. "Race!" said Fatty Wynn. "Oh, yes; but I was speaking of the feed. Good-night!"

And Figgins & Co. went home across the quadrangle, leaving the School House still rejoicing.

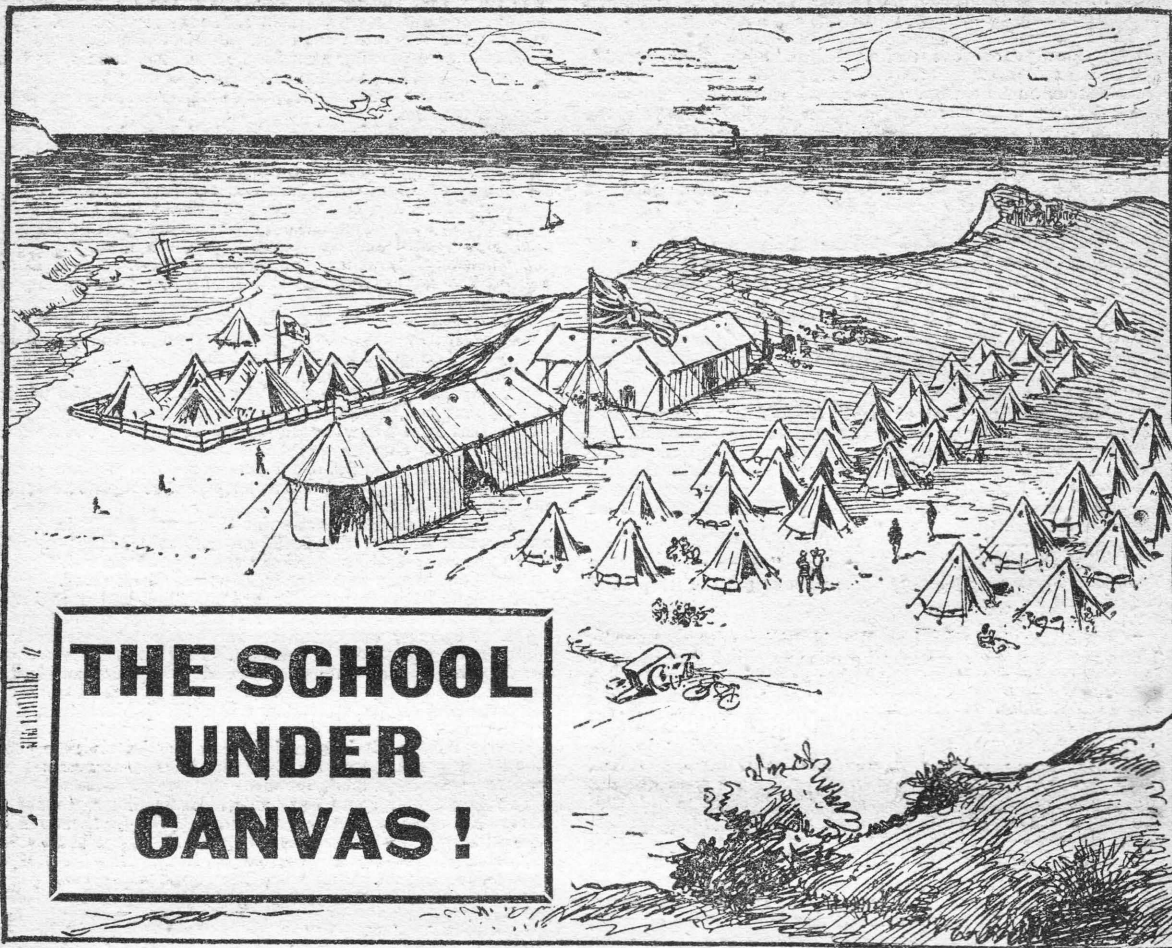
THE END.

(Another magnificent, long, complete tale of Tom Merry and Co. and Kildare, of St. Jim's, next Thursday, entitled: "An Affair of Dishonour," by Martin Clifford. Also a splendid instalment of our Grand New School Serial: "The School under Canvas." Don't miss next Thursday's All School-Story "GEM." Price ONE PENNY.)

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**THE SCHOOL
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A Rousing, New, and Original School-Story of Gordon Gay,
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By PROSPER HOWARD.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

"The School will assemble in Big Hall at half-past six o'clock. An important announcement will be made.

"(Signed), E. MONK, Headmaster."

The appearance of the above brief notice on the school board is the first hint that the Rylcombe Grammar School receives of the great change in its circumstances that is pending—noting less than the removal of the whole school into temporary quarters under canvas by the sea, on the Essex coast. Dr. Monk's formal announcement of this step is greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the entire Grammar School, with the exception of Herr Hentzel, the unpopular German-master, who has, apparently, reasons of his own for objecting. Gordon Gay & Co., and Monk & Co., and indeed the entire Fourth, as the liveliest Form in the school, are

particularly excited at the prospect of the change. Just at this time the ranks of the Fourth Form are reinforced by Gustave Blanc—immediately christened Mont Blong—a new boy from across the Channel. Mont Blong, who attaches himself to Gordon Gay & Co., is a slim and elegant youth with a peculiar flow of English, but he quickly shows his worth by holding his own with Carker, the bully of the Fourth. In revenge, Carker prys into Mont Blong's trunk, and expresses great surprise at the variety of wigs and disguises which it contains. The new boy becomes momentarily confused, but explains that he goes in for theatricals.

"I don't believe it!" exclaims the bully. "There's something jolly fishy about this, in my opinion!"

(Read on from here.)

Great Preparations.

"Oh, rats!" said Gordon Gay, contemptuously. "What do you mean, Carker? You'd have found the same if you'd turned out my box, or Frank Monk's. Go and eat coke!"

"Zat you let my box alone, Carkair," said Mont Blong. "I allow only my shums to touch ze property zat belong to me. You are a rascal, Carkair!"

Carker clenched his fists. Since his first encounter with Mont Blong, on the day of the French junior's first arrival at the Grammar School, Carker had rather avoided him. He had

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realised that there was more in Mont Blong than met the eye, but Carker's temper was rising now.

"I'll jolly well teach you something in manners, you rotten Froggy!" he exclaimed. "Put up your fists, you ead!"

"Oh, shut up, Carker!" said Gordon Gay, impatiently. "We've got to pack now."

"Mind your own business. I'm going to lick that French rotter."

"Let him come on, my dear shum," said Mont Blong, cheerfully. "I zink zat I shut him up viz himself."

Carker rushed at the French junior.

SHOW YOUR FRIENDS THIS ALL SCHOOL-STORY NUMBER OF "THE GEM."

The quick, nimble junior dodged the heavy rush, and caught Carker round the waist as he passed, and swung him off his feet.

Then he whirled round and round, swinging Carker round him, with his arms and legs flying and waving wildly in the air. There was a roar of laughter from the juniors.

They would not have suspected the French junior of the strength he showed in lifting the heavy bully of the Fourth and swinging him round as if he were an infant.

Carker struggled wildly in the grasp of the French junior, but he could not escape it, and he could not get at Gustave Blanc with his fists. He swung round and round, with the French junior grinning down upon him, till he was giddy and dazed. The laughter of the juniors rang through the dormitory.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Mont Blong."

"Ow!" roared Carker. "Oh! Yah! Lemme down! Yow!"

"Zat you make it pax!"

"No!" spluttered Carker. "I won't! Yow! Leggo!"

"Zat you make it pax, Carkair!"

"Yow! Yes! Oh!"

"It is pax, zen?"

"Ow! Yow! Yes!"

Bump!

Carker was dropped upon the floor. He sat there, dazed, with the dormitory walls and the crowd of grinning juniors seeming to swim round him.

"Oh!" he gasped. "The French beast! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carker staggered to his feet. His face was dark with rage, and his fists were clenched. There was a shout.

"Hands off, Carker! You've made it pax!"

"I'll smash him!" roared the bully of the Fourth.

"You'll keep pax, or you'll get a dormitory licking," said Gordon Gay. "Don't be a cad, Carker. You've got to keep pax."

Carker unclenched his hands, and turned away with a savage scowl upon his face. He could not attack the French junior just then, but he was only saving up his wrath for a more convenient opportunity. Mont Blong had made an enemy in the Fourth Form at Rylcombe, and an enemy who would not be likely to lose any opportunity of making his dislike felt.

Mont Blong knew it, but he did not seem to mind. He went on cheerfully with his packing, and carefully corded up his box, so that the broken lock did not matter. It was pretty clear that Mont Blong did not want idle eyes to spy into the interior of his box. And some of the juniors wondered whether there were any other little secrets there, as well as the theatrical disguise which Carker had discovered.

Off!

"Here's the brake!"

It was morning at the Grammar School.

The rising bell had gone as usual; the last time that the juniors were to hear it for that summer. But morning classes did not assemble as usual. There had been no preparation the previous evening, and there were no classes that morning. In Rylcombe Railway Station a special train awaited the Grammar School, and three brakes had been engaged to carry the Grammarians to the station. The luggage had already been sent off, in charge of Corporal Cutts, the old school porter.

The brake intended for the juniors was outside the house now, and a loud shout announced its arrival.

Gordon Gay & Co. came crowding out.

"Jolly close packing, to get all the Fourth in that giddy trap," said Wootton major.

"Here, make room, you kids," said Carker, pushing his way forward, and putting one foot on the step of the brake.

Gordon Gay cheerfully pushed Carker's other foot away from under him, and the bully of the Fourth sat down on the ground with a bump.

"Oh!" he roared.

"Sorry, Carker, I hope you're not hurt," said Gordon Gay blandly. "These little accidents will happen when fellows push. Jump in, kids."

And the Co. jumped into the brake while Carker was scrambling up, red with rage. Gay and Wootton major and minor were the first in, and Monk and Lane and Carboy followed them. Then Carker clambered in, scowling. Potty Benson and Craven and Carpenter and Mont Blong followed, and then the rest of the Fourth. There was, as Wootton major had said, a crowd for the brake, but the juniors did not really mind it. They crowded in cheerfully, and packed themselves like sardines. Gordon Gay extracted his pea-shooter from his pocket.

"Some of the St. Jim's chaps are going to see us off," he remarked. "Tom Merry and D'Arcy said they'd get off from lessons to come down if they could."

"Good egg," said Frank Monk heartily. "I wish they were coming."

"Here we go!"

The brake rolled out of the school-gates. The big, red-brick Grammar School was left behind, and the crowded vehicle rolled down the lane, under the spreading branches of the trees, towards Rylcombe. The Grammarians were in the highest spirits. The day was a whole holiday, and they were joyous to escape the stuffy class-rooms for a whole day. And the bright June weather was glorious.

"Oh, it's ripping!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "This is almost as good as being home in Wirra-Wirra!"

"Where on earth's that?" said Frank Monk.

Gordon Gay sniffed.

"In Australia, where I come from," he said loftily. "Do you mean to say that you've never heard of Wirra-Wirra?"

"Ha, ha! Never."

"Then you're an ass! Hallo, hallo, here's Grimey!"

Grimes, the grocer's boy of Rylcombe, was passing down the lane with a big basket on his arm. Gordon Gay clapped his pea-shooter to his mouth, and the next moment Grimes gave a fiendish yell.

"Yarooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it's you, Master Gay, is it?" said Grimes, with a grin. "I fear you're going away."

"Yes, we're going," said Gordon Gay. "I wish you were coming, Grimey."

"I wish I was," said Grimes.

Gay reached over the side of the brake.

"Give us your fin, old man."

And Gordon Gay shook hands heartily with Grimes. Grimes waved his cap as the brake rolled on. Carker looked at Gordon Gay with a bitter sneer.

"Just like you blessed Cornstalks," he said, "letting down the school by shaking paws with a grocer's boy."

"Well, I don't suppose old Grimey would shake hands with you," said Gordon Gay cheerfully. "I believe he's rather particular."

"Why, you silly ass——"

"Shut up, Carker," said Frank Monk. "Don't jaw, old man. This is a holiday, and we can enjoy it if we don't see too much of you."

"You—you——"

"Let's sing," said Gordon Gay, "I feel like singing. And then we sha'n't hear Carker talk. Now then, all together—'On the Ball!'"

And the Fourth Form burst into the famous football song, and thundered it out as the brake rolled into the old High Street of Rylcombe. Carker was still saying things, but no one excepting Carker knew what they were, so it did not matter. With a rattle of hoofs and wheels, and a roar of voices, the brake came rolling up to the railway-station and halted.

"Bai Jove! Here are the Gwammah boundahs, Tom Mewwy!"

"Hallo, Gussy!" shouted Gordon Gay. "Here we are again!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy."

Two juniors of St. Jim's were there to see the Fourth Form off. They were Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, and Tom Merry of the Shell. The Grammarians swarmed out of the brake, and the rival Co's. shook hands warmly with Tom Merry and D'Arcy.

"Good old Gussy!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, slapping the swell of St. Jim's forcibly on the back. "How nice of you to put on your Sunday clothes to come and see us off!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyelashes into his eye, and turned a wrathful glare upon the Cornstalk.

"You uttah ass!" he exclaimed. "I twust you do not imagine that I have diffeent clothes for a Sunday! I considah——"

"Dry up, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"I wufuse to dwy up, Tom Mewwy. I——"

"Get into the station, you fags," said Delamere of the Sixth, coming out. "It's time you were in the train."

"Yes, come on," said Gordon Gay. "It's jolly good of you chaps to get leave to come and see us off, and I hope you'll be able to come down and see us when you get a holiday. We'll give you a good time by the giddy sad sea waves."

"Yes, rather," said Frank Monk heartily.

"It won't be necessary for Gussy to put on his Sunday clothes, either."

"Weally, Gay——"

"This way," said Gordon Gay, and the juniors marched into the station.

The platform was crowded.

The whole station seemed to be alive with luggage and Grammarians. Boxes and porters and boys were crowding the length of the platform. The special train was waiting, and all the doors were open, and many of the carriages were already full. Gordon Gay & Co. made a rush for an empty carriage and crowded into it. Dr. Monk came down the platform, and the Grammarians gave him a cheer, and the good old doctor

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smiled genially. He seemed to be in as great spirits as his youthful charges.

"Bai Jove! I wish I were comin' with you, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he stood by the carriage-door. "Take care of yourselves, deah boys. I should like to come all the way and look aftah you, you know."

"Oh, we'll try to get on," said Gordon Gay. "Now then, Carker, don't shove."

"I'm coming into that carriage," said Carker. "You've got an empty seat there."

"We're keeping it for Mont Blong."

"Blow Mont Blong."

Carker shoved his way into the carriage. Under the eyes of Dr. Monk, Gordon Gay & Co. could not throw him out, and he was allowed to remain. Mont Blong came running along the platform, with a bag in his hand, and his silk hat on the back of his head. Gordon Gay waved his hand to him.

"This way, Mont Blong! Here you are!"

"My dear shums, je viens—I come, zat is to say!"

And the excited French youth rushed up, and dived into the carriage. There was a roar from Carker.

"Get out! This carriage is full!"

"It's going to be fuller, then," said Gordon Gay cheerfully.

"Gerrout, I say! You French rotter——"

"It is you zat is ze rottair," exclaimed Mont Blong, plunging in past Carker, and jabbing him in the ribs with the ferule of his umbrella.

"Yow!" roared Carker, collapsing into his seat. "Yowp, the beast has punctured me! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out for that broly!" gasped Frank Monk. "Leave us one eye each, Mont Blong. Put it under the seat, or chain it up somewhere."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"B' y'r leave!" grunted the porter, coming along and slamming the door. "Now, young gents, keep that door shut—you're hoff!"

There was a shriek from the engine.

"Yes, we're hoff," grinned Gordon Gay. "Good-bye, you St. Jim's chaps. We'll lick you at footer when we come back."

"I should wefuse to be licked at footah——"

"Shut them doors!"

"Hurray!"

The train began to move. Gordon Gay & Co. crammed the window of their carriage, and all the other windows along the train were crammed with faces. Tom Merry waved his cap, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised his silk hat most gracefully. Mont Blong leaned out of the carriage window, and raised his silk topper in return. He did not know the St. Jim's fellows, but politeness came first, of course.

"Adieu!" he called out. "Adieu, my shum's shums. Farewell! Good-pye!"

"Good-bye!" roared Tom Merry. "We'll lick you at footer when you come back."

"Yaas, wathah! Good-bye, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus bowed low, hat in hand. Mont Blong bowed out of the carriage window, and D'Arcy bowed back, and Mont Blong bowed still lower, till it seemed as if he were trying to hang himself out of the window. The train was moving faster now, and a gust of wind caught Mont Blong's topper and whisked it out of his hand. There was a yell from the French youth.

"Ciel! Mon chapeau! My hat! It is gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon Gay. "You won't get it back now! Good-bye, kids!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy picked up the rolling topper, and raced along the platform with it, holding it up for Mont Blong to catch. Mont Blong reached out to take it, and for a few seconds D'Arcy kept pace with the train, only a carriage behind and out of reach. He put on a spurt, and came almost within reaching distance, but he was now at the end of the platform, and the train rushed on, leaving him behind, still holding the hat.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

The Grammarians roared. They waved caps and handkerchiefs from the window as the train rushed on, and as it vanished down the line, and the station disappeared behind them, the last thing they saw was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's, still standing on the platform with his own topper in his right hand and Mont Blong's topper in his left.

On the Rack!

"Off at last!" said Gordon Gay.

"Ciel! I am lose my hat!"

"My hat!"

"Non, non, not your hat, my shum, my hat!" said Mont Blong distressfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you can't expect to keep your hat if you lose your head," said Frank Monk.

Mont Blong put his hand to his head, as if to make sure that it was still upon his shoulders, and the Grammarian juniors yelled.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE!"

is the Title of the New and Exciting Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"Mon Dieu! Ze head is all right," he said, "but I lose ze hat. But never mind, it is all in ze day's play, as you say in ze English proverb."

The Grammarians laughed again at Mont Blong's English proverb. Gordon Gay & Co. were in the greatest of spirits. The special train buzzed through Wayland Junction without stopping, and dashed on towards London. The June sun was blazing down upon fields and hedges and green woods and gleaming streams. From all the windows of the long train the Grammarians looked out, and waved caps and shouted to people along the line.

Gordon Gay's carriage was very full. Gordon Gay and Wootton major and minor and Tadpole filled one side, and Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy and Carker filled the other; and as each side was really intended to seat only three, there was some squeezing. For Mont Blong there appeared to be no place, and the chums of the Fourth looked very meaningly at Carker. They had been keeping a corner for the French junior, and the bully of the Fourth had plumped himself into it, and evidently intended to stay there.

"It is zat I stand up viz myself, I zink," Mont Blong remarked, after a look round the crowded carriage.

"Now, then, Carker!" said Gay.

Carker scowled.

"I don't give up my place to a rotten Froggy, if that's what you mean, you blessed Cornstalk," he growled.

"It isn't your place," said Wootton major warmly. "We were keeping it for Mont Blong, and you shoved yourself in; and we'd have shoved you out jolly fast, if Dr. Monk hadn't been looking on."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Carker.

"Zat zere is peace," said Mont Blong, with a wave of the hand, "I stand. Zat is all right. I zink zat I like to stand."

"You can't stand all the way, my son," said Gordon Gay. "We shall have to make room for you. And as Carker is the extra passenger, room will have to be made on that side. It's only fair."

"You're jolly well not going to squeeze me," said Carker threateningly. "That blessed Froggy can get on the rack, or under the seat, or jump out of the train after his giddy topper. You can all go and eat coke!"

And the burly junior planted himself firmly in his corner, and glared defiance at the other fellows. Carker was a big fellow to tackle, but that would not have made much difference to the two Co.'s crowded in the carriage. But they did not want to begin that happy journey by a fight in the carriage, if they could help it. They tried methods of peaceful persuasion before resorting to methods of barbarism, so to speak.

"Now, Carky, my dear fellow, move up," said Frank Monk sweetly.

"Rats!"

Frank, who was sitting next to Carker, gave him a slight shove. Carker retorted by a very hard shove. Monk grinned.

"Move up the other way, you fellows," he said, "then Mont Blong can sit between Carker and me. That's right! Sit down, Mont Blong."

"Zank you, my dear shum!"

Mont Blong sat down between Carker and Monk. He sat partly on the seat and partly on Carker. Carker gave a roar.

"Get off, you French boulder!"

"Zat is all right."

"My hat! I—I'll pitch you out of the carriage!" roared Carker. "Gerroff!"

"Zat is very all right."

"You foreign rotter! Sheer off!"

"My dear shum——"

"I'll shum you!" roared Carker, springing up and pushing Gustave Blanc violently off. "I'll shum you! I—I— Oh!"

Mont Blong rolled off, but he kept tight hold of Carker, and the bully of the Fourth rolled over upon him. They rolled together in the bottom of the carriage, and Carker's nose was ground into the dust of ages. He kicked out furiously with his feet, and there was a loud shriek, and the sound of the carriage door crashing open. Then a wild shout from all the Grammarians.

"Murder!"

Carker twisted over and sat up in alarm.

The carriage door was flying open, crashing to and fro in the wind as the train rushed on, and the French junior was not to be seen.

Carker rubbed the dust out of his eyes and glared at the open door.

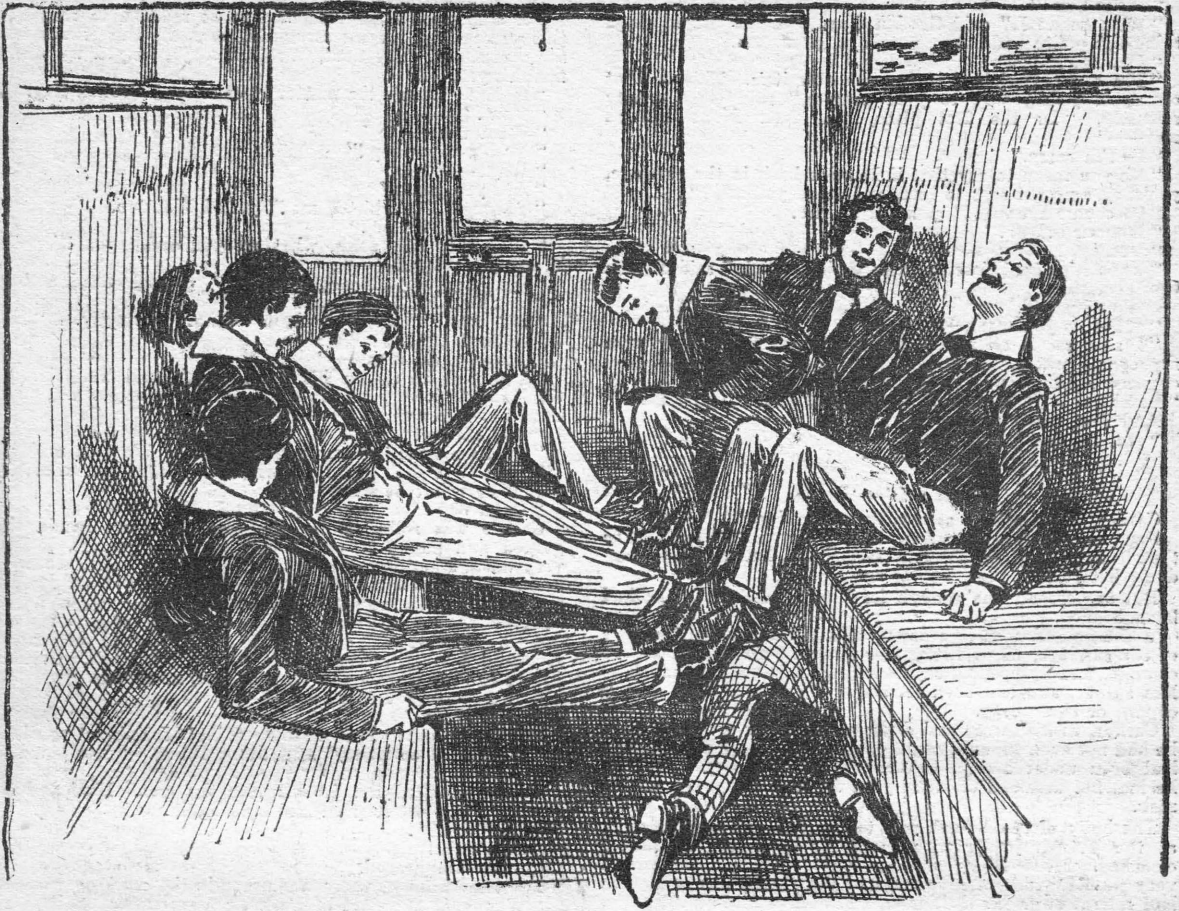
"G-g-g-good heavens!" he gasped. "Has—has he fallen out?"

"Fallen out!" yelled Gordon Gay. "No, he's not fallen out. You kicked him, you know you did!"

"Murder!" gasped Wootton major.

"Help!" panted Jack Wootton.

"You said you'd pitch him out of the carriage!" shrieked Frank Monk. "You're a murderer, Carker."



Carker gasped and puffed in clouds of dust and attempted to plunge out from under the seat, but half-a-dozen pairs of boots reached out to push him back again. "Whenever any part of Carker shows, stamp on it!" said Gordon Gay cheerfully.

"Oh, quite!" gasped Carboy.

"Stop the train!" yelled Lane.

"Hold on!" Carker's face was white as a sheet, and he trembled from head to foot as he sat in the dust in the bottom of the carriage. "Hold on! Don't touch that cord! It's—it's no good stopping the train!"

"But Mont Blong—"

"I—I couldn't help it," groaned Carker. "I—I never meant to kick him out of the carriage. The door couldn't have been properly fastened to fly open like that."

"You kicked him—"

"I only meant to kick him, not to kill him," panted Carker. "You—you can't think that I meant him to fall out of the train. It—it's horrible. I—I say, don't touch that communication cord! Don't stop the train! He—he can't be helped now. He—he must be dead, falling out of an express train. Oh, dear!"

"Well, you can be arrested for murder, anyway."

"Ow! Don't! I—I never meant it, I tell you!" shrieked Carker. "I—I say, keep this dark, you know. I shall be ruined!"

"What about Mont Blong, you villain?"

"Well, you can't help him now. I'm frightfully sorry. If he were here I'd beg his pardon. I'm sorry. I never meant it. For mercy's sake, don't give me away!" panted Carker; and in an agony of terror he clasped his hands and rose on his knees. "Don't stop the train! Don't give me away! Keep it dark! Mercy!"

"You are a murderer!" said Gordon Gay sternly.

"Ow! I never meant it!" groaned Carker. "It's awful! Shut that door, for goodness' sake, before they notice it down the train."

Monk slammed the door shut. Carker breathed more freely. He took the action as a sign that the Grammarian chums were going to keep his dreadful secret.

He staggered to his feet.

"I—I'm much obliged to you chaps," he panted. "I—I never meant to hurt the poor chap; I swear I didn't."

"You kicked him without intending to hurt him?" demanded Gordon Gay.

"Well, I—I didn't mean to hurt him much, I mean. I—I didn't know the door wasn't fastened. It's horrible! I—I shall never forget that shriek."

"I hope it will haunt you to your dying day, and afterwards," said Gordon Gay severely. "I say, you chaps, can we keep the secret, or ought Carker to be hanged?"

"Hanged!" said Frank Monk promptly.

"Oh, hanged!" said Lane. "I've often thought that Carker ought to be hung. I don't think we ought to lose an opportunity like this. It's the chance of a lifetime."

"Oh, quite!" said Carboy.

"We'll put it to the vote," said Gordon Gay. "Sit there, Carker, and don't jaw. It goes by the majority."

"I—I say—" stammered Carker, in dismay.

"Shut up! You three chaps say hanged?" asked Gordon Gay, turning to the Old Co.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hanged by the neck, or any other part that's convenient; I'm not particular."

"Oh, quite!"

"Good! What do you say, Tadpole?"

Tadpole blinked at his chief.

"Perhaps upon the whole Carker ought to be hung," he said. "He spoiled a canvas of mine once, a masterpiece which might have brought me fame and fortune. He says I can't paint, too. I think he had better be handed over to the police and hung. It will be so much more comfortable for everybody in the Fourth Form if Carker is hung."

"Ow!" groaned Carker.

"What do you say, Wootton major?"

"Oh, Carker be hanged!" said Harry Wootton.

"What do you say, Jack?"

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"Hang him!"

"Well, so do I," said Gordon Gay. "Upon the whole, I think the police had better put in an execution."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm sorry, Carker, but you see how it is. This is what comes of giving way to your temper," said Gordon Gay solemnly. "In the first place, you took Mont Blong's seat—"

"I—I'm sorry."

"Do you mean to say that if he were back in the carriage, you'd give up the seat to him, and stand yourself?"

"Of course I would!" groaned Carker.

"Honour bright?"

"Yes."

"Then it's about time he came back, I think," said Gordon Gay cheerfully.

Carker jumped.

"What do you mean—what—"

"I zink zat is all right, and I zink zat I have my seat, my dear Carkair," said a cheery voice; and Mont Blong dropped lightly from the luggage-rack above Carker's head.

"I zink zat I get a leetle cramped on ze rack if I stay there."

And the juniors roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carker Lies Down.

Carker glared wildly at the French junior.

For one instant it seemed to the amazed bully of the Fourth that it was the ghost of Mont Blong that had appeared suddenly before him.

But one second was enough for him to realise that he had been hoaxed.

While he had been face downwards in the dust on the floor of the carriage, Mont Blong had flung open the door of the carriage, and whipped up on the luggage-rack with his monkey-like agility, and had been crouching there ever since on top of two or three bags.

Carker, in his terror and dismay, had never suspected, and he had not even thought of glancing upward. If Mont Blong had been under a seat, Carker would have seen him; but he had not dreamed of looking up above the luggage on the rack.

The bully of the Fourth rose to his feet, and stood staring at the French junior with gleaming eyes, and his hands clenched. Mont Blong was grinning serenely. He had a very peculiar turn of humour, and the chums of the Fourth had caught on to his little jape, and backed him up instantly. They were yelling with laughter now. The expression of Carker's face was irresistible.

"You—you—you—" stuttered Carker.

"Oui, oui, oui!" said Mont Blong.

"You French beast—"

"Zat is not polite, my dear Carkair. I zink zat I take my seat since it is zat you have not ze objection."

"You sha'n't have my seat!" roared Carker, sitting down again quickly.

"Now, Carker, that won't do," said Gordon Gay, with a shake of the head. "You said plainly enough that if Mont Blong came back, you'd give up the seat, and stand yourself. You said honour bright."

"Yes, rather!"

"Yes, yes, razzer!" said Mont Blong.

"It—it was a swindle!" yelled Carker.

"No, only a jape," said Gordon Gay sweetly, "and you said honour bright. You've got to give Mont Blong the seat, Carkey."

"I won't!"

"Then we'll jolly well make you!" said Gordon Gay, rising. "All together, you chaps, and if Carker gives trouble, we'll shove him under the seat and keep him there till the train stops."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm not going to move," said Carker defiantly. "I say— Oh! Ow! Yow! Yaroooh!"

Carker had not really meant to say that. But he did. The rival Co.'s of the Fourth Form piled on him and yanked him from the corner seat. He was whirled away from the seat and dumped down in the bottom of the carriage.

"Yow!" roared Carker. "Lemme gerrup! Gerroff! Yowp!"

"Don't kick!" said Gordon Gay. "If you kick somebody out of the train, you know, you will be hanged, and you may never get over it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In spite of that warning, however, Carker struggled and kicked fiercely. Frank Monk gave a yell as he caught Carker's heavy boot with his leg.

"Oh! Yah! Sit on his head!" he yelled.

"Yes, rather!" panted Wootton major.

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He sat on Carker's head.

For a moment Carker seemed to be reduced to reason by this proceeding, for his struggling ceased. But it was only for a moment. The next, Wootton major leaped up with a frenzied yell.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" exclaimed Gordon Gay.

"Yow!"

"What the—"

"Yow-w-w-w-woop!"

"What—"

"Are you hurt?"

"Yaroop! He's bitten me!" yelled Wootton.

"Oh! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you silly asses, what are you cackling at?" yelled Wootton. "What—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I mean, sorry!" gasped Gordon Gay.

"You sit on his head, Jack."

"No fear!" said Wootton minor promptly. "He's dangerous."

"Tadpole, old man—"

"I decline to sit on his head, Gay," said Tadpole. "I think that it is very probable indeed that Wootton will suffer from blood poisoning. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sit on his head yourself, Gay!" yelled Wootton major.

"No jolly fear!" said the Cornstalk. "Roll him under the seat if he won't be quiet!"

"Good egg!"

Carker was rolled under the seat by many hands. He gasped and puffed in clouds of dust. The juniors, looking very warm and dusty, sat down again to rest. They needed a rest after that rough-and-tumble with the bully of the Fourth. Carboy carefully adjusted his collar and tie by a pocket mirror. Carboy was an aristocratic youth of elegant tastes—indeed, in personal elegance he was a rival of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. Carker's head came out from under the seat, and he roared.

"You rotters! Lemme out!"

"Keep quiet!"

"Oui, oui, oui! Zat you keep quiet! I zink zat you have made enoff of ze noise," said Mont Blong. "Zat you ring off, Carkair."

Carker plunged out from under the seat. Half a dozen boots reached out to push him back again.

"Biff, biff, biff!"

"Grooooooh!"

Carker disappeared.

For some minutes there was peace in the carriage

"Whenever any part of Carker shows, stamp on it," said Gordon Gay.

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, quite!"

No part of Carker showed.

But after some time his voice was heard muffled from the clouds of dust under the seat. He sneezed, and sneezed, and sneezed again, and howled out.

"Lemme gerrout, you chaps! Atchoo!"

"Can't be did!" said Gordon Gay. "There's no room for you in this carriage, but you would come in."

"I s-s-say, I'm chook-chook-chooking!"

"Well, chook-chook-choke quietly."

"Atchoo!"

"Look here, Carker, stop that sneezing," said Frank Monk. "It's getting on my nerves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sneezy thing to do," remarked Lane.

"Oh, don't! Your rotten puns are worse than Carker's sneezing," said Gordon Gay. "But you might shut up, Carker. We're four to a seat, and you've got all the room under that seat to yourself. You ought to be satisfied."

"Lemme gerrup, and I'll change as soon as the—atchoo—atchoo—train st-stops," mumbled Carker.

"Well, that's a fair offer," said Gordon Gay. "I believe we have several stops en route. If you'll promise to get out at the first stop, we'll let you get out from under the seat, and sit on the floor."

"Groo! Atchoo! All right. Atchoo!"

"You can get out, then. Don't kick him unless he tries to get on his hind legs, you fellows," said Gordon Gay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bully of the Fourth crawled out from under the seat, a dusty and most disreputable-looking object. The Fourth-Formers grinned at the sight of him. Carker did not venture to get on his hind legs, as Gordon Gay expressed it. He was content to sit on the floor of the carriage. It was much better than crouching in the confined space under the seat. He sat there, and glared and sneezed, and sneezed and glared, until the special train made its first stop. Then he got out of the carriage.

On the platform he shook his fist furiously at the grinning juniors in the carriage.

SHOW YOUR FRIENDS THIS ALL SCHOOL-STORY NUMBER OF "THE GEM."

"I'll make you sit up for this!" he yelled.
 "Ha, ha, ha! We've made him lie down, and he's going to make us sit up!" said Gordon Gay. "Well, one good turn deserves another."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You—you rotters! I'll pay you for this, and especially that French cad!" yelled Carker.

Herr Hentzel, the German master, put his head out of the next carriage.

"Vat is tat noise?" he exclaimed. "Carker, you get in te train at vunce! Vat you say to tat French poy?"

"Oh, n-n-nothing, sir!" stammered Carker.
 "You may get in dis carriage, Carker."

"Thank you, sir," said the bully of the Fourth.

Carker certainly did not relish the prospect of travelling down to Netherby with the German master, but he could not very well say so. Herr Otto Hentzel pushed the carriage door open, and Carker entered. There was a seat to spare—in fact, several. Nobody had been keen to travel with Herr Hentzel. Carker sat down opposite the German, and the keen, sharp eyes of the Teuton scanned him.

"You haf been in trouble, ain't it, Carker?"
 "Only a—a—little fun, sir," stammered Carker.

"You not like te French poy?"
 "No, I don't, sir," growled Carker. "He's a rotter!"

Carker was too furious to be very careful what he said. But he realised that he ought not to have used such expressions to a master, and he felt uneasy. Herr Hentzel was generally supposed to be on the look-out for a chance to punish juniors. But the German master did not look angry. He leaned back in his seat, and buried himself in his *Deutsch* newspaper, and made no further remark. A close observer might have guessed that Herr Otto Hentzel was pleased to learn that the bully of the Fourth did not like the French boy, though why that circumstance should have pleased him it would have been difficult to say.

The Grammarians Arrive.

A golden June afternoon.
 The special train was still speeding on its way, but in the carriage occupied by Gordon Gay & Co. the juniors did not seem tired.

The Fourth-Formers, in fact, were enjoying themselves. They had discussed the contents of a very large and well-packed lunch-basket, and Gordon Gay felt, as he expressed it, like a giant refreshed with ginger-pop.

The lowlands of Essex were round the train now, and the juniors looked out at the landscape with great interest, and watched for the sea.

Like all British boys, the sea had a deep fascination for them; they loved the wide, blue waters upon which Britons of many generations had won fame and fortune.

"It will be simply ripping!" said Gordon Gay, for about the twentieth time. "Dr. Monk's idea of a school under canvas is simply top-notch! You've really brought your father up to be a sensible old chap, Frank."

Frank Monk grinned.

"Yes; I'll bet the St. Jim's fellows would like it, too."
 "Oh, we'll have 'em down to play cricket there," said Gordon Gay. "D'ye know, I've hardly seen the sea since I landed in this little spot of yours—"

"This what?"
 "Spot!" said Gordon Gay cheerfully. "We've got farms at Wirra-Wirra as big as this. I knew an Australian chap who came to England, and he went to live in the Midlands, because he was afraid he would fall off!"

"Ass!" said Frank Monk. "Where on earth is Wirra-Wirra? I think you blessed Cornstalks beat everything for nerve. You and Wootton—"

"I'm not a Cornstalk," said Wootton major cheerfully.
 "Oh! Ain't all Australians Cornstalks?" asked Monk innocently.

Wootton major sniffed.
 "My dear fathead, what you don't know about Australia would fill the *Encyclopædia Britannica*," he said. "I come from Queensland. Queensland is bananalander."

"Oh! And you're a banana, are you?"
 "No, ass!" roared Wootton. "I'm a Bananalander."

"Dear me!" said Tadpole, who was slightly afflicted with deafness, among his other charms, and he looked at Wootton major in great surprise. "I always thought so, but how surprising that you should say so!"

"Eh?"
 "It is certainly quite candid of you to admit it—"

"Admit what, ass?"
 "Didn't you say you were a balmy bounder?" asked Tadpole innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Frank Monk. "He is, but he didn't say so!"

"Ass!" yelled Wootton. "Bananalander, chump! Do you understand now?"

Tadpole nodded.

"Yes, certainly. "You say you are a Bananalander chump. But—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "A Bananalander, fathead!" shrieked Wootton major.

"A Bananalander fathead!" said Tadpole in surprise.
 "You just said a Bananalander chump and a balmy bounder. My dear Wootton—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Br-r-r-r! Ring off!" growled Wootton major. "Pass the sandwiches, Monkey. I wonder when we shall see the sea?"

Gordon Gay looked out of the window.

In the distance a church spire could be seen over a belt of trees, and beyond that, far in the distance, there was a gleam in the sunshine. Gay gave a shout.

"There's the sea!"

The windows of the train were crammed. The Grammarians shouted to one another along the express. The spire they could see belonged to the village church of Netherby, and near Netherby was the camp they were to occupy for some months to come. As the express raced on, they caught sight of a grey old building embowered in thick woods.

"The Abbey!" somebody called along the train.

"Netherby Abbey!" said Gordon Gay. "That's a school, you chaps, and jolly near to our camp! We shall see something of the fellows. There's the sea again!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yes, razzar; hurrah!" said Mont Blong enthusiastically.

"Zat is where ze flag have brave for ze thousand years ze battle and ze breeze. Hurrah!"

"Not your giddy flag, though!" grinned Wootton major.

"My dear shum—"

"We shall be stopping soon," said Gordon Gay. "Get your traps together. There's the station!"

The special train rushed into the little country station. It was a quiet old place, with bright flower-beds glowing along the plank platform. An old porter with grey beard and sleepy eyes stood watching the train come in. It was evident that a special train was a very rare visitor to Netherby Station. The special clattered and clanked to a stop.

Doors were flung open, and a swarm of Grammarians poured out upon the platform. The little station, which had been so quiet before, was noisy enough now.

Baggage dumped down on the platform in great piles. Fellows of all ages and sizes swarmed in the station.

There was a rush for the brakes, which were waiting outside, and the juniors clambered in. Punter of the Fifth and a crowd more of his Form crowded into the second brake, and Punter shifted the driver out of his seat and took the reins. Apparently not hearing Mr. Hilton, his Form-master, call out to him, Punter set the horses in motion, cracking his whip with a succession of reports like pistol-shots.

"Cheek!" said Gordon Gay, standing up in the Fourth Form brake. "Punter can't drive for toffee! Cheek!"

"He's getting along at a good rate," Wootton major remarked.

"Ciel! It iz zat he beat us in ze race!" said Mont Blong.

"I do not like! Zat ve turn out ze drivair and race!"
 Gordon Gay's eyes gleamed.

The suggestion was exactly in accordance with his ideas. There were three horses to the brake, but Gay was a good driver—he had driven bigger and more unruly teams at home in the cornstalk country. He tapped the driver on the shoulder.

"Give me the ribbons, old man."
 The driver shook his head.

"Horders for me to drive, sir," he said.

"But I'm giving you fresh orders," explained Gordon Gay.

The man grinned.

"Can't be done, sir."

"Oh, yes, it can, quite easily," said Gordon Gay cheerfully. "Lend a hand, you chaps."

Three or four fellows lent a hand.

The driver was lifted bodily out of his seat and dropped gently into the road. He sat down there, looking dazed and bewildered.

"My heye!" he gasped.

Gordon Gay clambered into his seat, and cracked his whip. The team started.

"Sit tight!" shouted Gay.

"Hurrah!"

"We're off!"

(The Fourth-Formers' exciting race with the Fifth-Form brake, and the startling ending thereto, together with much more that is of absorbing interest, is described in next Thursday's long, amusing and exciting instalment of this splendid, new school serial. Please order next week's

"GEM" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 230.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE

**For Next Thursday.****"AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR,"**

by Martin Clifford, is the title of our splendid, extra long, complete school tale of St. Jim's for next Thursday. Kildare, the upright and stalwart captain of the school, is the leading figure in an unusual incident, destined to have unlooked-for consequences. The school captain, however, faces his trouble in a characteristic and manly way, and frankly owns up to his share in what he himself has come to regard as

"AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR."

As a school tale of extraordinary and original interest, our grand new serial,

"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS"

has already made its mark, and spread the fame of the All-School-Story "Gem" Library still further abroad. The plot is thickening already, and the doings of Herr Hentzel, the mysterious German master, are attracting more than a passing attention among certain of the juniors of the novel open-air school. Next Thursday's instalment will reveal further developments, the bland Mont Blong, the new French junior, showing a new side of his versatile character. My readers will find

"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS"

a story well worth following with the closest attention, as it unfolds week by week—a tale of absorbing school interest and exciting adventure that never flags for one moment.

For Making Invisible Inks.

H. D., of South Shields, and a number of other readers have written to ask me how they may manufacture some invisible ink for themselves, and I have pleasure in giving herewith four well-tryed recipes:

1.—Write on paper with ordinary water in which rice has been soaked. To make the writing reappear, brush over lightly with tincture of iodine.

2.—Use milk instead of ink. Upon rubbing with a dirty finger the writing will appear. Paper without gloss or shine on is the best.

3.—An ink which has the properties of becoming invisible in four days is made as follows: Take ten grains of arrow-root and boil it in one gill of water, and when cold add twenty-five drops of tincture of iodine. The writing cannot be made to reappear.

4.—Mix one drachm of gum arabic in one ounce of water. To make the writing reappear gradually heat over a lamp.

Replies in Brief.

J. R. Sykes (Liddall).—The best way for you to strengthen your chest and stomach is to go in for a course of physical training, and to get as much fresh air as possible. Ten minutes every night with a pair of spring dumbbells, together with deep breathing exercises, will go a long way towards developing the chest. For an exercise for the stomach, lie flat on the back on the ground, press the palms of the hands against the floor, and, keeping them perfectly stiff, lift the legs slowly upwards until they are at right angles to the body. Then slowly lower them. This repeated two or three times every night before bed, and early in the morning, after a cold bath, should soon make you healthy and strong.

Miss E. Fancett (Ilford).—The explanation of the words you mention in your letter has been given many times before in the series of Frank Kingston stories that have been running in "The Gem" Library. Professor Polgrave, a close friend of Frank Kingston, invented a method of disguise which was more effective than any other known. Certain kinds of dliquids were injected into the skin by means of small syringes, thus changing the appearance of the face.

Back Numbers Offered and Wanted.

R. B. Peters, Maisoncroft, Stanhope Road, St. Alban's, would be glad if any reader would quote him for the whole or part of the halfpenny numbers of "The Magnet" Library.

E. Earle, 146, Northboro' Road, Norbury, Surrey, wishes to obtain any back numbers of "The Magnet," from Nos. 1-100, and of "The Gem," from Nos. 1-120.

T. Nickels, 27, Belmont Park Road, Leyton, Essex, has Nos. 172-221 of "The Gem" Library and 175 to 221 of "The Magnet" Library to dispose of at half-price.

S. Maloney, 219, Clonliffe Road, Dublin, Ireland, wishes to obtain Nos. 197 and 201 of "The Gem" Library at half-price.

W. G. Smith, Woodlands, Bowes Road, New Southgate, N., wishes to obtain Nos. 11-16 and 18 of "The Gem" Library, New Series.

J. Hall, 18, Caine Road, Hong Kong, wishes to obtain Nos. 208 and 209 of "The Magnet" Library.

How to Set Butterflies.

With the capture of the required specimens, the hardest part of the collector's task is only at its commencement, the business of "setting" the insects requiring considerable skill and also practice before it can be carried out in a really neat and workmanlike manner.

Having laid out the specimens it is required to set on a piece of white paper, you must then provide yourself with the following requisites: one or more setting-boards, consisting of strips of cork-covered wood, having a bevelled groove running down the centre of each, for the reception of the bodies of the butterflies; a number of ordinary pins, and also some of the special-entomological pins, in different sizes; and a few special "setting-needles." All these requirements may be bought at any naturalists' shop for a few pence, or any of the big stores will supply them.

Now, take one of the insects, handling it with the greatest care, and after pressing up the wings with a needle, insert a small pin through the exact middle of the thorax, allowing the pin to project about an eighth of an inch through on the underside. The pin should slope somewhat towards the head of the butterfly, but without leaning sideways in either direction. It will be seen, on experiment, that to get the correct position of this pin requires careful manipulation.

The point of the pin, projecting from the underside of the insect, should now be fixed exactly in the centre of the groove in the setting-board, and pressed in so that the wings of the butterfly are just clear of the surface of the board. Cut some pointed slivers of stiff, white paper, of a size proportionate to the dimension of the insect to be set. The next thing is to push the wings into a natural position with a setting-needle, beginning with one of the under wings. When you have decided exactly how each wing is to be fixed so that its markings may be displayed in the most effective and natural manner, you can proceed to fasten them in position by means of the slivers of stiff paper. With a tiny pin at the widest end, these act as braces which span each of the wings and hold them neatly.

The slips of paper must be of sufficient length to allow of the pin at the end of each being well outside the wings, otherwise there is danger that the point may pierce the wing itself, and thus ruin the specimen.

The legs and antennæ of the butterfly should then be spread out in a natural manner, and fixed in position with more of the papers, when the setting will be complete. Amateur naturalists will find the setting of the specimens they have themselves secured, perhaps with great difficulty, a most interesting and absorbing operation, in which practice alone will make perfect. For this reason it is well to practise on a few of the commoner varieties of insect before commencing to set those of greater value as specimens.

THE EDITOR.