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PLUCK

Grand School Tale:

"THE PREFECTS OF BOWKER'S HOUSE." By JACK NORTH.

Splendid Detective Story:

"A REGIMENTAL MYSTERY."

1^p



LARINGA BEGAN TO PLAY A LOW, SOOTHING AIR, AND TAFFY'S RESENTMENT MELTED LIKE WAX BEFORE FIRE. A DULL LOOK CAME INTO HIS FACE, WHICH BECAME AS THAT OF A SLEEP-WALKER. (See page 9)

NEW SERIES

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YOU CAN START NOW.



THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

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

Pat becomes great chums with Blagden and Greene. One day a tramp, named Black, stops Arthur Talbot and tells him he is his father. The latter believes him, as he has never known his parents. He gives him some money.

Pat, remembering what he had heard when locked in the cupboard, decides to shadow Lacy, and overhears the bully and Black hatching a terrible plot against Arthur Talbot. The next day Black comes to the school while a cricket-match is on, and claims Talbot as his son before them all. However, Black is warned off the place by one of the masters, and Talbot goes to his study. Later the Head joins him, and proposes that a certain silver box that belongs to Arthur, but has never been touched, should be opened. "No," said Arthur, "it is not to be opened till I am twenty-one. Besides, it may only prove that Black is my father!" (Now go on with the story.)

The Head has a Chat with Talbot.

Dr. Kent felt his heart sink. Truly, this was the most plausible theory of the secret of the silver box.

It would be no gain to learn for certain that the ruffian Black was in reality, and indisputably, the father of the boy he claimed as his son.

"No," said Talbot, "we can leave the silver box out of the question. I have never attached any great importance to it, and in any case a pledge solemnly given to a man now dead cannot be broken. We must deal with this man who claims to be my father. I try not to believe that he speaks the truth, and yet I am aware that my feeling comes from the heart, not from the head. I cannot resist a conviction that this shame is real—that I have found my father at last in that unspeakable blackguard!"

And the captain of St. Kit's dropped his head upon his hands with a groan.

"My poor boy! Take courage; at all events we are not certain yet, and in any case the man cannot claim you."

"A father can claim his son!"

"Not if the son is well cared for by good friends, and the father is a blackguard not fit to have the care of a boy," exclaimed the doctor. "Exactly how such a case would go at law I do not know; but this I do know, that this ruffian has neither the money nor the desire to go to law upon the subject. So far as actually claiming you is concerned, we can defy him."

"Yes—yes, I suppose so; but—"

"He must have parted with you of his own accord, and therefore forfeited his claim. And the evidence he has offered, though sufficient to make us uneasy, would go for absolutely nothing in a court of law."

"But if he is my father—"

"Do not deceive yourself upon that point, Talbot. You owe such a man no duty, no obedience. Even if he is your father, he has forfeited every claim. But I cannot and will not believe it. I repeat that you have nothing to fear."

"I suppose he could not take me away from St. Kit's; but he has disgraced me here. How can I ever look the fellows in the face again?"

"The best of them will think none the worse of you for this, Arthur."

"No doubt; but they are not all of the best," said Talbot.

"I have enemies, and many of the fellows are not likely to regard a disreputable blackguard's son as an equal. Even those who are sorry for me now will turn against me in time."

The good old doctor was silent.

He knew that there was a great deal in what Talbot said.

The boys at St. Kit's were many of them the sons of wealthy parents, and, as at all public schools, there was a certain element of snobbishness.

It would certainly not be long before a set was made against Talbot by the snobbish party, and by those who had always envied him.

There were troublous times ahead for the captain of St. Kit's.

"There is something in what you say, Talbot," said the doctor, at last. "But what is it, then, that you are thinking of doing?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I ought to leave St. Kit's."

"Leave St. Kit's?"

"It would be better for you, sir, and perhaps better for the school."

"Impossible! You must put that out of your mind altogether, Arthur," said the doctor decidedly. "I will never consent to anything of the kind."

"At all events I must resign the captaincy."

"Perhaps that might be advisable for the present," said the doctor, with some hesitation. "Only for the present, I say, till we have some further light upon this miserable matter."

Talbot braced himself up a little.

The look of sadness and distress on the doctor's kind old face touched him deeply.

"I'm a fool to let this thing knock me over," he said, with an attempt at a smile. "If it hadn't come so suddenly I could have stood it better. I'll see if I can't show a little more pluck, and see it through without whining."

"That's the right spirit, my boy; and hope for the best."

It was some time before the doctor left his protégé. He left Talbot in a calmer, though hardly a happier mood. The captain of St. Kit's had made up his mind upon one point, and he proceeded to write out a notice of his resignation of the captaincy, to be put up on the notice-board in the hall.

It was bitter to him to have to do it; but it was plainly for the best. He had not the slightest doubt that Eldred Lacy, his enemy and rival, was already at work against him. If he did not resign of his own accord, it was quite probable that he would be asked to do so. His voluntary resignation would take the wind out of the enemy's sails, and would propitiate many who turned against him. Apart from that, Talbot felt that under the circumstances it would be unseemly for him to continue to act as captain of the school. But it was a blow to him, for he had been happy and proud to captain the old school; and he knew, too, that St. Kit's needed his aid to guide it through the coming days. The cricket season was in full swing now, and the difficulties of the cricket captain were many and great. At a time when care and skill were most needed, he was forced to leave the helm.

But it could not be helped.

The resignation was written out, and pinned up on the notice-board, for all St. Kit's to see and read.

Arthur Talbot was no longer captain of St. Kit's.

"THE SHADOW OF A SECRET."
A School Tale (Extra Long)
By Charles Hamilton

AND "UNITED WE STAND,"
A Spirited Adventure Story by
Owen Leach

IN "PLUCK," 1d.

NEXT SATURDAY:

The Committee of the Sixth.

While those miserable hours for Arthur Talbot passed on leaden wings, Eldred Lacy was not idle.

From the point of view of the prefect, all had gone well. Black had struck his cowardly blow, and no one at St. Kit's, so far as the prefect was aware, knew that he had had a hand in bringing about the disgrace that had overwhelmed the captain.

Eldred Lacy believed in striking the iron while it was hot, and he was never slow to do an ill-natured action. And so, while Talbot was plunged in the deepest gloom in his study, Lacy, in his own quarters, was busily at work.

Coming back from the cricket-field, after the affair of Seth Black, Lacy had spoken to a good many of the Sixth, most of them his own friends, and asked them to come and have tea in his study. They were not long in arriving. Lacy's study was a big, airy room, and the prefect always had plenty of money. Whatever the Squire of Lynwood's faults were, he was never lacking in generosity towards his younger brother. A fellow who was always in funds could give excellent feeds, and Lacy's feeds were famous at St. Kit's. All the invited seniors were not long in turning up. Lacy's fags, watchful for crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, in the shape of cakes and biscuits and fruits, after the guests had finished, were on their best behaviour, and had set the table nicely, the cloth also covering a desk which stood at one end to make it more extensive.

"Lacy, old dear, you're a giddy trump!" said Dunn. "This is the kind of thing one likes after an afternoon's cricket, though I must say that the cricket to-day was rather a rotten kind of a frost."

Lacy laughed.

"Yes, I'm afraid most of us forgot the cricket in the interest excited by the arrival of Talbot's estimable parent."

"You believe the chap was his father, then?"

"Of course, I know no more about it than you do, but Talbot as good as admitted it himself, and that's what I go upon."

"That's so," said Haywood. "I never saw a fellow so knocked into a cocked hat in all my natural. Talbot knew he was telling the truth."

"Nice sort of a giddy parent for a captain of St. Kit's," observed Rake.

Lacy's eyes gleamed. They were coming of their own accord to the point he had wished to approach without seeming too eager about it.

"By Jove, yes!" said Haywood. "Fancy a captain of St. Kit's being claimed as a son by such a howling out-and-outer as that fellow!"

"If it's true Talbot ought to resign."

"He ought certainly," said several voices in unison.

Lacy thought it about time for him to chime in.

"Well, I've been thinking about that, too," he remarked.

"Of course, we're all sorry for Talbot."

He said this with an air of great honesty, which deceived some of his hearers.

"Of course," assented Rake. "Talbot has always been a decent sort. But if he's the son of that horrid tramp, he's no fit captain for St. Kit's."

"That's my idea," said Lacy. "We've not got only ourselves to think of, you know. There's the reputation of the school. We shall soon be meeting Redclyffe and other tony schools in the cricket fixtures. They would have a right to complain at being expected to meet a team captained by the son of a common tramp, or worse."

"And they'd let us hear of it, too, I've no doubt," said Haywood, with a grimace. "I hadn't thought of that, Lacy, but now you mention it, I think there's a lot in it."

Lacy looked round the table.

He wanted to gauge the exact amount of support he was likely to meet with before he committed himself to the policy of jumping on a fellow while he was down; for that was what some uncharitable persons would have called it.

"Of course, as I've said, we're all sorry for Talbot," he remarked. "It's hard lines on a chap to be the son of a tramp. Still, under the circumstances, I can't say I think Talbot wholly free from blame."

"How do you make that out?" asked Rake. "He didn't choose his own father, did he? If he did, of course, this was very careless of him."

There was a general grin.

"No," said Lacy, laughing; "but he knew that there was a lot of doubt about his parentage, and that some disgraceful scene like this might crop up at any moment. Why, that blackguard might have come and made a scene here while we were playing Redclyffe, for instance. A nice lot of fools we should have looked! Under the circumstances, Talbot ought to have kept himself in the background, and not put himself forward as captain of the school."

This was a new view to the tea-party, but many of them were quite ready to endorse it.

"Still, he is captain," remarked Dunn. "It would want a lot of nerve to ask him to resign, wouldn't it?"

"I don't think so," said Lacy. "It would be a nerve for a single chap, or two or three, but if a committee of the Sixth went to him, and put the thing plainly, he'd be sure to see reason. Don't you think so?"

"Well, yes, I dare say he would. But how about getting up a committee?"

Lacy glanced round at the interested faces.

"There are eight of us here," he said. "Eight seems to me to be a good and suitable number for a committee."

Haywood laughed.

"But, I say, we can't appoint ourselves a giddy committee!" he exclaimed. "We'll have to put it to the whole Form."

"I don't see it. We don't want to make a lot of talk about it, and make things unpleasant for Talbot, more unpleasant than they are, I mean. If he won't take any notice of our opinion, then it will be time to call upon the whole Form."

This was putting it skilfully, with an appearance as if Lacy were actuated by a desire to spare Talbot's feelings as much as by anything else.

As a matter of fact, he knew that such an expression of opinion by eight members of his Form would wound Talbot to the quick, and perhaps hurry him into an indignant resignation, which Lacy would see afterwards it was not easy for him to retract.

"Well, it seems a good wheeze," said Haywood, at last. "He ought to resign, and we can put it to him in a friendly way. If he does so, there'll be a new election for captain, and that's where you'll come in, Lacy."

"I wasn't thinking of that, of course," said the prefect, with becoming modesty. "Time enough to talk about the new captain when the post is empty."

"True enough. Well, then, as we've mopped up all the tea and scoffed all the biscuits, I vote that we make a move to Talbot's study."

"Nothing like striking the iron while it's hot," agreed the prefect.

And the self-constituted committee of the Sixth Form at St. Kit's rose to their feet, and with Lacy and Haywood in the lead, marched away to Talbot's study.

Lacy's somewhat peremptory knock was answered by Talbot's quiet "Come in!" Lacy pushed open the door, and the worthy committee marched in.

Talbot looked at them in astonishment.

"Hallo!" he said quietly. "Anything up?"

His face was still very pale, but quite calm. He saw at a glance that none of his own friends were among the visitors, but he did not guess what the visit portended.

"Yes," said Lacy. "We want to speak to you, Talbot."

"Go ahead!" said the captain tersely.

"There was rather an unpleasant scene this afternoon."

Talbot flushed deeply.

"Well, what about it?" he asked, in rather a tart tone.

"It might be repeated."

"Well?"

"Under the circumstances, the Sixth have thought the matter over, and the long and the short of it is, that we're a committee of the Form—"

"What are you driving at?"

"The Sixth think that under the circumstances you ought to resign the captaincy," said Lacy savagely, provoked by Talbot's contemptuous manner.

"Indeed! And have they sent you to say so?"

"We are a committee of the Form, as I said."

"Appointed by the Form, or by yourselves?" asked Talbot scornfully.

Some of the committee shifted, and looked uncomfortable, but Lacy was not so easily put out of countenance.

"If you choose to appeal from us to the whole Form, you are at liberty to do so," he said. "We thought you would rather keep the thing as quiet as possible."

"I don't believe for a moment that the Sixth are at the back of this," said Talbot calmly. "There are too many decent fellows in the Form, for the Form as a whole ever to give a chap a kick when he's down."

The committee turned very red in the face, and began to wish that they had left Lacy to get through the business without their assistance.

"You can insult us if you like, Talbot," said Lacy loftily. "We can afford to put up with insults from a fellow in your position, and I for one won't quarrel with you, however you let off your temper at us. I know how you feel, and I'm sorry for you."

"Keep your sympathy till it's asked for," flashed out Talbot. "I want none of it."

"We're all sorry for you," went on the prefect again, with

irritating persistence. "The whole school is sorry for you, for that matter. But that isn't what we came here to say. Are you going to do the decent thing, and resign?"

"I am not going to listen to any more of your insolence!" said Talbot quietly. "This is my study. There is the door."

Even Lacy flushed at this. Some of the committee edged towards the door which Talbot indicated with an outstretched finger.

"Very well," said Eldred Lacy, between his teeth. "Have your way. You won't get out, so you will have to be kicked out. I don't care."

"If you are not outside that door in one minute, there will be some kicking out done here and now," said Talbot.

Half the committee were already outside. Lacy, scowling blackly, followed them out.

Talbot walked after him to the door, and closed it. In the corridor the precious committee stood and looked at one another in a rather uncertain way.

"Well, he's taken it rather badly," said Dunn, at last. "He didn't seem to understand that we were actuated by—er—friendly intentions."

"What's that crowd in the hall about?" said Haywood.

"Let's go and see."

The eight seniors joined the crowd of boys of all Forms who were gathered in front of the notice-board in the hall, craning over each other's shoulders to read it.

"My hat!" ejaculated Haywood.

For this is what they read—what they might have read earlier if they had not been quite so busy planning the downfall of the captain of St. Kit's.

"Notice, to all whom it may concern. For reasons of my own I have decided to resign the post of captain of St. Kit's. The post is therefore vacant, and a new election will take place on some date to be fixed by the headmaster."

"ARTHUR TALBOT."

That was what the crowd were reading, and what the committee of the Sixth now read.

They looked at each other a little foolishly.

"We've been a little bit too previous," growled Dunn.

"Nice silly asses we've made of ourselves, haven't we?"

And the rest of the committee had to agree that they had!

A Remonstrance from the Fourth Form.

"What have you got there, Blaggy?"

Blagden's face had gone quite pale, and his eyes were blazing as he stared at the paper he had just picked up out of the dust of the lane. Pat Nugent and Greene looked at him in amazement.

"What is it, old man?"

Blagden hastily thrust the paper into his pocket, and glanced up and down the road. Then he quickly put his arms through those of his chums, and hurried them in at the school gate. Too amazed to resist, Pat and Greene were hurried across the quadrangle by the excited Blaggy, but at the door Pat called a halt.

"If you've not gone right off your rocker, Blaggy, explain what you're up to!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens do you mean?"

"Come up into the study."

"But—"

"Don't talk; it's serious! Come up into the study!"

Blagden's face showed that he was in deadly earnest.

Amazed as they were, his chums obeyed, and they quickly ran up the stairs, and reached the end study. As soon as they were inside Blagden closed the door and turned the key in the lock.

Greene tapped his forehead significantly.

"Clean gone!" he exclaimed. "Mad as a giddy hatter!"

"Looks like it," said Pat. "But we'll give him a chance to explain before we jam his head against the wall. Now, Blaggy, expound, before we slay you."

"Right-ho!" said Blagden, with a sigh of relief. "I was afraid we might lose it."

"Lose what?"

"The paper! Suppose that ruffian had come back to look for it?"

"What ruffian?"

"Seth Black. Or suppose Lacy had tumbled to it?"

"To what? If you don't explain what you're talking about," exclaimed Pat, exasperated, "I'll buzz the giddy inkpot at you!"

"Hold on!" said Blagden hastily. "It's the paper—the paper I picked up in the lane—the paper you saw Lacy give to Seth Black!"

Pat gave a jump.

"You don't mean to say you've got hold of that?"

"Yes, I have. Black must have dropped it out of his pocket."

"Let's look at it."

Blagden spread out the captured document on the table.

and the chums looked at it eagerly. It was briefly worded, but very much to the point.

"I promise to pay Seth Black the sum of thirty pounds (£30) when he has publicly claimed Arthur Talbot of St. Kit's as his son. (Signed) ELDERED LACY."

The three chums stared at one another with startled faces. This was indeed a capture from the enemy! There was proof in black-and-white that the prefect had been at the bottom of the plot against the captain of St. Kit's. If that paper were placed in the hands of Dr. Kent, Eldred Lacy would have to face the music in a way he would probably find exceedingly unpleasant.

"My hat," said Greene, "it would be one up against Lacy to pin this on the notice-board in the hall, wouldn't it?"

"Yes; but we have to think of Talbot. Poor old chap! I wonder what he's feeling like now?"

"What shall we do with this paper, then?" asked Blagden. "We ought to show Lacy up, don't you think so, now we can do it?"

"Well, I think Talbot's about the proper person to have that," said Pat. "It concerns him, and we can leave him to decide whether to make it public or not."

"Well, yes," said Blagden slowly; "but you know how he received you when you tried to warn him of Lacy's little game before."

"I know, but he misunderstood—"

"That's all very well; but, to tell you the exact truth, Nugent, I don't care to risk it," said Blagden, with a grimace. "I don't like being jumped on, as a rule, especially by a chap for whom I'm doing a good turn."

"That's all right. I'll take the paper to him, if you like. It will give me a chance to set myself right with him."

"You can have it, then," said Blaggy. "When are you going to take it?"

"Not just yet. He won't feel inclined to see anybody just now, I think." Pat put the paper in his pocket. "We've got some impets to do; let's knock them off. This affair has given me the blues, and I don't feel up to much, anyway, just now."

"Same here."

And the chums of the end study settled down to work, and for some time only the scratch of three busy pens, and an occasional remark, could be heard in the study. Pat rose at last with a yawn. As he rose there came a knock at the door. Pat moved across, unlocked and opened it.

"Well—Hullo, Hooper, what do you want?"

Hooper was looking excited, like the bearer of startling tidings.

"Heard the news, you fellows?"

"No!" said Pat. "What's the news?"

"Talbot has resigned."

"Talbot resigned! Resigned the captaincy, do you mean?"

Hooper nodded, pleased with the effect of the information he had imparted.

"That's it, Nugent."

"My word!" said Blagden. "Of course, that was what Lacy was aiming at!"

Hooper picked up his ears.

"Eh? What's that about Lacy?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing!" said Blagden. "But how do you know about this, Hooper? Who told you?"

"It's on the notice-board, in Talbot's own writing."

"Let's go and see it," said Pat.

They hurried down to the hall. Hooper's information proved to be quite correct. The news was, in fact, old, and most of St. Kit's had already seen the notice, and there were only two or three juniors standing before the board when the chums arrived there.

Pat read it through, and gave a whistle.

"Well, this is rotten!" he exclaimed. "This means a new election; after all the trouble we had to get Talbot in last time, too!"

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"THE SHADOW OF A SECRET."
A School Tale (Extra Large)
By Charles Hamilton

AND

"UNITED WE STAND."
A Splendid Adventure Story by
Eileen Leitch

IN "PLUCK," 10.

NEXT SATURDAY:

"Lacy is sure to put up for it," Blagden remarked. "Now's his chance, and he's pretty certain not to lose it."

"Lacy has already put up for it," replied Hooper, who had followed the chums. "Trimble is canvassing for votes for him among the juniors."

"He's lost no time, the beast!"

"I wonder if anybody else will put up?" said Greene. "It will be absolutely rotten if Lacy gets in in Talbot's place. He oughtn't to have resigned."

"Did it in a moment of aberration, sure," said Pat. "Since that beggar claimed him, he felt he ought to do it. That's all rot, of course!"

"Of course it is! He sha'n't resign!"

"No, he sha'n't! The Head hasn't fixed the date of the new election yet, you see, so there's still time for him to withdraw his resignation."

"Let's go to him and remonstrate."

"That's the idea."

"Come on, then!" And Blagden was starting off, but Pat caught him by the sleeve and stopped him.

"Don't be in a hurry. This thing has got to be done in proper style, my boy. It's no good two or three juniors remonstrating. The whole of the Fourth Form ought to go in a body to Talbot and put the thing to him plainly."

"Good wheeze! Let's gather the giddy clan!"

"Lot of rot!"

said Hooper, who evidently belonged to the other party. "Let it alone! It's no business of you chaps, anyway."

Pat seized Hooper by the collar, and ran his head against the notice-board.

"What's that!" he exclaimed. "Don't you want Talbot to withdraw that notice?"

"No, I don't! Lemme alone!"

"Then I'll knock your head against it until you do."

"Look here, you wild Irish beast—"

"Sure, and you're not polite," said Pat, solemnly knocking Hooper's head against the notice-board.

"Do you want Talbot to withdraw now?"

"No—yes—leggo!"

"Then you can cut off," said Pat.

"Mind, if I hear you uttering a word against Talbot, you'll get the thickest ear you've ever had in your life."

Hooper scuttled off. He never cared to come to close quarters with Pat Nugent. All the same, he was a thick-and-thin partisan of Lacy, chiefly because Pat was on Talbot's side. But Pat's influence in the Form was very extensive. Most of the Fourth Form were willing to follow his lead, and most of them liked and respected Talbot.

(Another long instalment of this school tale next Saturday.)

PLUCK

A SPLENDID
COMPLETE SCHOOL TALE
EVERY SATURDAY!

1D



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

Your Editor's Corner.

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

"THE SHADOW OF A SECRET"

is the title of our first long, complete tale for next Saturday's issue of PLUCK. The story will deal with the adventures of a party of schoolboys—Jack Blake, Augustus, and Figgins & Co.—by Charles Hamilton.

Our second story will be a bit of a surprise, as it is written by a new author.

"UNITED WE STAND"

is the title, and I am sure you will want to read some more tales by this author, Owen Leach.

However, that is for you to say; and when writing to me I shall be glad if you will let me know what you think of the long, complete story in this week's issue of "The Gem" Library. I am interested to find out whether you consider them equal to our tales.

NEXT SATURDAY'S COVER.

The two new additions to "The Boys' Friend" Library are now on sale.

NOS. 17 AND 18.

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"PETE IN CANADA."

The price of these two new books is 3d. each. Get them today.

My friends should also note that I have still a few pocket-knives to award for Limericks published on this page.

YOUR EDITOR.