

Splendid ^{Extra Long,} Complete School Tale.

PLUCK

JACK'S ENEMY,
AND:
THE EMPEROR'S RING.

A Tale of John Smith, Detective.

1^o



TAFFY NEVER UTTERED A SOUND, BUT BRAVELY WADED ON THROUGH THE BITTER COLD WATER THAT REACHED NEARLY UP TO HIS WAIST. (See page 13.)

NO. 122. VOL. 7. NEW SERIES.

NEW SCHOOL TALE.

YOU CAN START NOW.

THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

The day PAT NUGENT, a young Irish boy, arrives at ST. KIT'S, an election is taking place for the captaincy of the school—ELDRED LACY and ARTHUR TALBOT being the two candidates. PAT is soon spotted by a crowd of juniors, and to stop him from giving his vote he is thrown into a cupboard in LACY'S study. He goes to sleep, and on waking up he hears voices—the voices of ELDRED LACY and his brother, RUPERT LACY, the Squire of LYNWOOD: "You must ruin and disgrace ARTHUR TALBOT, and drive him from the school. He is a menace to me—to both of us. But ruined, disgraced, driven forth into poverty and obscurity, I shall no longer fear him!"

PAT is eventually released from the cupboard, and after the election, which is decided in favour of TALBOT, becomes great chums with BLAGDEN and GREENE. These three friends take an instinctive dislike to ELDRED LACY, and continually get bullied by him. One day a curious meeting of the two LACYS and a strange tramp, whose name is BLACK, takes place in a lane not far from the school. One night PAT makes his way to LACY'S study, and upsets a few of the bully's things. The same night TRIMBLE and COBB decide on the same object, and they tie a firework to the gas bracket.

Now go on with the tale:

Lacy Has a Bad Fright.

Cobb grinned as he saw Trimble's scheme. "I say, that's a bit thick," he replied. "It'll make old Lacy jump right out of his skin if he lights that in the dark." "There's no if about it," replied Trimble. "He's certain to light it in the dark. He will come up in the dark, and turn on the gas and put a match to it. The gas won't light, but the cracker will. And I want to make him jump out of his skin."

"There'll be an awful row," said Trimble composedly.

"All the worse for Pat Nugent," said Trimble composedly. He blew out the candle and they quitted the study. They were quickly in their beds again, but they did not think of sleep. They remained awake, listening for the disturbance that was sure to follow when Lacy came up to bed.

Lacy, as it happened, was late to bed that night. He was playing a game of chess with Rake, and did not finish till the limit of time allowed for any of the boys to remain up. The common room was deserted save for the two by the time Rake was checkmated, and they went up the stairs together, and parted at Lacy's door; Rake going on to his own room as Lacy went into his study.

Lacy felt in the usual place for his matchbox, to light the gas. He found it easily enough, for Pat had been careful not to displace it. He struck a match, and there was only a scratch on the box, and no light. He tried another and another, with the same result. The prefect muttered something under his breath.

Something was evidently wrong with the matches. Half a dozen he scratched on the box, but there was never a glimmer of light. He had no matches about him, so he stepped to the door and called out to Rake, who had just lighted his gas in the next room.

"I say, give me a match, Rake. Mine won't strike, somehow, confound them. Somebody's been playing a trick with my matchbox."

Rake came out of his room with a box of matches.

"Here you are."

"Thanks," said Lacy, and taking the matches he returned to his study. He struck one, and put it up to the burner with his right hand, turning the gas on with his left, as usual. The gas did not light. But a sudden fizz made Lacy jump back, and drop the match, and a glimmer of sparks in the darkness amazed him.

"Why, what the—how the—wooroo—ooh-oh!"

He jumped clear of the floor with a startled yell as the cracker exploded.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! The sudden explosions, succeeding each other so rapidly, were enough to startle anybody, in the darkness and the dead silence of the night.

Lacy gasped, and bolted for the door, fell over a chair in his haste, and went down with a crash and a yell.

Bang! Bang!

"Help!" shrieked Lacy. "Fire! Murder! Help!"

Rake came rushing up the passage.

"What on earth's the matter? What has happened?"

Lacy staggered to his feet. He was bruised and hurt. The smell of the gunpowder in the room was strong, but the cracker was silent now. It had done its work.

"I don't know!" gasped Lacy, dazedly. "Something's exploded—I don't know what it was."

"My hat! It's roused the house."

There was no doubt about that. A large-sized cracker, exploding six times in succession in the middle of the night, was calculated to waken the Seven Sleepers. Doors were opening in all directions, and excited voices demanded to know what was the matter.

"Why don't you light your blooming gas, Lacy?" exclaimed Rake.

"I—I tried to, but the match exploded something. I don't know what it was. Somebody's been shoving dynamite in my study."

"What is the matter here?"

It was Mr. Crane, the master of the Sixth, at the door, in dressing-gown and slippers. The master's face was very angry as he peered into the dark study.

"Light your gas, Lacy!"

"I—I can't, Mr. Crane. It has just exploded, and—"

"Exploded? Nonsense! There is a strong smell of gunpowder. Talbot, please get a candle. This must be looked into."

Talbot was the first to awake and come out of his room. He soon brought the candle, and Mr. Crane entered Lacy's study. Lacy's face was white as a sheet in the flickering light. He had never been so startled or terrified in his life.

"Now, Lacy, tell me what has happened?"

"I put up a match to light the gas," said Lacy, helplessly, "and something exploded. I don't know what it was."

Mr. Crane's look became savage as he glanced at the gas bracket.

"You can see, if you look," he said. "The burner has been stopped with wax, and a cracker fastened there. You must have lighted the fuse yourself."

Lacy's teeth came together with a click. He realised that he had been frightened out of his wits by a trick of some reckless junior.

"It is a trick," went on Mr. Crane, "a most foolish and dangerous trick. A weak person might be seriously injured by such a shock to the system. Have you any idea who played this wicked and foolish trick upon you, Lacy?"

"No, unless it was Nugent."

"Nugent!" repeated Mr. Crane. "Why do you think it was he?"

"He's always up to some trick," said Lacy, with a spiteful look at Talbot. "I had to lick him, too, this evening, for refusing to go to bed, and throwing his boot at me in the Lower Fourth dormitory."

"Indeed! If it was Nugent, he shall learn not to disturb the house in the middle of the night with such antics," said Mr. Crane grimly. "Come with me, Talbot and Lacy, and

NEXT SATURDAY:

"MISSING."

A School Tale (Extra Long), AND

"ON THE TRACK OF MARTIN STERN,"

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IN "PLUCK." 1st

we will ascertain. The rest of you had better go back to bed."

The master of the Sixth, with the captain and prefect, proceeded to the Lower Fourth dormitory. All was silent as Mr. Crane opened the door. He held up the candle, and the light fell flickeringly upon the row of white beds and the faces of the sleepers. No one seemed to be awake.

The dormitory, being on a different floor, and shut off by a thick oaken door, had been penetrated by only a faint echo of the noise which had roused all the sleepers near Lacy's room. None of the Lower Fourth had been awakened. Mr. Crane approached Pat Nugent's bed. The boy was lying on his side, with his head resting on one arm, his eyes closed, and he was breathing deeply and regularly.

"He certainly seems to be asleep," said Mr. Crane. "He is shamming," said Lacy savagely. "He is the worst boy in the Fourth Form, and cunning enough for anything." "Nothing of the kind," said Talbot quickly, as he saw the impression this statement had upon Mr. Crane. "Nugent is my fag, sir, and I have always found him singularly frank and truthful, and as far from being cunning as any boy could be. He has not been long at St. Kit's, but I have never had a real fault to find with him."

"He is your fag?" repeated Mr. Crane, "then you should certainly know something of his character. Do you consider him a boy to play such a dangerous and cruel trick?"

"Certainly not," said Talbot promptly. "He might play tricks on Lacy, and in fact, I know he has done so, but I do not believe for a moment he would do such a thing as that."

"Why, he is awake all the time!" exclaimed Lacy. "He was only pretending to be asleep, as I told you."

Pat's eyes were indeed open now; the voices close to his bed had awakened him. He stared in amazement at the master and two seniors. A look of dismay passed over his face as he recognised Lacy. His natural conclusion was that Lacy had guessed him to be the author of the raid in his study, but, of course, he knew nothing about the episode of the cracker.

"Were you pretending to be asleep, Nugent?" asked Mr. Crane sternly.

"No, sir," said Pat, "I've just woke up."

"Do you know why we are here?"

"I suppose old Lacy's on the warpath again," said Pat. "He's always on my track for something or other."

Mr. Crane coughed. He had not a particularly high opinion of Lacy himself. Still, it was imperative to get to the bottom of the outrage.

"Did you place a cracker at the gas-burner in Lacy's room, Nugent?"

Pat looked astounded.

"Certainly not, sir."

"You deny having been in Lacy's study at all?"

Pat was silent. He had not, of course, expected to be picked upon and questioned directly by a master; but he had never told a deliberate lie, and he did not intend to begin now. Yet it was hardly fair that he should be called upon to incriminate himself.

"Answer my question, Nugent!" rapped out the master of the Sixth.

"I don't see why you should ask me, sir!" said Pat doggedly. "If Lacy thinks I have been in his study, let him prove it."

"That's only fair, sir," said Talbot.

Mr. Crane looked obstinate.

"This is too serious a matter to be passed over," he said. "Nugent must say definitely whether he was guilty of this outrage."

"I don't know what you're talking about, sir!" said Pat.

"Someone placed a firework so that Lacy ignited it when he tried to light his gas," said Mr. Crane. "Did you do it?"

"I did not, sir."

"But he doesn't deny having been in my room," said Lacy quickly.

"Have you been in Lacy's room, Nugent? If you were there for an innocent purpose there is no reason why you shouldn't say so."

Pat did not reply; he wanted time to think. The affair of the cracker astonished him, and he saw clearly enough that if he admitted having been in the room he would probably be adjudged guilty of all that had happened. His silence was misconstrued by Mr. Crane. The master's brow was dark and stern.

"Very well, Nugent," he said, "you refuse to answer me. I shall question you no further. In the morning you will be questioned by Dr. Kent."

And he turned and walked out of the dormitory, followed by the two seniors. He went back angrily to his room, and Talbot entered his quarters. Lacy went on to his own room

in a rather satisfied frame of mind, in spite of the shock to his nerves.

He firmly believed that Pat had placed the cracker there, and there was no doubt that the junior would be flogged by the doctor if he was found guilty of the dangerous trick.

Lacy's burner required a good deal of cleaning before it could be used; but he borrowed a candle, and proceeded to go to bed. When he plunged in between the sheets he gave a fearful yell. His pyjamas protected him to some extent, but he still felt the cinders Pat had placed there scraping on his nether limbs.

He sat up in amazement, and examined his bed, and when he found out its state, his feelings were easier to imagine than describe.

With set teeth he got out of bed, and took off the bed-clothes and shook them out. He shook them well, but ashes are not easily got rid of, and Lacy passed an extremely uncomfortable night.

He rose in the morning in a mood to thoroughly enjoy whatever punishment was inflicted upon Pat, and he would have decidedly preferred that punishment to be something "with boiling oil in it."

Under Suspicion.

"I say, Pat, you were an ass to shove that cracker on Lacy's gas!" exclaimed Blagden, the next morning.

The story was all over the dormitory before the boys went down. Cleeve had awakened, and heard Mr. Crane talking the night before. Pat stared at Blagden as he got out of bed.

"What are you talking about, Blaggy?"

"You did it, I suppose?" said Blagden, staring. "You know all about it."

"I don't know anything about it."

"Oh, tell us another!" chuckled Cleeve. "You can't expect us to swallow that, Nugent."

Pat turned on him angrily.

"Do you mean to call me a liar, Cleeve?"

"N-no," said Cleeve, retreating in alarm, "I don't mean to call you anything, Nugent. I didn't mean anything at all."

"Then keep your silly cocoanut shut up!" said Pat.

"But look here, Pat," exclaimed Blagden, "didn't you do it, then?"

"No, and don't know who did. I never knew anything about it till Mr. Crane came here last night and started asking questions," said Pat. "I made some little improvements in Lacy's quarters, but I never put a cracker there. Somebody else did that, unless Lacy dreamed it."

"Of course, if you say so, it's true," said Blagden, looking puzzled; "but I don't see who could have done it. Funny that somebody else should be on the war-path at the same time as our noble selves."

"Well, I don't know. Lacy's a bully, and lots of the juniors have a grudge against him. But the chap who played such a silly trick as that ought to be fayed!"

"Well, I thought it was rather steep. I'm glad it wasn't you. There will be a row about it, and a flogging for somebody."

Blagden was right.

Few of the masters at St. Kit's were hard upon ordinary boyish mischief. They knew that boys would be boys, and were all the better for being boys; but this was not to be considered as a mere piece of fun. The consequences might have been serious.

At the best, it had wakened half the house in the middle of the night. The delinquent, when discovered, was certain of a flogging; and it was soon apparent that the matter was not to be allowed to rest.

Mr. Crane had gone to the doctor the first thing in the morning, and the Head of St. Kit's had promptly taken the matter in hand.

Pat went down with the Lower Fourth feeling somewhat uneasy. The unexpected happening had caused a furore, and now it was pretty certain that his visit to Lacy's study would come out.

If he admitted having gone there to play a trick on Lacy, he was pretty certain to be adjudged guilty of all that had been done. He had little time to think over it before he was called into the doctor's study.

The doctor's face was very stern and severe. His glance rested searchingly upon Pat's face as he entered, and he did not fail to note the signs of worry in the boy's countenance.

"Nugent, I have sent for you to question you about the outrage in Lacy's study last night. You seem to have refused to answer Mr. Crane's questions."

"I know nothing whatever about the cracker, sir."

"Did you go to Lacy's study?"

Pat did not answer.

NEXT SATURDAY:

"MISSING,"
A School Tale (Extra Long),
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"ON THE TRACK OF MARTIN THE L" IN "PLUCK"
A Splendid Tale of this
Famous Detective.

IN "PLUCK" IN

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"That is the question he would not answer last night," said Mr. Crane.

"I must insist upon your answering it, Nugent!" said Dr. Kent. "At the same time, if you did not place the cracker there, I shall not punish you for going there."

Pat brightened up at once.

"Yes, sir, I did go," he said immediately.

"For what reason?"

"To play a little joke on Lacy."

"Indeed! Kindly explain the nature of the joke."

Pat explained. When he told what he had done to Lacy's bed, and the rest, the doctor had to hide a smile with his hand, and Mr. Crane turned away his head.

"And why did you play these absurd tricks on Lacy, Nugent?"

"He's a beast, sir—I mean we don't like him," said Pat, flushed.

"It was very wrong of you, but I have promised you immunity for everything except the firework affair. You will deny having placed it there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any idea who could have done so?"

"No, sir."

The doctor looked puzzled. There was a frankness in Pat's manner which made him inclined to believe the boy, and yet he admitted having been on the spot with hostile intentions against Lacy, and there was no reasonable suspicion against anyone else.

"I hope you are speaking the truth, Nugent," he said at length. "The evidence is all against you, yet I can hardly think that you would look me in the face and tell me a deliberate lie. You may go for the present."

Pat quitted the room. Dr. Kent turned to the master of the Sixth, with a troubled brow.

"What do you think, Mr. Crane?"

"I think that the evidence is all against Nugent, as you say, sir," replied Mr. Crane, "yet the boy has a truthful air. There is a clue we can take up, I think. It is possible that we may learn who was in possession of that firework. It was, I presume, the owner of it who placed it in Lacy's study."

"Undoubtedly, I should say. Follow that line, Mr. Crane, and let me know the result."

Mr. Crane accordingly questioned every boy in the Lower Fourth on the subject; but all of them denied having had a cracker, or knowing anyone else who had had one. Either some boy was telling untruths, or the delinquent was in another Form. The Upper Fourth were questioned, but one and all denied knowledge of the cracker.

"It is absurd to suppose that the trick was played by a boy in a senior Form," the head remarked, when Mr. Crane made his report. "The guilty party is in the Fourth Form. I shall deal with that Form. If Nugent is not guilty, we are baffled; but to allow such a matter to pass without punishment would be a serious blow to the discipline of the school. I shall speak on the subject in Hall."

The doctor's pronouncement, when he made it, was eagerly listened to by the junior Forms. It was brief, but to the point.

There had been an outrage against the laws of the school, and the culprit was as yet undiscovered. Until he was discovered the whole Fourth would be detained for an hour's extra preparation every evening in the presence of the master, and one of the weekly half-holidays would be stopped.

There was consternation in the Fourth. Black looks were cast at Pat by the rest when the boys went out after morn-

ing school. The Fourth knew now that he had raided Lacy's study the previous night, and that he was suspected by the masters.

The general opinion was that he had not only done what he had confessed to doing, but the rest as well. Nobody blamed him for playing a trick on the unpopular prefect; but he was universally condemned for not owning up and taking his licking, now that his whole Form had to suffer for his joke. It was in vain that Pat protested that he knew no more about the matter than the others did. Some believed him, but the majority did not.

"If you didn't do it," said Trimble, "who did?"

"How should I know?" said Pat indignantly. "I tell you I know nothing at all about the matter."

"Rats! You were there!"

"Yes; but the chap, whoever he was, didn't put the cracker up while I was there, you ass!"

"I fancy he did," sneered Trimble. "It was you, of course."

"I tell you it was not!"

"And I tell you I don't believe you."

No more was said, but Pat let out his left, and Trimble sat down in the quadrangle, and the argument ended abruptly. More than one doubting Thomas was "biffed" that day by Pat, but though this might silence them, and usually did, it did not convince them.

Blagden and Greene believed in him, but while some of the others were doubtful, the great majority condemned him; especially so when they were detained in the classrooms for the additional hour of preparation, under the eye of a master. Of course, the fact that they were irked and bored by the detention did not prove Pat guilty, but the youthful mind is not over reasonable, and by the time that hour was over, most of the juniors felt inclined to lynch Pat.

Their views might have changed if they had heard a little talk that passed between Trimble and Cleeve in the privacy of the former's study. Cleeve had come in with a peculiar expression on his face, and Trimble was unusually civil. He asked his visitor to sit down, and produced some jam-tarts with really eager hospitality. Cleeve grinned, ate the jam-tarts, and then came to business.

"Where did you go after I left you last night, Trimble?" he inquired.

"Go?" said Trimble, looking astonished. "To bed, of course!"

"You didn't go to Lacy's study?"

"Of course not. Why should I?"

"Where's that cracker I saw in your desk the other day?"

"Rot! You know I never had one."

"Oh, really?" said Cleeve. "I suppose it was some other fellow's desk I saw it in. I'll make a few inquiries about it."

"Don't do anything of the kind," said Trimble hastily. "Better say nothing at all. I may have one—I forgot. Have some more tarts?"

"I don't mind if I do. They're nice!"

"Got 'em from the tuck-shop yesterday," said Trimble. "Wire in; I don't mind if you do in the lot."

"That's really kind of you!" said Cleeve.

He waded into the fresh lot of tarts Trimble brought out of his cupboard, and finished them to the last one. Then, with perfect calmness, he resumed the topic that was so disagreeable to Trimble.

"I wonder what became of that cracker?"

"What does it matter?" said Trimble uneasily. "Of course, you couldn't connect that with what happened last night."

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A School Tale



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AND

"ON THE TRACK OF MARTIN STERN,"
A Splendid Tale of this
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IN "PLUCK" 1d.

NEXT SATURDAY:

Library

"Of course not. A suspicious person might. I ain't suspicious."

"We've always been jolly good friends, Cleeve, haven't we?"

"Well, I don't know; you're such a beastly bully!"

Trimble's hand clenched hard, and unclenched again. He could not afford to quarrel with Cleeve just now.

"I didn't mean to be, Cleeve—I didn't, really."

"It's curious about that cracker," said Cleeve musingly.

"By the way, Trimble, I'm hard up."

"Are you?" said Trimble, not very sympathetically.

"Yes; as you said just now, we've always been jolly good friends; and I thought you might lend me five bob," said Cleeve calmly.

"I'll kick you out of my study!" roared Trimble, quite losing his temper, and starting to his feet.

Cleeve did not stir; he only smiled unpleasantly.

"I think you had better not, Trimble," he said. "Sit down, old chap."

Trimble glared at him for a moment in speechless rage. Then he sat down humphly.

"That's better," said Cleeve. "Of course, I wouldn't think of pressing you, even such a jolly good friend as you are, Trimble. But if you could spare that five bob, I should be awfully obliged, you know."

Trimble's teeth were set hard. He thrust his hand into his trousers' pocket, and counted out the five shillings. It left a big hole in his pocket-money.

"Thank you!" said Cleeve, transferring it calmly to his own pocket.

"This is really kind and generous of you, Trimble; but we've always been jolly good friends, haven't we?"

"Get on!" muttered Trimble.

"Certainly," said Cleeve, rising.

He left the study, and Trimble sat down, thinking it out. His revenge upon the prefect and upon Pat Nugent, which he had considered such a neat stroke of strategy, was not panning out so well as he had anticipated. He had succeeded in his aim; but the way of the transgressor is hard, and he was finding it so.

"But I'll make Pat Nugent sit up, all the same!" he muttered savagely. "The whole Form's against him now, and I'll see that they give him a high old time."

Trimble did not spare his efforts, and in the present state of feeling in the Fourth Form, he found plenty to back him up. The same evening Pat found a paper pinned upon the study table:

"Pat Nugent is sent to Coventry for being a liar and a sneak. Anybody in the Fourth Form, Upper or Lower, found speaking to him will be cut by the Form as well. By order."

(To be continued.)

Your Editor's Corner.

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

"MISSING!"

Our next Saturday's long, complete school tale will be written by Charles Hamilton, author of so many extremely popular school tales.

Jack Blake, Augustus, and Figgins & Co. figure very prominently in this extra long, complete tale, and I hope you will all make a point of ordering your copies in advance.

"ON THE TRACK OF MARTIN STERN."

It is some time since we have had a tale of the famous detective, Martin Stern, and I feel sure that my friends and readers will welcome his reappearance in the pages of PLUCK.

PLUCK
EXTRA LONG,
COMPLETE SCHOOL
TALE EVERY SATURDAY. **1d**



A POCKET-KNIFE WINNER.

SLEEP, SLEEPER, SLEEPING.

A sleeper is one who sleeps. And a sleeper is a saloon-carriage on a railway train in which the sleeper sleeps. And a sleeper is a tie under the rails on which the sleeper in which the sleeper sleeps runs. Now, then, when the sleeper sleeps in the sleeper that is carried over the sleeper under the sleeper in which the sleeper sleeps, the sleeper sleeps in the sleeper until the sleeper in which the sleeper sleeps jumps off the sleeper, and wakes the sleeper in the sleeper by bumping against the sleeper, until there is no longer any sleeper sleeping in the sleeper in which the sleeper sleeps.

There was a young fellow named Gia,
Who called on a girl called Maria;
But the short-sighted fool
Took the stove for a stool,
And set his best trousers on fire!
E. SMITH.

I call your attention to two more additions to "The Boys' Friend" Library:

No. 13—"ONLY A PITBOY," a splendid tale of collier life, by Hamilton Edwards; and No. 14—"CARINGTON'S LAST CHANCE," a tale of school life, by Henry St. John.

YOUR EDITOR.

This picture depicts an incident from "Missing," by Charles Hamilton, one of the two complete tales for next Saturday's PLUCK. 32 pages. Price 1d.