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THE NEW HOUSE RIVALS!



A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Not Good Enough.

BANG! Figgins, of the Fourth, brought his fist down upon the table in his study in the New House at St. Jim's. "It's not good enough!" he exclaimed.

Figgins had been sitting at the study table, with a very thoughtful expression upon his face, for some time, and he had suddenly come out of his reverie in that emphatic manner.

He had chosen an unfortunate moment!

Kerr was writing on one corner of the table, and Fatty Wynn was breaking eggs into a dish on another corner. Kerr was driving through a German imposition at express speed, and Fatty Wynn had a dreamy expression upon his plump face, evidently thinking of the pudding he was going to make. Neither of the juniors had an eye upon Figgins.

The sudden crash of Figgins's heavy fist made the study table dance.

Kerr's pen jabbed into his paper, and scattered a variety of blots big and little over the German characters he was scribbling out, and Kerr gave a yell. Fatty Wynn roared as the egg he was breaking shot a liquid stream up his sleeve.

"Oh!"

"Yow!"

"It won't do!" repeated Figgins emphatically.

"Yah! You ass!"

"Yow! You silly fathead!"

Figgins did not heed. Kerr's ruined imposition, and Fatty Wynn's wasted egg, did not appeal to him in the least. He thumped the table again.

"I tell you it's not good enough!"

"If you mean my impot, it was good enough till you splashed it, you frabjous ass!" roared Kerr. "I've got thirty-five lines of beastly German to do over again, you awful chump, and it's due in Herr Schneider's study in ten minutes, you burbling ass!"

"If you mean my pudding, it would have been all right if you hadn't wasted that egg!"

yelled Fatty Wynn. "Groo! I've got it up my sleeve Yowp!"

"I tell you——"

"Look at my impot!"

"Look at my egg sleeve!"

"Oh, blow your impot!" said Figgins. "Blow your silly eggs! This isn't a time to be thinking of puddings and impots!"

Figgins's two chums glared at him.

"It's nearly teatime," said Fatty Wynn, gouging in his sleeve with his handkerchief. "It's time to think of tea, I suppose."

"Blow tea!"

"I've got to write this over again now!" howled Kerr.

"Oh, rats!"

Figgins brought down his fist once more, and the table groaned.

"I tell you it's not good enough!" he declared.

The dish danced, and there was a spurt of egg liquid across the table, and Fatty Wynn roared again.

"Collar the silly ass!" he exclaimed. "He's getting dangerous! They're the last of the eggs—new laid, and twopence each, too. Collar the frabjous ass! I'll teach him to waste my eggs and spoil my pudding!"

"I'll teach him to muck up my impot!" howled Kerr.

And with one accord the Co. hurled themselves upon Figgins. Figgins jumped up; but their grasp was upon him, and he was rushed backwards. His chair went flying, and he went flying over it; and he rolled on the floor of the study, with Kerr and Wynn sprawling over him.

"Ow!" yelled Figgins. "Leggo!"

"Bump him!"

"Bump the frabjous ass!"

Bump!

"Ow! Yow! Leggo! I was going to say—Yaroo!"

"You can say yaroo as much as you like," grinned Kerr. "But you're not going to spoil my giddy German impots."

Bump!

"Yowp! Oh!"



Next Thursday:

CHAPTER 2.

Too Much Redfern.

Figgins struggled desperately in the grasp of his exasperated chums. What he had been going to say was unknown, and Kerr and Wynn did not want to hear it. They were content with bumping Figgins, and bumping him hard.

Bump!
"Yaroo!"
The study door opened suddenly. There had been a light tap, but the excited juniors of the New House had not noticed it. A handsome face ornamented with an eyeglass looked into the study.

"Bai Jove! Pway excuse me, deah boys—I knocked, you know—Bai Jove! Is that a little game?"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the School House, gazed in amazement at the three New House juniors struggling on the floor.

The swell of St. Jim's jammed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye, and gazed again.

"Bai Jove!"
Bump!

"Weally, my deah boys! I came ovah to say——"
"Yow! Help!" roared Figgins.

"Bump the silly ass!" gasped Kerr. "Get out, Gussy! Figgins has gone dotty, and we're bumping it out of him."

"Bai Jove! What has he done?"
"He's spoiled my impot!"
"He's spoiled my pudding!"

"Help!" roared Figgins. "Yow! Leggo! I was going to say—yowp! I wanted to tell you fellows—yaroo! Lend me a hand, Gussy, there's a good chap, and drag these maniacs off!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could not pass unheeded an appeal for help. As a rule, the swell of St. Jim's did not care for rough play of any sort, since it was liable to spoil his clothes, or at least to ruffle his hair and disarrange his necktie. But he was generous to a fault, and he rushed to the rescue of the unfortunate Figgins.

"Now, then, deah boys—stop it! Welsease Figgy at once, Kerr! Do you heah me, Wynn? I shall be sowwy to be wuff with you, but weally——"

"Gerrou!" roared Fatty Wynn.
"Buzz off!" shrieked Kerr.
"Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus grasped the two excited juniors, one in each hand, and dragged at them.

Kerr caught hold of his ankles, and gave a mighty jerk.
"Oh! Bai Jove!"
Arthur Augustus went flying.

He caught at the edge of the study table to save himself; but instead of saving himself, he dragged the table over with him.

Swish—splash!
The dish of liquid eggs, the inkpot, and a variety of other articles rolled down upon the swell of St. Jim's.

The inkpot alighted upon his chin, and streamed ink there, and the dish of beaten eggs crowned him fairly upon the head, and yolk ran down all over his aristocratic features. Arthur Augustus gave a suffocated yell.

"Yawoooooooooooooooooooo!"
He staggered blinding to his feet, smothered with eggs and milk, and gouging yolk out of his eyes with both hands. Kerr and Wynn gasped with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Yawoo! Oh! You awful wottahs!"
Figgins sat up breathlessly. Figgins hadn't much breath left, but what he had he expended in a yell of laughter at the sight of Arthur Augustus. D'Arcy seemed to be weeping eggs and ink.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Figgins.
"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Kerr and Wynn.

Figgins & Co. seemed to have forgotten their own dispute. They sat on the study carpet and yelled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gouged eggs from his eyes, and blinked eggily at the chums of the New House. Arthur Augustus was wrathful.

He had suffered that awful fate in coming to the rescue of Figgins, and there was the ungrateful Figgins yelling as loudly as the others, as if there were something funny in what had happened to D'Arcy.

"Weally, Figgins!" gasped Arthur Augustus.
"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins.
"You awful wottah!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I wegard you as a beast!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You fwightful blightah——"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned from the study, and strode haughtily into the passage, still streaming ink and yolk of egg. He slammed the study door behind him with a slam that rang the length of the Fourth Form passage in the New House. Figgins & Co. still sat on the floor of the study yelling hysterically.

FIGGINS rose to his feet at last, gasping for breath. He was feeling considerably bruised and shaken, but he had laughed his excitement away. Instead of descending upon Kerr and Wynn in his wrath, he only chuckled.
"Good old Gussy!" he murmured. "He will be the death of me yet."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
And the chums of the Fourth in the New House laughed again.

"But what about my blessed impot?" ejaculated Kerr, suddenly glancing at the clock. "It's six now, and Herr Schneider had to have it by six."

"Well, he won't have it now!" grinned Figgins.
"And what about my pudding?" grunted Fatty Wynn.

"It's teatime now, and that pudding is dished."
"Never mind the pudding——"
"Look here, you ass——"

"I was going to speak about something a jolly great deal more important than impots or puddings," said Figgins severely. "Who was that chap in history—was it King John or Napoleon—who fiddled while Rome was burning."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr. "It wasn't either of them, you fathead: it was Nero!"

"Well, I don't care who it was—that's not really the point," said Figgins hastily. "But you fellows remind me of him—doing rotten impots and making rotten puddings while the honour of the study is in danger."

"Oh, what's the matter with the honour of the study?" asked Kerr, as he set the table to rights again. "It seems to me that the carpet is in a worse state than the honour of the study."

"I'm thinking of our prestige," said Figgins loftily.
"And I'm thinking of our pudding," said Fatty Wynn.
"Blow the pudding!" roared Figgins, exasperated.

"Well, blow the prestige, then!" retorted Fatty Wynn.
"I was going to say——"
"It's no good saying you're hungry, when you've mucked up the pudding I was making for tea."

"I wasn't going to say I was hungry!" howled Figgins.
"If you say anything more about that rotten pudding——"
"It wasn't a rotten pudding! The eggs were new laid, and cost twopence each!"
"Dry up, I tell you!"
"Well, I don't see——"
Bang!

Kerr having set the table upright, Figgins banged it with his fist again, as he had done a quarter of an hour before, and caused all the trouble.

"It's not good enough," he said.
"I've heard you say that before," Kerr remarked. "Two or three times, in fact. What isn't good enough, most noble, grave, and reverend signor?"

"The state of things in this House!" said Figgins.
Kerr looked puzzled.

"Do you mean the grub arrangements?" he asked.
"No, I don't, you ass!"
"Has old Ratty, our respected Housemaster, been treading on your noble corns?"

"It isn't Ratty."
"Then who, what, and which is it?"
"It's Redfern."
"Oh!" said Kerr comprehensively. "Redfern!"

"Yes," said Figgins, smiting the table again with a mighty smite. "It's Redfern. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence! The New Firm, in fact."

"I say, have mercy on that table!" said Kerr anxiously.
"One of the legs is rather gammy already."
"Blow the table!"
"Very well," said Kerr resignedly. "But smashing the study furniture won't keep our end up against Redfern & Co., that I know of!"
Figgins snorted.

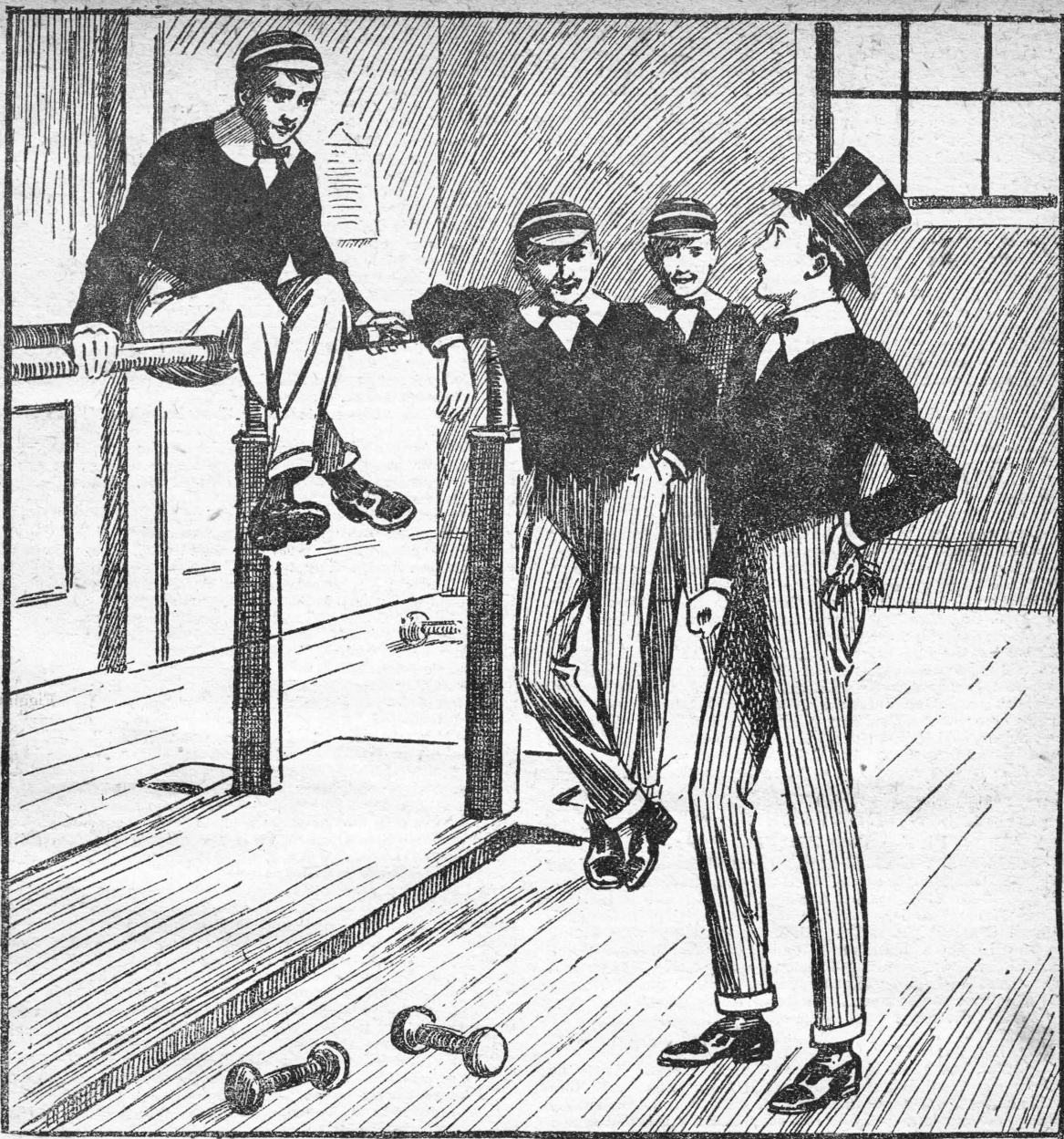
"It's not good enough," he said. "How long have Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence been in the New House of St. Jim's?"

"Blessed if I know! I forget."
"Well, not many weeks," said Fatty Wynn. "I remember they stood a good feed the day after they came——"

"Yes, you would remember that!" said Figgins witheringly.
"Now, you fellows know that when Redfern came, I explained to him like a Dutch uncle that I was the junior leader of the New House, just as Tom Merry was in the School House, and I offered him a thick ear if he didn't keep his place. I couldn't say fairer than that, could I?"

Kerr chuckled.
"Impossible!" he agreed.
"But has he kept his place?" demanded Figgins excitedly.
"He hasn't—he's kept yours," said Fatty Wynn. And Kerr chuckled.

"He's actually had the cheek to say that he's not looking for a leader, you know," said Figgins, in great wrath. "He doesn't



"Hallo, Gussy! Are you going to give us a turn on the bars?" called out Redfern cheerfully. "No, deah boy, I'm not in the wight wig for that," was the reply. "Do you wear different wigs for different exercises?" exclaimed Reddy in astonishment. "Pway don't be an ass, Weddy! When I say wig, I mean wig, not wiq!" (See Chapter 8.)

admit that I'm junior captain of the House, though I told him so plainly. He's been planning raids on the School House, and raids on the Grammarians, all on his own, without consulting us."

"And getting the best of it," said Kerr.

"Yes, that's the worst cheek of the lot. Some of the fellows are beginning to say that we're played out, you know."

"What rot!"

"I know it's rot, but they're saying it. Look here, it's not good enough. We've got to put Reddy & Co. in their place once for all!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr heartily.

"I wonder what they've got for tea?" said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "We might raid them—"

"That's just what we're going to do," said Figgins emphatically. "I happen to know what they are doing, and it's a first-class chance of putting them in their place. Reddy said it's such a fine afternoon that he's going to have his tea out of doors, and the three bounders have taken their grub in a basket to picnic under the trees behind the chapel."

Fatty Wynn's eyes gleamed with the light of battle.

"What have they got?" he asked.

"I heard Lawrence mention a cold chicken—"

The Falstaff of the New House made a movement towards the door.

"Come on!" he exclaimed.

"Hold on a minute!"

"What is there to hold on for?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn peevishly. "What about the prestige of the study? We've got to put those bounders in their place, haven't we?"

"And collar their cold chicken," murmured Kerr.

"Really, Kerr—"

"Listen to me," said Figgins. "We're going to deal with this matter in the right way. We shall go to Reddy and explain to him with perfect patience and calmness that we are cocks of the walk in the New House. As proof of it, and as a punishment for his cheek in setting up his study against ours, we shall eat their tea. If they object, it will be taken as rank mutiny, and we shall wallop them."

"Good egg!" said Fatty Wynn.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SHUNNED BY HIS FATHER!" AND "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 227.

"What do you think, Kerr?"
"Oh, good!" said Kerr, laughing. "I'm on."
"Come on, then," said Figgins. "Never mind the impot, and never mind the pudding. I'll help you do the impot this evening, and we shall get enough tea from Reddy. They had a basket full of stuff when they went out."
"Did they?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn eagerly.
"They did!" said Figgins. "Mind, we've got to talk to them like Dutch uncles first. We don't want to give an impression that we're after their grub."

"Eh?"
"We don't want to let the bounders think that we're merely raiding their tommy, you know."

"Well, ain't we?" demanded Fatty Wynn innocently.
"No!" roared Figgins. "We're acting for the prestige of the study."

"Oh, I see! Let's buck up, Figgy. I'm hungry—I—I mean, the prestige of the study, you know—"

Figgins snorted.
"Oh, come on!" he said. "I know where they are, and if they don't toe the line, we'll fall on 'em, and smite 'em hip and thigh, and knock 'em into a cocked hat, and give 'em the giddy kybosh!"

"And collar the grub!" said Fatty Wynn. "Don't forget that."

"I'm not forgetting it, porpoise!"
"Don't jaw to them too much first, Figgy, you know."

"Rats! Come on!"
And Figgins led the way from the study, and his two chums followed, Fatty Wynn in deadly earnest, thinking of the cold chicken, and Kerr grinning. Figgins frowned a warlike frown as he led the way across the quadrangle.

During the short time that Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, the three County Council scholarship boys, had been at St. Jim's, they had certainly made their mark in the New House. Figgins & Co., who had always been considered the leaders of the juniors of the New House, had been in danger of being eclipsed by the newcomers on more than one occasion. And Redfern had not seemed to understand in the least when Figgins explained that he was the great chief of the New House juniors, and that all rotten outsiders were expected to toe the line. Lately, some of the New House fellows had chipped Figgins on the subject, asking him if the Co. had gone out of business, and questions of that sort. And Figgins had decided that it was high time he did something, and now he was doing it.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins Puts His Foot Down.

TOM MERRY of the Shell looked out of the doorway of the School House, and uttered an exclamation.

"My only summer bonnet!"

And Manners and Lowther, who were chatting in the hall, looked towards him lazily. The Terrible Three were killing time until Blake called them to tea in Study No. 6. Jack Blake of the Fourth was standing a tea in his study, and Herries and Digby were helping him to get it, while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had gone over to the New House to invite Figgins & Co.

"What's the row?" asked Lowther.

"Look!"

"My hat, Gussy!"

The Terrible Three burst into a roar. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was returning to the School House. They knew him by his clothes, but it would have been difficult to know him by his features, which were quite concealed under a mask of mixed ink and yolk of egg. The swell of St. Jim's had dabbed furiously at his face with his handkerchief. He had succeeded in reducing his handkerchief to the state of an egg, inky rag, but he had not very much improved the state of his face.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus started as he heard the yell of laughter, and groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye. But the lens was black with ink, and it obscured the vision of the swell of St. Jim's, and he allowed it to drop to the end of its cord again.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Have you given Figgins the invitation?" yelled Manners.

"Certainly not!"

"How did you get like that?"

"Those uttah wottahs have tweeked me with gwoss diswespeet. I see no cause watevah for wibald laughtah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go and look in the glass, then, and you'll see it soon enough!" yelled Lowther.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus marched into the School House with his aristocratic and inky nose very high in the air. Fellows who saw him pass burst into wild yells, Kangaroo of the Shell and Reilly of the Fourth came down the passage almost sobbing.

"Faith, and did ye see him?" chuckled Reilly. "Sure, it's in the wars he's been intirely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 227.

"Halle! Here come Figgins & Co.," said Monty Lowther.
"It's a long time since we've bumped those New House bounders, and they deserve to be bumped for handling Gussy like that when he went over on a friendly errand."
"Yes, rather."
"Collar them, then!" said Manners.
"Come on!"
Five or six School House juniors bore down upon Figgins & Co. as they came across the quadrangle. Figgins held up his hand in sign of peace.
"Pax!" he exclaimed.
"Oh, rats!"
"Pax! We claim pax!"
"That's all very well," exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly.
"But what price Gussy? You've made him look so that nobody in the House of Lords would know him!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"It was his own fault," said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "You don't think I wanted him to upset my eggs over himself, do you? He's spoiled my pudding!"
Tom Merry grinned.
"Well, I know you wouldn't have a hand in spoiling a pudding, Fatty," he remarked.
"But ain't we going to bump these bounders?" demanded Kangaroo.
"Pax!" repeated Figgins. "We're on the warpath. We're putting down a rebellion in our own House, and we've got no time for rows with you School House chaps. We're going to bring Redfern & Co. to their senses."
"Redfern! What's Reddy been doing?"
"Getting his ears up," said Figgins darkly. "We're going to bring 'em down again for him! You School House chaps can come and see the fun if you like."
Tom Merry & Co. grinned at one another. They had tasted the quality of Redfern & Co., and they had more than a suspicion that Figgins & Co. would not find it easy to put the New Firm in their place.
"We'll come, rather!" said Tom Merry. "What are you going to do to them?"
"Something lingering, I suppose, with boiling oil in it," suggested Monty Lowther blandly.
Figgins snorted.
"Oh, don't be an ass! Come on, you fellows!"
And the New House trio proceeded on their way. Tom Merry & Co. followed them, greatly interested to see what would happen, and several other School House fellows joined them en route. Lumley-Lumley, and Levison and Gore and Bishop and Herries, and two or three more fellows came along to see the promised entertainment, so it was quite a little party that arrived upon the scene where Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen were enjoying their little al fresco spread.
Redfern & Co. certainly looked as if they were enjoying themselves. They were seated upon the grass, under the big, shady trees near the old chapel, and they had a white cloth on the ground in their midst. Three or four bottles of lemonade, a cold chicken on a dish, buttered toast galore, and cakes and jamparts, made a most enticing array. Redfern had just filled the three glasses with a foaming, gurgling lemonade when the avengers of the prestige of Figgins's study arrived, and, with them, the School House crowd.
Redfern glanced up coolly.
"Hallo, you fellows!" he said cheerfully. "So kind of you to give us a look in! Will you sample the lemonade, Figgins?"
"I haven't come to tea," said Figgins.
"Well, there isn't any tea, if you had," said Redfern. "Have you come to lemonade?"
"I've come to talk to you," said Figgins abruptly.
"Good! My great-grandmother used to say that what was nice at meal-times was light and entertaining conversation," said Redfern. "Lawrence, shut up! Owen, don't say a word! Figgins is going to talk to us. Go on, Figgins."

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"Mum's the word!" said Lawrence solemnly.

"Not a whisper!" said Owen.

"There you are, Figgins!" said Redfern, turning to the junior captain of the New House. "Now pile in. You don't mind if I go on with my lemonade, do you?"

Figgins turned crimson. The New Firm were chipping him with great solemnity, with never a grin on their faces; but the School House fellows were grinning gleefully. Figgins strode a little nearer to the tea-party.

"Look here, Redfern——"

"I'm looking."

"I'm going to talk to you plainly. I'm a plain chap——"

Redfern looked at him.

"You are," he agreed.

There was a roar of laughter from the juniors, and even Fatty Wynn and Kerr grinned. Figgy was a very pleasant and manly-looking fellow, but his best friend had never called him handsome. Even Cousin Ethel was not supposed to believe him handsome. But Redfern had put quite a different meaning to Figgy's words, from that which Figgy intended.

"Look here!" roared Figgins, "I don't want any of your cheek, Redfern."

"Well, I don't want any of yours, if you come to that," said Redfern peaceably. "Suppose we make up our minds to give and take?"

"You—you—you——"

"Jam tarts, please, Lawrence."

"Here you are!"

"Redfern!" roared Figgins.

"It's all right," said Redfern, with his mouth full. "If you're going to talk, I can listen all right while I eat. I've done it before. I always eat jam tarts when my grandfather is talking to me. Go ahead!"

Figgins almost exploded.

"Look here, we're going to put you in your place!" he roared.

"Fellows have been asking who's junior captain of the New House, and it's time you new bounders were shown where you belong."

"More lemonade, Owen?"

"Please."

"Do you hear me?" roared Figgins.

"Yes; I hear," said Redfern. "I think I should hear you if I were across the quad. No harm in my helping Owen to lemonade while you talk, is there? Don't think I mind you talking, of course. You can run on as long as you like, and we'll listen till we've finished tea."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins appeared about to choke, and Kerr laid a restraining hand on his arm, and pulled him back.

"Don't get excited, Figgy, old chap!" he whispered. "Let me talk to the cheeky bounders."

Figgins nodded.

"Look here, Redfern," said Kerr, in his keen and incisive way, "we're the leaders of the New House. You fellows have got to toe the line. You savvy! Get up?"

"Eh?"

"We're going to eat your feed for you," said Kerr coolly.

"Not because we want it——"

"Oh, don't we?" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Shut up, Fatty! Not because we want it," said Kerr loftily, "but just to show you and everybody else that we are the leaders of the New House juniors, and that you, and all the rest, have to toe the line. Savvy?"

Redfern cocked his head thoughtfully on one side.

"Yes," he said. "I think I savvy."

"Then get up!"

Redfern made a sign to Owen and Lawrence, and they rose to their feet. Their quiet meekness astounded Tom Merry and his chums, and indeed Figgins and Co. as well. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence were not wont to take orders meekly from anyone. But they obeyed Kerr's command with the meekness of pet lambs.

"Anything else?" asked Redfern.

"Yes; you can wait on us while we eat your tarts."

"Certainly!"

"And buck up!" said Kerr.

"Your humble servant," said Redfern, with a bow.

And Tom Merry & Co. stared at the amazing spectacle of Figgins & Co. sitting down to Redfern's tea, and Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence waiting on them with meek attention and civility.

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins & Co. Take Their Medicine.

FIGGINS was so astonished, that he could hardly eat the jam tarts.

The coolness and "cheek" of the New Firm had caused the great Figgins to rise in his wrath, and declare that Redfern & Co. must be put in their places, and kept there. But Figgins had not been prepared to find the task so easy as

this. He had expected alarms and excursions, so to speak—something just a little short of battle and sudden death. To see the three coolest and calmest fellows in the New House knuckling under in this way astounded Figgins. Kerr was equally surprised, though he tried not to show it. Fatty Wynn would have been surprised, too, if he had had time. But he hadn't. He was far too busy negotiating the good things Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence had provided for their own delectation. Figgins and Kerr were acting in the matter from the highest motives, as they had explained; but it is to be feared that Fatty Wynn's motives were a little nearer earth.

The School House fellows looked on at this lesson in House discipline, simply gaping. They could not understand Redfern & Co. at all.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were perfectly grave.

They waited upon Figgins & Co. with meekness and polite attention. They handed them things to eat, and changed their plates, as if they had been born to the work of waiters.

"More ham," said Fatty Wynn, breaking silence at last—a silence that had been deep and joyful.

Redfern looked politely regretful.

"I'm sorry," he said, "there isn't any more ham. But there are heaps of jam tarts."

"Jam tarts galore, sir," said Lawrence humbly.

Fatty Wynn grunted.

"I want to lay a solid foundation," he said. "Keep the jam tarts for a bit. I'll have some of those cold potatoes. Is there any more chicken?"

"No; you've finished it."

"You ought to have had two chickens," said Fatty Wynn. "Still, you didn't know I was coming to tea. Are they sausages in that bag?"

"Yes; they are."

"Hand them over, then!"

"Certainly."

"Look here, Reddy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the little game? What are you fellows playing the giddy ox like this for?"

Redfern looked surprised.

"We're waiting on Figgins," he said, as if that were quite sufficient explanation.

"Yes. But what are you doing it for?"

"Because he told us to."

"You jolly well don't obey orders as a rule," said Blake suspiciously.

"The flesh is weak," said Redfern blandly; "but the spirit is willing, you know. We've got a lot of arrears of respectfulness to make up."

"Look here, you ass——"

"They're pulling Figgy's leg," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, they can always pull my leg, too, if they do it this way," Manners remarked. "It's a good feed, and Fatty Wynn seems to be enjoying himself. If this is a joke, I don't see where the fun comes in—for Reddy."

Redfern looked shocked.

"You don't think I'd play a joke on Figgins, surely?" he exclaimed. "You don't seem to understand what a great man Figgins is."

Figgins turned red.

"Don't be an ass!" he exclaimed.

"I'm only saying what I feel," said Redfern humbly. "It's an honour to wait on Figgins. It's jolly kind of him to live in our House; in fact, it's pretty condescending of him to inhabit this world at all. We feel that."

"Oh, rather!" said Lawrence solemnly.

"It's our place to wait on Figgins," said Owen, with owl-like gravity; "and we're doing it. What more could anybody want?"

"Look here," said Figgins warmly, "if you're trying to be funny——"

"But we're not," said Redfern, in surprise. "We're toeing the line, and waiting on you, just as you ordered us to."

"Obeying orders from superior officers, you know," said Lawrence.

Kerr looked very suspicious. He could not understand the sudden and amazing humility of the New Firm, though he tried to look as if he took it all as a matter of course. Fatty Wynn finished the sausages and potatoes, and looked round for fresh worlds to conquer. Only the jam tarts remained, but, as Lawrence had said, there were jam tarts galore. Redfern had taken them out of the bags, and arranged them in tempting array upon plates. He had replenished the jam in them from a jar. Dame Taggles, who kept the school tuck-shop, made excellent jam tarts, but the juniors considered her a little "close" with the jam. But Redfern had made up for that. There was plenty of jam on each tart now, and they really looked very nice.

"Try the tarts now, Fatty?" asked Redfern.

"Yes," said Fatty.

"You can eat three or four, I suppose?"

"Three or four dozen, you mean!" grunted the Falstaff of the New House. "Don't be funny."

"Here you are, great chief!"

Redfern dropped solemnly upon one knee, and presented Fatty Wynn with a plate loaded up with luscious-looking jam tarts.

Lawrence did the same for Figgins, and Owen for Kerr.

By this time a very considerable crowd had collected upon the scene, and the fellows were standing in a ring round the picnicers, looking on in astonishment.

Inquiries were showered upon Redfern from all sides as to what he was up to, and Redfern replied solemnly to each inquiry that he was waiting on the great Figgins, and that he regarded it as an honour to be allowed to do so.

Figgins and Kerr did ample justice to the jam tarts. They disposed of at least seven or eight each, and then they called a halt. But Fatty Wynn was not finished yet. Fatty Wynn and the tarts were likely to be finished together. As Monty Lowther remarked, it was always a dead heat between Fatty Wynn and the grub.

"Finished, Fatty?" asked Figgins at last.

"How many more tarts are there?" asked Fatty.

"Six."

"I'll be finished in three minutes, then."

"Two tarts a minute!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Hurray!"

"Leave three of them for the kids," said Figgins, generously.

"They've waited on us very well, and we might leave 'em a tart each as a tip."

"Good idea," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn looked doubtful. As he would have explained, he was not greedy, but he liked a lot. But Redfern came to the rescue.

"Don't leave any for us," he exclaimed. "This is a lesson in discipline, and it ought to be carried out to the bitter end."

"The bitter end!" grinned Lawrence. "Exactly."

"Pile in, Fatty!" said Owen encouragingly.

"Well, if you press me——" said Fatty.

"We do—we does!"

"Then I may as well finish the lot, as you're so pressing."

And Fatty Wynn finished the lot.

He had some little difficulty in rising to his feet when he had finished. He had eaten not wisely, but too well.

"Enjoyed yourself?" asked Redfern respectfully.

"Yes, rather! Thanks."

"Not at all. It's our duty, you know."

"All serene," said Figgins. "You keep this up and it will be all right. All I want is for you chaps to understand what's what, and to keep in your place."

Redfern turned seriously to his chums.

"Do you understand what's what, Lawrence?"

"Yes, Reddy."

"Do you understand what's what, Owen?"

"Yes, Reddy."

"Good! We all understand what's what, Figgy. What are you School House fellows sniggering at?" demanded Redfern, looking round inquiringly. "It's very important for a chap to understand what's what, and Figgy is very particular about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to snigger at. We've done our duty, looking after Figgins's health in this way——"

"Looking after my health!" repeated Figgins. "What do you mean?"

"Your health, and Kerr's, and Wynn's," said Redfern, blandly. "Wynn's most of all, as he's eaten the most. If Wynn has any pains in his little interior, he must remember that it is for his good."

Fatty Wynn looked alarmed.

"Pains!" he repeated. "Look here, you bounders, what rotten game have you been playing?"

"Game!" said Redfern. "Nothing of the sort. It was for your good. We've only done our duty, haven't we, you chaps?"

"Certainly," said Lawrence, "England expects every man to do his duty. England often gets disappointed. But this time it is all right. We've done our duty."

"Done it brown," agreed Owen.

Figgins and Co. had been about to depart. But they stopped now, and looked very queerly at Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen.

"Look here," said Figgins, with an effort, "if you've been doctoring that grub in any way——"

Fatty Wynn turned quite pale.

"Doctoring the grub!" he murmured.

"Only the jam tarts and the lemonade," said Redfern, cheerfully. "It was for your good, you know—for the sake of your health."

"I—I noticed the lemonade had a taste," murmured Kerr. "You villain, what did you put in the lemonade?"

"Only mixed up some Epsom salts," said Redfern, innocently, "and some syrup of figs in the jam. You've taken about enough for a whole hospital, among you. But it will do you good. We've done our duty. Come on, you chaps."

And Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence walked solemnly away, arm in arm. Figgins and Co. stood quite still, looking very

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pale. From the interested crowd round them came a wild roar. They understood now the extraordinary meekness of Redfern and Co. They yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" murmured Figgins.

"Ow!" muttered Kerr.

"Groo!" groaned Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn pressed his hands to his ample waistcoat.

"Ow! Ow! I've got a pain!"

The juniors shrieked.

"I—I—I'll stay that beast Redfern!" gasped Figgins, turning very white. "I—I—I—ow!"

"Yow!"

"Groo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins and Co. dashed away. A roar of laughter followed them from Tom Merry and Co. The leaders of the New House were not seen in public again for some time, but fellows who passed their door in the New House heard the most hair-raising groans proceeding from their study. After the feast had come the reckoning.

CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Ratcliff Comes Down Heavy!

TOM MERRY & CO. were almost weeping when they gathered in Blake's study for tea. The joke on the unfortunate Figgins had made them laugh themselves hoarse. The absurd scene of Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence waiting meekly upon the leaders of the New House, and its climax, was too funny.

"Poor old Figgins!" murmured Tom Merry. "He's caught a Tartar in Reddy. That new kid is hot stuff, and no mistake." "Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Undah the cires, I am wathah pleased that Figgins has been put through it. The awful wottah treated me with the grossest disrespect. I am very much inclined to go and ask Weddy to tea."

"Go ahead, then," said a cheerful voice at the door.

Redfern tapped at the open door and came in, followed by Lawrence and Owen. The heroes of the New House were grinning serenely.

"Hullo!" said Blake.

"Please we've come," said Redfern.

"Well, of all the cheek——"

"We had a sort of feeling that Gussy wanted to ask us to tea," explained Redfern. "At any rate, we had a sort of feeling that we wanted to come. Didn't we, my children?"

"We did," said Lawrence and Owen.

"Figgins & Co. have scoffed our tea," said Redfern. "We have nothing to eat, and we are thrown on the cold world."

"Pwaw sit down, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "we have got a weally good spread, you know, and you are vewy welcome."

"Oh, make yourselves at home," said Blake.

"Thanks, we will!"

"Nothing in the jam, though, you know," said Owen. "No larks."

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"Poor old Figgins is greaning," said Lawrence. "We passed his study a few minutes ago, and looked in. We asked him if we could get him any medicine or anything, and he threw a cushion at us. I call that ungrateful."

"They're making a fearful row," added Redfern, "The Fourth Form passage is simply groaning. I think Fatty Wynn had too many tarts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is what comes of trying to put fellows in their place, when they won't be put," sighed Redfern. "I say, that ham looks prime."

"So it is," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Here you are."

"Thanks."

And the New Firm sat down to tea with cheerful faces and good appetites.

Tea in Blake's study was always a cheerful meal—when the juniors were in funds. At other times, when the supplies were low, and there was only a sardine to share among four, it was not so cheerful. But just now there was an excellent spread, and the juniors did it full justice.

A merry buzz of voices ran round the table, and the juniors were all in high spirits, when the door opened, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, looked in.

"Oh! So you're here," said the prefect, grimly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy, we're here," he replied. "Have you come to tea?"

Monteith frowned.

"No, I haven't come to tea; and I wasn't addressing you," he said. "I'm looking for three young rascals belonging to my House."

"You'll have to look further, then," said Redfern. "There ain't none here."

"I mean you three," said Monteith. "Mr. Ratcliff wants you."

"Ratty wants us!" said Redfern, in astonishment. "My dear chap, there must be some mistake. Ratty can't possibly want us. We don't get on together at all."

Monteith shook a warning finger at the cheerful Redfern.

"You'd better go to his study at once," he said. "He isn't in a good temper, and he might come over to fetch you himself."

"Oh dear! What does he want us for?" asked Lawrence.

"He knows about your latest little game, that's all."

And Monteith walked away.

Redfern & Co. looked dismayed, and the School House fellows looked sympathetic. Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, did not have a sweet temper. When he was in a bad humour the New House fellows were always on the look-out for trouble; and he generally was in a bad temper.

"Bai Jove, that's wotten," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Surely Figgins hasn't told him about your little trick?"

"I suppose the awful rotter has found out somehow," groaned Redfern. "It's marvellous how Ratty finds things out. He's got a wonderful nose for poking into things that don't concern him. What does it matter to him if we've physicked Figgins?"

"Nothin' at all, deah boy. You'd better explain that to him."

"No good explaining things to Ratty," grunted Redfern, as he rose. "Good-bye, you fellows; thanks for the feed."

"Not at all, deah boy."

And the New House juniors quitted the study. Their faces were glum as they crossed the quadrangle towards the New House. Mr. Ratcliff seemed to live only for the purpose of making himself obnoxious to easy-going juniors.

"Blessed if I know how he knows anything about it," said Owen. "I suppose he's been listening to the fellows talking. No other master at St. Jim's would take any notice of anything he overheard."

"Oh, it's no good trying to make Ratty play the game," said Redfern, despondently. "I'd change him for Railton of the School House with pleasure. What does it matter to him if we jape Figgins & Co?"

"I believe he'd like us to be on bad terms with Figgy's study," said Lawrence, savagely. "He enjoys stirring up mischief."

Thompson of the Shell met the three as they came in. He greeted them with a solemn wag of the head.

"You're in for it," he remarked.

"Ratty very bad?"

"Yes," said Thompson. "rotten! He's just given me fifty lines for whistling in the passage. He had indigestion all the afternoon, Lefevre says, and the Fifth had a very rough time with him. He takes those rotten white powders for his indigestion—I mean for his digestion—and they make him worse. They make his temper worse, anyway. Mind how you handle him."

"Nice, ain't it?" growled Redfern as the trio made their way to Mr. Ratcliff's study.

Redfern knocked.

A voice that bore a great similarity to the grind of a rasp answered the knock.

"Come in!"

The chums of the Fourth entered the lion's den.

Mr. Ratcliff was sitting at his table. His long, thin nose was very red at the end, and that was always a sign that his digestion was at fault. His brow was knitted, and his thin lips drawn tightly together.

"You sent for us, sir?" said Redfern, meekly.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned at him.

"Yes, Redfern." He rose to his feet and picked up a cane. "Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn are suffering very much from your mischievous prank, and I am going to punish you for it. I do not approve of these absurd jokes, Redfern, and I must see justice done. I have promised Figgins that you shall all three be punished."

Redfern gasped.

"Did—did Figgins tell you, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly, he did."

"My hat!"

"You should not utter those ridiculous ejaculations in my study, Redfern. Try to show a little better behaviour here, please."

"Sorry, sir. But—but I never dreamed that Figgins would sneak," said Redfern, in amazement.

"The awful rotter!" murmured Owen.

"Silence! It is not sneaking for Figgins to inform his Housemaster of an ill-natured trick that was played upon him, to the detriment of his health," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You do not deny it, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Then hold out your hand."

Redfern held out his hand. His face was white with anger.

He was not angry with Mr. Ratcliff. He expected the Housemaster to be "down" on him; and there was no love lost between the hearty, breezy junior and the sour Housemaster of the New House. But Redfern was very angry with Figgins. Whatever might be the japes and raids among the juniors, it was always understood that no fellow was ever to sneak to a master. However they might suffer at one another's hands, the masters and prefects were to be kept out of it—that was the unwritten law that was never broken.

True, Figgins & Co. had been very ratty lately about Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen declining to toe the line, as they called it. They had tried to assert their position as the born leaders of the New House juniors, and they had not succeeded. But that Figgins should come to so disgraceful a resort as sneaking to a master was almost incredible. But Mr. Ratcliff evidently knew all about it, and he stated that Figgins had told him.

Redfern's blue eyes glinted with anger as he held out his hand.

Swish!

Mr. Ratcliff brought the cane down with force. Redfern had to hold out the other hand, and the cane descended upon it with a terrific swish. Redfern had only the two cuts. But they hurt as much as five or six by any other master. Mr. Ratcliff had a way of laying on the cane that was quite his own.

Lawrence and Owen awaited their turns, which soon came. Two cuts each almost doubled them up, and they stood with their hands squeezed under their arm-pits, and their faces almost pale with pain.

Mr. Ratcliff laid down the cane, and waved his hand to the door.

"You may go!" he said.

And they went, without a word.

As the door closed behind them Mr. Ratcliff sat down again, and a sour smile came over his face. His digestion was still bad, but the caning of Redfern and Co. seemed to have afforded him some relief.

CHAPTER 6. Figgins's Reply.

"H!"

"Ow!"

"Yowp!"

Thus Redfern and Co.

The three chums had gone to their study immediately after leaving Mr. Ratcliff. They sat down in the study, and rubbed their hands, and squeezed them and twisted them, to assuage the pain in their aching palms.

But it was not much use. Mr. Ratcliff had laid on the cuts quite scientifically, and the juniors simply had to wait for the pain to pass away.

"Ow!" repeated Redfern, for the twentieth time. "Can't the beast lay it on? Yow!"

"I think he must have been practising with Indian clubs on purpose," groaned Owen. "Ow! I should like to give him just one! Yow!"

"Groo!" said Lawrence. "But it isn't Ratty who's the worst. It's Figgins! Fancy Figgins sneaking to a Housemaster!"

"The rotter!"

"I knew he was wild about our setting him down," said Redfern thoughtfully, "and I dare say we were rather liberal with the medicine—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But that's no excuse for his giving us away to Ratty. I can hardly believe it of him," said Redfern.

"Oh, you never know a chap till you find him out!" said Owen. "Ow! I sha'n't be able to use my hands for hours! Yow!"

"We've got to get even with Figgins & Co. for this!" said Lawrence savagely.

Redfern nodded.

"What-ho! If they're going to take up sneaking to the masters, the sooner they're downed for good the better. But—but it's a queer bizney. I think we'll go and ask Figgins just what he said to Ratty."

"We got it plain enough from Ratty."

"Still, we'll ask Figgins."

"I don't want to speak to the cad!" growled Owen. "You can go if you like!"

"Same here!" said Lawrence.

Redfern rose.

"Then I'll go," he said. "I'll soon get at the facts."

And Redfern, still squeezing his aching hands, walked down the Fourth Form passage to Figgins's study. He knocked at the door and opened it. There was the sound of a mumbling grunt as he opened the door. Figgins and Kerr were there, but Fatty Wynn was not to be seen. Figgins and Kerr glared at Redfern.

"What do you want?" growled Figgins.

Redfern grinned.

"Got over the pain in the little inside?" he asked.

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"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Look here," said Redfern, "I dare say that gave you a twist, but you deserved it for your cheek in ordering us to hand over our tea to you. And it was only a jape, too. You've been just as rough on us at times, and we never thought of complaining to a master. That's always supposed to be barred."

"What?"

"Sneaking is a bit too thick, you know!" said Redfern sharply. "Whatever you might have done to us, we should never have said anything to Ratty. And I think you might have shut up. It's rotten!"

"What's rotten?" demanded Kerr.

"Sneaking!"

Figgins and Kerr jumped up.

"Get out of this study!" roared Figgins.

Redfern did not move.

"I want to know whether you've got any explanation to make," he said. "I've come here to speak—"

"You've come here to get a licking!" said Figgins angrily.

"I'm open to take all the lickings you can give me," said Redfern disdainfully. "I'm not afraid of a sneak!"

"A what?" yelled Figgins.

"You heard what I said—a sneak!" retorted Redfern.

"It was sneaking to tell old Ratty about the jape—"

Redfern got no further. Figgins rushed right at him, and they closed and waltzed round the study. Redfern was dragged round to the door, and sent whirling out into the passage. He crashed upon the floor with a loud bump.

"There!" gasped Figgins.

"Yarook!"

"If you come into this study again—"

"I'm jolly well coming, anyhow!" roared Redfern furiously.

He was up again in a moment, and rushing at Figgins.

"Pitch him out, Figgy!" yelled Kerr.

"I'm going to!" gasped Figgins.

They struggled in the doorway. The heavy trampling of feet, the fierce gasping for breath brought a crowd of juniors to the spot. The sight of Figgins and Redfern in deadly conflict caused loud exclamations of surprise. Although the rival leaders of the New House juniors were generally on fighting terms, to a certain extent, they waged war good-temperedly as a rule, and good feeling always reigned at bottom. But it was evident now that matters had become serious, and that bitterness had crept into the strife.

"What on earth's the trouble?" demanded Diggs, of the Fourth.

"Separate them!" yelled Pratt.

Pratt and Thompson and French, and several more fellows, rushed to separate the combatants, but it was not an easy task. The intended peacemakers yelled as they received several powerful blows that the adversaries intended for one another.

"Yow!" roared French. "Chuck it!"

"Leggo!" growled Figgins.

"Drag that ass back, Pratt!"

"Now then, all together!"

In the grasp of half a dozen juniors the foes were dragged apart. They stood panting in the juniors' grasp, glaring fiercely at one another. Redfern's nose was streaming crimson, and Figgins's left eye was closed.

"Now what's the matter with you two duffers?" exclaimed Pratt.

"He called me a sneak!" roared Figgins. "Lemme get at him! I'll smash him!"

"So you are a sneak!" yelled back Redfern.

"Leggo!" shrieked Figgins.

"Look here, Figgins— Oh!"

Figgins broke loose and rushed at Redfern. Redfern, nothing loth, met him half-way, and the fight raged again furiously.

"Oh, let the silly asses have it out!" growled Pratt, rubbing his nose, which had received a left-hander from Redfern. "Let them hammer one another if they like."

"Go it, Figgy!"

"Go it, Reddy!"

"Cave!" yelled Craggs from the stairs.

The juniors scattered along the passage at the warning, but Redfern and Figgins were too furious to heed. They fought on, and did not stop, even when Mr. Ratcliff mounted the stairs, and stood in the passage looking at them grimly.

"Redfern!" rasped out Mr. Ratcliff. "Figgins!"

Then they ceased fighting.

"You will take a thousand lines each for fighting in the House!" said Mr. Ratcliff acidly. "You will stay in on Wednesday afternoon to write them out. And if there is any renewal of this disturbance, I shall cane you both severely."

Figgins stepped back into his study. Redfern blinked after him with the one eye he could still see with, and then went down the passage. Lawrence and Owen were still in the study at the end of the Fourth Form passage, rubbing their hands. They had not even come out to see the row; the ache in their hands occupied all their attention. But they looked inquiringly at Redfern as he came panting in.

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"Been rowing?" asked Lawrence.

Redfern snorted.

"Didn't you hear us?" he demanded.

"We heard a row," said Owen. "What did Figgins say?"

Redfern ground his teeth.

"He didn't have anything to say. He never even troubled to deny that he had sneaked. He simply went for me, and we've been fighting. Ratty's given us a thousand lines each!"

"Phew!"

"I'm fed up with Figgins!" said Redfern, between his teeth.

"He's a sneak, and we'll make him sit up for it. I'll—"

"You'd better bathe your eye," said Lawrence; "and your nose looks as if it ought to be put in a sling. Better leave Figgins alone for a bit."

But Redfern's anger was by no means abated. He bathed his eye and his nose, but all the time his thoughts were running upon the one subject—to punish Figgins & Co. for having broken the universal law of schoolboy honour by sneaking to Mr. Ratcliff.

CHAPTER 7. Bitter Blood.

"PHEW!" said Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell was surprised.

It was the day after that jape of the New Firm upon Figgins & Co., which had had such disastrous results in the New House.

The School House boys knew nothing of the matter. Tom Merry had just come out of the School House after breakfast, when he sighted Figgins and Redfern in the quadrangle. Figgins had a black eye, and Redfern's nose was swollen, and one of his eyes was of an artistic shade in blue. Both the juniors looked as if they had been very much through it. The traces of rough experiences of that kind were not uncommon among the juniors of St. Jim's. Two black eyes for Figgins, and two for Redfern, would not have surprised Tom Merry very much; but what surprised him was the manner of the two juniors as they met. They passed near by one another in the quad, but instead of a cheery nod or greeting, or a word of badinage, they glared at one another and passed without speaking.

"Phew!" repeated Tom Merry. "There's trouble in the family."

He descended the School House steps into the quadrangle, and intercepted Figgins. Figgins was striding along with a frowning brow, occasionally caressing his damaged eye. He did not stop till Tom Merry called to him.

"What's the matter, Figgy?"

"Nothing," said Figgins shortly.

"Have you had a row with Reddy?"

"Yes," snapped Figgins.

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Yes."

"Not on account of that jape yesterday?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise. "You don't bear malice for that, Figgins? You've japed Reddy quite as badly many a time."

Figgins shook his head.

"It's not that," he said.

"What is it, then?"

"He's a rotten cad."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "He's nothing of the sort. I don't know what you've rowed about, but Reddy's not a cad."

"You keep your opinion, and I'll keep mine!" said Figgins, with unusual acidity. "I say he's a cad!"

"Well, I say he isn't!"

"Then buzz off, and don't jaw to me!"

And Figgins strode on his way, leaving Tom Merry standing in the quadrangle, utterly astonished. This display of bad temper on Figgins's part was unprecedented. Figgins was usually one of the sunniest-tempered juniors in the whole school. Tom Merry simply could not understand.

But it occurred to him that Redfern might be able to furnish an explanation, and he looked round for Reddy. Redfern was outside the New House, chatting with Lawrence and Owen. The three scholarship juniors looked rather grimly at Tom Merry as he came up, but the junior captain of the School House made a gesture of peace.

"Pax!" he said. "I say, Reddy, what have you been rowing with Figgy about?"

Redfern frowned.

"Blow Figgy!" he replied tartly.

"You've quarrelled with him, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because he's a cad!"

Tom Merry stared.

"Look here, Reddy, Figgins is nothing of the sort. Don't let your tongue run away with you. Figgy is one of the best!"

Redfern's lip curled.

"Well, we know better than that," he said.

"Yes, rather!" said Lawrence and Owen together.



Bolsover began to dig, turning the earth over slowly and with great difficulty. Suddenly he started. A footstep had sounded in the Close. Bolsover major straightened up, his heart throbbing wildly, and his eyes turned fearfully in the direction of the sound, (*The above incident is taken from the splendid, long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "THE GREYFRIARS GARDENERS." which is contained in our popular companion paper "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on sale. Price One Penny.*)

"What has he done?" asked Tom Merry.

"I'm not going to talk about a fellow. If you want to know, ask Figgy. Figgy can tell you what he's done," said Redfern.

"But—"

"We bar him, that's all," said Redfern. "I don't intend to speak to him again. I can't stand him at any price!"

Tom Merry whistled.

"So serious as that?" he said.

"Yes, quite. No need to jaw about it. I don't want to run Figgins down. I daresay he had his reasons for what he did. But that's enough. I intend to give him a wide berth."

"There must be a misunderstanding, I think."

Redfern shook his head.

"Perhaps somebody's been making mischief," Tom Merry suggested. "I remember once there was a cad set us all by the ears in the School House, by telling rotten tales, till we found him out."

"It isn't that in this case."

"Won't you tell me what it is? I might be able to set it right, you know," said Tom Merry anxiously.

"Ask Figgy."

"Oh, all serene."

Tom Merry walked away, with his hands in his pockets, looking very thoughtful. He was seriously disturbed by the breach between Figgins & Co. and the New Firm. In spite of the incessant warfare the St. Jim's juniors waged, it was generally done in a spirit of fun, and neither party thought of bearing malice. But a quarrel with bitterness on each side was rare, and it worried Tom Merry. As leader of the School House juniors he was "up against" both Figgins and Redfern; but he liked them both very well, and apart from House rows, he was on the best of terms with both of them. And he was troubled by this bitter quarrel between two fellows whom he liked. Redfern told him to ask Figgins for an explanation, and he determined to do so. He found Figgins a little later, crossing the quad, towards the School House when the bell rang for morning lessons.

"Just a word, Figgy, old man," said Tom Merry, falling into step beside the New House junior. "I've been speaking to Reddy—"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "SHUNNED BY HIS FATHER!" AND "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

"Oh, blow Reddy!" said Figgy, crossly.
 "Yes, blow him if you like," said Tom Merry. "But I'm sure that there's some misunderstanding at the bottom of this row, and I'd like to set it right. Reddy says you'll tell me what you rowed about—at least, he said I was to ask you."
 "Ask Redfern."
 "But he told me to ask you."
 "Well, I tell you to ask him."
 "But I say Figgy—"
 "He's a cad," said Figgins. "That's all. You can tell him I said so. And now don't say any more about him."
 "But look here—"
 "Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

And he went into the Fourth Form class-room, leaving Tom Merry standing in the passage, looking very much perplexed. Manners and Lowther joined Tom Merry on their way to the Shell Form-room.

"Hallo! Wherefore that worried brow, my infant?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry explained.
 "Pair of asses!" said Monty Lowther. "Six of one and half a dozen of the other."
 "Yes, but I say—"

"No time to jaw now, old Linton will rag us if we're late."
 And Manners and Lowther marched Tom Merry into the Shell Form-room, and the subject had to drop for the time.

CHAPTER 8.

Arthur Augustus Makes Peace.

MUTUAL glares were exchanged by Figgins & Co. and the New Firm when they went into the Fourth Form-room for morning lessons. Most of the New House portion of the Fourth Form knew already that the two Co.s were on the worst of terms, though all of them did not know the reason. But to the School House fellows it came as a surprise. The general impression was that Figgins & Co. were resenting the jape of the previous afternoon, and it caused surprise that the famous Co. could not take a joke against themselves for once. But whatever was the cause of the bitter blood, it was certainly bitter enough. After mutual glares, the two New House Co.s carefully avoided looking at one another at all. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy drew his famous monocle from his waistcoat pocket, and jammed it into his eye, the better to survey the rival juniors of the New House. It was a new sight to see the scowl of enmity upon Figgins's sunny brow.

"Bai Jove!" the swell of St. Jim's remarked to Blake, in a whisper. "There's somethin' vewy w'ong there!"

"Looks like it," agreed Blake.
 "Figgy and Weddy seem to be at dagga's dawn."
 "They do—they does," agreed Blake solemnly.

"Pway don't be funny, Blake. I am sowy to see this sort of thing goin' on. Figgay tweekt me with gwoss diswepsect yestahday, but I'm not the fellow to beah malice. There must be some misundahstandin' or misappwehension between them, you know."

"I shouldn't wonder."
 "I might be able to set it wight," said D'Arcy, musingly.
 "In a mattah of this sort, what is required is the good offices of a fellow of tact and judgment."

Mr. Lathom looked round.
 "Pray do not talk in class!" he said mildly.

"Certainly not, sir," replied Arthur Augustus, with great politeness. And the master of the Fourth smiled.

Arthur Augustus looked very thoughtful that morning. He was really sorry to see matters on such a bad footing between the rival Co.s in the New House, and he had a natural desire to set them right. Whether he would succeed in making matters better, or in making them worse, was another matter.

During morning lessons the rival Co.s never even looked at one another; but when the class was dismissed they came in contact.

Figgins and Redfern came near together at the door of the Form-room, and they looked at one another like savage dogs, and went different ways in the passage.

Arthur Augustus hurried out of the Form-room after them.
 "Figgy, deah boy!" he called out.

Figgins stopped.
 "Hallo, Gussy! What is it?"

"I want to speak to you," said D'Arcy. "I want to explain, first of all, that I beah no malice for the wotten way you tweekt me yestahday."

Figgins grinned.
 "Good old Gussy!" he said. "If ever you want a bath in eggs, don't fail to come over to my study."

"Weally, Figgins—" Arthur Augustus began warmly; but remembering that he was engaged upon a peace mission, he calmed down suddenly. "Howevah, I was not goin' to talk about that. It's about Weddy."

The genial grin vanished from Figgins's face, and he frowned.
 "Blow Reddy!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy; blow him as much as you like,"

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said D'Arcy. "But what is the wov about? I can see that there is somethin' up," he added, with a sage shake of the head.

Figgins grunted.
 "A white mouse with half an eye could see that," he replied.
 "I'm not on good terms with that fellow, and I never shall be again. He's a rotter, and you can tell him I said so, if you like. That's all."

"But weally, Figgins—"
 "Now, ring off, Gussy—"
 "But I want to make peace, deah boy—"
 "Well, you can't."
 "But I insist upon makin' peace—"
 "Rats!"

Figgins strode away, with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and his brows still knitted. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was looking after him, in surprise and some indignation, when Tom Merry clapped him on the shoulder.

"It's no good, Gussy," said the captain of the Shell. "I've tried to get at what's the matter, but they're as close as oysters. Better let 'em alone."

"Leave 'em to stew in their own juice," suggested Monty Lowther, elegantly.

D'Arcy shook his head.
 "I'm goin' to make peace," he declared. "It's all wot, you know. Weddy is wathah a cheeky young ass, and Figgy nevah tweekt a fellow with weally wopopah wespsect; but othahwise they are vewy decent chaps, and this wov must be due to a misundahstandin'. It's just the time when a fellow of weal tact and judgment is required."

And Arthur Augustus walked away elegantly, thinking it out; and finally he went to look for Redfern. He found Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen in the gymnasium. Redfern was sitting on a parallel bar, and Lawrence and Owen were talking to him.

"Hallo, Gussy! Are you going to give us a turn on the bars?" called out Redfern cheerily.

"No, deah boy; I'm not in the wight wig for that—"
 Redfern looked astonished.

"My hat! Do you wear different wigs for different exercises?" he exclaimed. "I've heard of actors changing their wigs with each character, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be an ass, Weddy," said D'Arcy severely.
 "I did not mean a wig. When I say wig, I mean wig, not wig."

"Well, that's lucid, at all events," agreed Lawrence.
 "Howevah, to wesune," said D'Arcy. "I observe that you chaps have got into some silly wov with Figgins & Co."

The smiles vanished from the faces of the New Firm at once.
 "Never mind that," said Redfern briefly.

"But I do mind it, deah boy. I am goin' to make peace."
 "Oh, bosh!"

"If you characterwise my wemarks as bosh, Wedfern—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly.

"Well, tosh, then," said Redfern.
 "I wufuse to have my wemarks called eithah bosh or tosh—"

"Well, let's say rot, and agrée on it," said Owen.
 "Weally, Owen—"

"We'll make it piffle, if you like," said Lawrence. "There are lots of words that will suit, and you can choose which one you like."

"Pway don't be an ass, Lawrence. Now, you boundahs, I feel sure that this twouble is simply due to some misundahstandin', and it only wants the assistance of a fellow of tact and judgment to set it wight."

"My dear Gussy, keep off the grass," said Redfern.
 "I decline to keep off the gwass. I weward this as a dutay,"

said the swell of St. Jim's firmly. "Now, I want you to tell me what you have got up against Figgins."

"Oh, he's a rotter."

"That is wubbish. He certainly isn't a wottah," said D'Arcy warmly. "He has his faults, I know. Sometimes he has a feahful nerve, especially when my Cousin Ethel comes down here. He weally seems to think that she is his Cousin Ethel, and not mine at all. But in othah wespsects Figgins is all wight. I wufuse to listen to you callin' him names, Weddy."

"Well, travel off, then," said Redfern carelessly.
 "I wufuse to twavel off till I have set this mattah wight."

It's no good callin' Figgins a wottah. That's what he did when I asked him about you—"

"He called me a rotter, did he?" roared Redfern.
 "Yaas, and I wemarked—"

"Well, I'll tell you what I've got up against him, after all," said Redfern, red with anger. "He's a sneak! He's sneaked about us to the Housemaster! Now drop the subject! I'm sick of it, and of Figgins too!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

ANSWERS

"There must be some mistake, Weddy. Figgins isn't a sneak."

"I say he is!"

"And I say he isn't, deah boy!"

Redfern clenched his hands.

"Look here, have you come round looking for a thick ear?" he demanded.

"Certainly not, deah boy! I'm makin' peace!" D'Arcy explained.

"You're more likely to make war, by the way you're running on," said Redfern. "You'd better leave the matter alone. You're too well-meaning, Gussy. Keep off the grass!"

"Weally, Weddy——"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Weddy——"

"Rats, then, and many of 'em!"

And Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence stalked away. Arthur Augustus's eye gleamed behind his monocle and he pushed back his cuffs in a warlike way. He was about to rush after the New Firm, and commit assault and battery, when he remembered his peace mission, and restrained his righteous indignation.

"Bai Jove! I've a good mind to leave them to stew in their own beastly juice, as Lowthah put it in his coarse way!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "But I made up my mind to make peace, and a D'Arcy nevah turns back. I had bettah twy Figgins again."

And Arthur Augustus tried Figgins again. He found Figgins outside the New House, with a frown on his brow. Several fellows had been asking Figgins questions about his trouble with Redfern, and most of them seemed to blame Figgins—which was not unnatural, as Figgins declined to give any details of the matter. Figgins was feeling unusually sharp and cross when D'Arcy sailed up.

"Figgay, deah boy, I've seen Weddy——"

Figgins snorted.

"I'm fed up with Reddy!" he exclaimed. "I'm beginning to agree with the chaps who said it was a rotten idea to let those scholarship bounders into St. Jim's. Don't talk to me about Reddy! I tell you I'm fed up!"

"Pway be weasonable, deah boy! I'm going to make peace, if I have to fight both of you ovah it!" said Arthur Augustus. "There is some feahful misapprehension. I cannot help suspectin' that somebody has been makin' mischief, or else Weddy would not call you a sneak."

Figgins jumped.

"Call me what?" he roared.

"He wegards you as a sneak, and I explained that it was impos——"

"He calls me a sneak, does he?" bellowed Figgins. "I'll show him! Where is he?"

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Where is he?" yelled Figgins.

"In the gym. But weally——"

Figgins did not wait for D'Arcy to finish. He dashed away across the quadrangle in the direction of the gym. Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, staring after Figgins in utter dismay.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated. "Whatevah is the mattah with Figgins? It looks as if there is goin' to be twouble—aftah all my efforts to make peace too! Weally, there is not much use in interferin' with those silly asses, even for a fellow of tact and judgment."

It was barely possible that D'Arcy had not been quite so tactful as he fondly imagined. At all events, the outcome of his well-meant efforts was certainly not peace—it was war!

CHAPTER 9.

Face to Face.

REDFERN & CO. were still in the gym. when Figgins burst in.

Figgins came in with red face and flaming eyes, and evidently in a towering rage.

The trio saw him at once, and guessed what was coming. They faced him coolly, Redfern stepping a little in advance of the other two.

Figgins rushed up furiously.

"You cad!" he bellowed.

"Hallo!" said Redfern, with deadly coolness. "Are you going to blow off steam again?"

"You lying cad!"

"Is that all?"

"Put up your fists! You utter rotter!" roared Figgins.

"With pleasure!" said Redfern grimly.

He had only just time to put them up. Figgins was rushing at him like a whirlwind. There was a crash as they met, and they were hammering wildly in another minute. Kildare, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, came into the gym. at the same moment, with Darrel and Langton, of the Sixth.

The St. Jim's captain uttered an angry exclamation at the sight of the two fighting juniors.

"Stop that!" he roared.

Redfern and Figgins did not even hear. Kildare strode up to them, and each of them was seized by the collar in a grasp of iron, and Kildare, exerting his great strength, wrenched them forcibly apart.

"Ow!" gasped Figgins.

"Oh!" grunted Redfern.

"You young asses, what do you mean by this?" Kildare exclaimed angrily. "You will take two hundred lines each, and go and write them out at once! That will keep you busy till dinner! Cut off!"

"Look here, Kildare——"

"I say——"

"Cut off, and don't let's have any more of this!" said Kildare, frowning. "Mind, I shall keep an eye on you!"

Figgins tramped away with a black brow. He paused in the doorway of the gym. to speak to Redfern, who was frowning just as darkly.

"We'll settle this after school to-day!" he said savagely.

Redfern nodded.

"Just what I was thinking," he agreed.

"Half-past five, behind the chapel, then!"

"I'll be there!"

"Good!"

And then they separated.

Redfern and Figgins did not speak again during the afternoon. They avoided one another carefully. But neither forgot the appointment for half-past five behind the chapel, and when afternoon lessons were over, they prepared for the meeting. Tom Merry & Co. were going down to cricket practice when they passed Figgins & Co., who were making their way rather mysteriously round the School-House. Kerr was carrying a bag, which he rather seemed to wish to keep out of sight under his arm. Tom Merry hailed them.

"Coming down to the cricket, you New House bounders?"

"No!" said Figgins shortly.

"We shall lick you in the next House match, if you don't keep up your practice, you know," said Blake.

"Bai Jove! We shall lick them anyway, deah boy!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Rats!" said Figgins.

"What's on, though?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Got an engagement."

And the New House trio disappeared round the School House, in the direction of the chapel.

Tom Merry paused.

The open space behind the chapel, shaded by trees and well screened by buildings, was a favourite battle-ground for truculent juniors, and it was not difficult to guess what Figgins & Co. were making their way there for.

"There's a fight on," said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Let's go and see fair play," said Blake. "The cricket can stand over for a bit."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the chums of the School House followed Figgins & Co. A good many juniors, who had discovered what was on, were making their way in the same direction in twos and threes. They did not go in a crowd, for fear of catching the watchful eye of a prefect. Quite a crowd was gathering near the chapel railings when Tom Merry & Co. arrived upon the scene, mostly New House fellows.

Kerr had his bag open, and had taken out a basin, a sponge, and a towel. He filled the basin with cool clear water from an adjacent tap. It did not need any more evidence that a fight was to come off.

"You chaps are not going to slog one another, surely?" demanded Tom Merry, regarding Figgins & Co. in amazement.

"No, ass!" said Figgins.

"Who's the happy victim, then?"

"I'm going to fight Redfern!" growled Figgins.

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as wathah wotten, aftah my efforts to make peace between you," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly.

Figgins snorted, but made no other reply.

"I have twied by ewery means to make peace," said D'Arcy, looking round. "I wegard this as wotten, and most un-gwatateful."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins crossly.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"But what has Reddy done?" asked Kangaroo, of the Shell.

"He called me a sneak!" said Figgins sulphurously. "He told D'Arcy so!"

"And you told Figgins, you ass?" asked Kangaroo, glaring at Gussy.

"Weally, Kangawoo, I was tryin' to make peace——"

"Fathead! Nice way to make peace, I must say!" growled the Cornstalk.

"I was tryin' to get it cleahed up——"

"Ass!"

"I wufuse to be called an ass! I considah——"

"Here comes Reddy!" said Digby.

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Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence arrived upon the scene. Lawrence carried a little bundle under his arm, which when opened, revealed a sponge and a towel and a tin basin. The New Firm had come prepared.

Tom Merry looked in a perplexed way at the New House rivals. He did not understand how matters had come to this pass, and it troubled him. He was convinced in his own mind that Redfern and Figgins were two of the best, and yet it was evident that they were very bitter against one another. And bitterness was really quite foreign to the natures of both the juniors.

"I don't want to chip in, in a New House affair," said Tom Merry. "But this seems rotten to me. Can't this be arranged?"

"No!" said Figgins. "It can't! Unless Redfern chooses to take back what he said, and apologise for it!"

Redfern's eyes gleamed.

"I'm not likely to take back the truth!" he said.

"That's enough!" said Figgins.

"Weally, if you would allow me to awrange the mattah——"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to shut up!"

"Why can't you explain what you've got up against one another?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I've told you!" growled Figgins. "Don't waste time!"

"What did you call Figgins a sneak for, Reddy?"

"Because he is one!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, don't jaw!" said Figgins savagely. "If you don't buck up with the arrangements, you fellows, I shall start on the rotter at once!"

"I'm ready!" snapped Redfern.

"Gloves on, I suppose?" said Tom Merry.

"No!"

"Well, you're a pair of silly asses, that's all I've got to say!" growled the captain of the Shell.

"Quite enough, too!" said Redfern.

Redfern stripped off his jacket and waistcoat, and tied his braces round his waist. The two adversaries faced one another, and Kerr called to Tom Merry.

"You can keep time, Tom Merry, as an outsider in this."

"All serene."

And Tom Merry took out his silver watch to keep time.

"Two minute rounds, and one minute rests?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good! Get ready!" A pause. "Time!"

Figgins and Redfern did not shake hands. At the call of time the fight began, and in a moment it was raging furiously.

CHAPTER 10.

Figgins Against Redfern.

TOM MERRY stood watch in hand, and the other fellows formed a ring round the combatants.

The crowd, which was increasing in numbers every moment, looked on with breathless interest at the first round of that historic fight.

Figgins and Redfern had had many little rubs since Reddy's first arrival at St. Jim's. But they had never stood up to one another in a set mill before. And as both of them were keen, athletic, and had boundless pluck, the combat was certain to be a severe and a protracted one.

Redfern was not quite so tall as Figgins, and not quite so long in the reach. But he was more stoutly built, and he was known to possess very unusual strength. And both the juniors were famous boxers.

They seemed to be pretty evenly matched as they toed the line and faced one another in the first round.

And so they were. The fight was hard from the beginning, and when Tom Merry called time at the end of the first round, both the juniors were looking pretty well punished.

Redfern staggered a little as he moved to his corner, and sank upon the knee Lawrence made for him, while Owen sponged his heated face.

Figgins gasped as Kerr performed the same office for him.

"Stick to it," murmured Kerr. "You're bound to lick him, Figgy, old man."

Figgins gritted his teeth.

"I'll lick him or bust!" he said.

"That's the music."

"I think you ought to have had your tea first," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "It's no use going into a thing of this sort hungry. You want to lay a solid foundation, you know."

Figgins grinned.

"That's all right, Fatty. We'll have tea when I've licked Redfern."

"If you'd like a snack between rounds, I'll cut across to the tuck-shop, Figgy, old man."

"Ha, ha, ha! No."

"Time!" said Tom Merry.

Figgins jumped up. Redfern rose from his second's knee with equal alacrity, and they came into the ring again.

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"Now look out for fireworks," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! I disapprove of this, you know. Aftah all my efforts to make peace——"

"They're making efforts to make pieces," said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Go it, Figgy!"

"Pile in, Reddy!"

Figgins and Redfern were "going it," and "piling in" with a vim, and they needed no encouragement.

They were at it hammer and tongs. Neither thought so much of defence as of attack, with the result that both were badly punished.

Figgins got in several body blows upon his adversary that made Redfern stagger, and the chief of the New Firm was driven round the ring; but just at the end of the round he deceived Figgins with a feint, and delivered a crashing upper-cut that swept the long-legged junior fairly off his feet.

Bump!

Figgins came down heavily upon his back, his senses swimming, and the chapel and the trees seeming to swim around him.

Had the round gone on, Figgins would certainly have been counted out; but the call of time came to his rescue.

"Time!"

Kerr and Wynn picked up their champion, and bore him to his corner.

Figgins was looking dazed, and a little sick, as he sat on Fatty Wynn's knee. He put his hand to his jaw, which was aching terribly.

"Teeth all right?" muttered Kerr.

"Yes, I think so."

"You must look out for that upper-cut. It's a trick of his."

"He shan't do it again," said Figgins.

On the other side of the ring, Lawrence and Owen were jubilant. They knew that that heavy fall must tell upon Figgins, powerful as he was.

"Another like that, and he's out," said Lawrence. "You are handling him splendidly, Reddy, old man. The blessed sneak won't last two more rounds."

"He's putting up a good fight, though," remarked Redfern.

"The beggar's got plenty of pluck, sneak or not."

"Pile in, and he's done," said Owen confidently.

"Yes, I'm going to pile in, rather."

Perhaps Redfern piled in a little recklessly in the next round. At all events, he laid himself open to a terrific right-hander from Figgins, which crashed upon his nose and sent him spinning.

He grunted painfully as he struck the earth.

"Count! Count!" yelled Kerr.

Tom Merry was counting.

"One—two—three—four!"

Redfern did not move.

Lawrence and Owen watched him anxiously. If he was counted out now the fight was over, and their champion was licked.

"Five—six—seven——"

"Oh, Reddy!" murmured Lawrence.

"Eight——"

Figgins stepped back.

By all the laws of the ring he was entitled to stand by, and knock Redfern down again as he attempted to rise, and had Figgins done so, Reddy would infallibly have been knocked out.

But Figgins was not inclined to use his advantage. He was very bitter against Redfern, but he did not want to take any advantage of him. He stepped back and dropped his hands, and stood waiting quietly.

"Nine!"

Redfern staggered to his feet.

"Come on!" he muttered thickly.

And he groped half-blindly towards Figgins.

"Good old Figgy!" said Jack Blake. "That's just like him."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Figgay's conduct as vevy wight and pwopah."

And as the round finished, they could see that Figgins was sparing his adversary. He defended himself, and did not hit out as he might have done. Redfern was in no condition to guard; in fact, it was only by an effort of will that he kept upon his feet at all.

"Time!"

Never was the call of time more welcome to a fighting man than it was to Redfern of the Fourth at that moment.

He sank heavily upon Lawrence's knee, gasping.

Owen sponged his flaming face. Redfern was breathing in short, quick gasps. Lawrence and Owen did not speak. They were feeling very anxious and despondent, but they tried to look cheerful. But their leader understood their feelings.

"That was bad," he muttered. "But it isn't the finish."

"Stall him off in the next round," murmured Lawrence.

"You must give yourself time to recover a bit, Reddy."

"I know."

"If he gets in another drive like that, you're done. Look out!"

"You bet!" said Redfern tersely.

"Time!"

Redfern, as very cautious after that, and he sparred with Figgins, keeping him at arm's length. It was not till the sixth round that the fighting became close and hard again. By this time half the junior portion of St. Jim's seemed to be upon the scene. The chapel rails were crowded with juniors, and there was a ring five or six deep round the spot where Redfern and Figgins were slogging one another.

In the seventh round there was much less science, and much more slogging. Both the combatants were thoroughly warmed up to the work now, and both excited. Figgins had one eye closed, and Redfern could hardly see out of either eye. But both of them were standing up to the punishment with grim determination.

"Eighth round!" said Monty Lowther, as Tom Merry called time again. "My hat! They're sticking it out!"

"If it lasts much longer we shall have a blessed prefect on the scene," said Herries.

"Oh! It can't last at this rate."

"Too fast—too fast!" said Manners sententially.

Hammer and tongs they were at it again. Both of them seemed to have flung defiance to the winds, and they were hammering away blindly and furiously. Tom Merry glanced at his watch. He was about to call time when there was a shout from Pratt of the Fourth, who was perched on the chapel rails, and had a view over the heads of the crowd.

"Cave!"

"Some rotten prefect, of course," growled Blake,

"It's Ratty."

"Oh!"

"Time!" shouted Tom Merry.

Figgins and Redfern dropped their hands and stepped back, gasping, and very unsteady upon their feet. At the same moment the ring of juniors opened, and Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, strode upon the scene.

CHAPTER 11.

Taken Before the Head.

MR. RATCLIFF did not speak for a moment.

He stood looking at the two battered juniors, in the midst of a general silence. There was dismay in every face.

If a prefect had come upon the scene he would have stopped the fight, and would probably have given the two juniors lines. If a master had found them so engaged he would probably have reprimanded them very severely, and perhaps caned them, and then allowed the matter to drop—any master but Mr. Ratcliff. But with Mr. Horace Ratcliff it was different. Fighting was not wholly frowned upon by the authorities of St. Jim's, so long as it was kept within certain limits, and gloves were used. But a fierce fight without gloves was certain to be punished, if it was discovered. But Mr. Ratcliff had methods unlike those of the other masters. He never allowed a matter to drop at the judicious moment. And all the fellows round the ring knew, as soon as they saw the New House master, that there was to be trouble.

Mr. Ratcliff had always been specially "down" upon Figgins and Redfern. They had been the leaders in a revolt in the New House when Mr. Ratcliff was barred out by the juniors; and the Head of St. Jim's, instead of punishing the rebels as Mr. Ratcliff considered necessary, had merely suggested to the New House master that he should take a holiday for a time, till matters settled down again. Mr. Ratcliff had taken the holiday because he had no choice in the matter; but he had not forgotten.

Immediately he returned to St. Jim's he had shown his dislike of Figgins and Redfern, and he made them feel it in many ways. Neither was in his Form, as Mr. Ratcliff was master of the Fifth, and Figgins and Redfern were both Fourth-Formers; but as Housemaster he had many opportunities of making himself disagreeable, and he had not neglected one of them.

Figgins and Redfern looked at Mr. Ratcliff as he stood scanning them—or, rather, they tried to look at him. Their eyes were blinking very painfully, and certainly their faces were in a state that Mr. Ratcliff was justified in considering disgraceful.

The silence grew quite painful.

"So you are fighting again," said Mr. Ratcliff, at last.

"Ye-es, sir," mumbled Figgins.

"I think I forbade you to fight, yesterday?"

No reply.

"Which of you began it?"

There was a sniff from the crowd. That was just like Mr. Ratcliff—to try and make a fellow sneak if he could.

Neither Redfern nor Figgins answered.

"I asked which of you began this disgraceful combat?" said Mr. Ratcliff, raising his voice a little.

Still no answer.

"Very well," said the New House master, compressing his lips. "I must take it that you are equally to blame."

"Yes, sir," said Redfern.

"This is perfectly disgraceful," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Look at yourselves! Do you think you are fit to be seen in any respectable school?"

Silence.

"Are you not ashamed of yourselves?"

Silence.

"Yesterday," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I forbade you to fight. You have disobeyed me, Redfern and Figgins."

"I—I forgot about it," muttered Figgins.

"It is easy to forget when one does not choose to remember," said Mr. Ratcliff sarcastically. "You are undoubtedly the two worst boys in my House. You are as bad as the worst boys in the School House—which is saying a great deal."

And Mr. Ratcliff's eyes rested upon Tom Merry and Blake for a moment.

Tom Merry's cheeks reddened, but he did not reply to the taunt. Respect for Mr. Ratcliff's position, if not for Mr. Ratcliff, forbade it.

"I shall not deal with this matter myself," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I shall take you both to the Head. Follow me."

"Oh, sir."

"Follow me at once."

The juniors did not move.

Mr. Ratcliff, if he had thought the matter out for hours, could not have devised a way of hitting them harder.

Redfern and Figgins respected the kind old Head of St. Jim's, and valued his good opinion very much, and to be taken before him in their present battered and bleeding state went more against the grain than the hardest caning from Mr. Ratcliff.

"If—if you please, sir," stammered Figgins, "I—I'd rather you caned me, sir!"

"So would I, sir," said Redfern.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sneeringly.

"You do not wish Dr. Holmes to see you in that disgusting condition, apparently," he said.

"No, sir, please," said both juniors at once.

"Well, you should have thought of that before. Follow me."

And Mr. Ratcliff stalked away. Redfern and Figgins followed him. There was no help for it; they had to obey the Housemaster's orders. But they went with heavy hearts and glinting eyes. They had never liked the harsh, sour Housemaster, but they came perilously near to hating him at that moment.

There was a murmur among the crowd of juniors as the New House master moved away, with the hapless fighting-men in his wake.

"Rotten!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Just like Ratty!" said Pratt. "He knows they'd rather be licked than shown up to the Head in that state. That's why he's doing it."

"They oughtn't to have fought without gloves," said Kangaroo. "That was rotten. Blessed if I see what they're so ratty with one another about."

"Yes, I suppose they ought to be licked, but Ratty could lick them. It's rotten to take them in to the Head."

"Trust Ratty to do anything that's rotten!" growled Blake.

The crowd followed at a distance, and saw the Housemaster and the two battered juniors disappear into the School House.

Mr. Ratcliff, with his long thin nose very high in the air, stalked on ahead with rustling gown.

Figgins and Redfern followed him down the passage to the Head's study, and paused while the Housemaster knocked at the door and opened it.

"Nice go this is!" muttered Figgins, forgetting for the moment that he was on terms of enmity with Redfern.

"All your fault!" said Redfern.

"All yours, you mean, you rotter."

"Sneak!"

"Cad!"

"I'll—"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, turning round sharply. "Do you dare to recommence your quarrelling at the very door?"

The juniors dropped into abashed silence.

They followed Mr. Ratcliff into the Head's study. Dr. Holmes rose from his chair, and looked at them in amazement and horror.

Black eyes and swollen noses, and cut lips, and rumpled hair, and torn collars, certainly presented a shocking sight to the eyes of Dr. Holmes.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "What has happened, Mr. Ratcliff?"

The New House master smiled grimly. His chance had come at last. These two boys, who had been the leaders in the outbreak against his authority in the New House, were at his mercy at last, and he did not mean to spare them.

"I have deemed it my duty to bring this matter to your notice, sir," he said. "I feel that it is too serious for me to deal with, even as a Housemaster. These two utterly aban-

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done boys have been fighting like hooligans, or rather like wildcats. You see the state they are in."

"Bless my soul!"

"If they had been fighting with gloves on, I should have dealt with the matter myself, sir—severely, but, I hope, justly," said Mr. Ratcliff. "But this disgraceful exhibition of savagery is quite beyond me. As their Housemaster, I cannot give these two boys a good character. If you thought fit to expel them from the school, I could only approve, and I should not feel justified in asking for leniency towards them."

Dr. Holmes looked sternly at the two culprits.

"What have you to say?" he demanded.

The juniors looked at one another, and then at the carpet. Evidently they had nothing to say; at all events, they did not say anything.

"You have been fighting, Figgins and Redfern?"

"Yes, sir."

"With one another."

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"We—we had a row, sir," said Figgins, hesitatingly.

"That's all, sir," said Redfern.

Dr. Holmes sat down again and scanned the two juniors closely. Their battered and bruised faces reddened under his searching glance. They were only too keenly conscious of their disreputable looks—which seemed more out of place than ever in the quiet, cool, reposeful study of the Head of St. Jim's.

"I do not understand this," said the Head slowly. "I think it will be necessary to investigate a little further, Mr. Ratcliff."

The New House master looked as impatient as he dared.

"The matter appears to me quite clear," he said. "These two boys have been guilty of outrageous and disgraceful conduct. Their faces will be battered for days, if not weeks, after this hooligan combat. They are a disgrace to the school. I think they should be sent away, sir. That is my firm opinion."

Figgins gave a little gasp of dismay. Redfern's eyes gleamed. They had never realised before how thoroughly their Housemaster detested them, and how bitterly he remembered that old affair of the barring-out.

At the worst, what they had done would be well punished by a flogging; but it was evidently Mr. Ratcliff's desire to get them expelled if possible.

Dr. Holmes did not reply to the Housemaster. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Well, sir?" said Mr. Ratcliff.

The Head looked at the juniors again.

"I think there is more in this than appears on the surface," he said quietly. "Figgins and Redfern, I must have a full explanation of this."

The Head's tone was quiet, but very decided, and Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip and was silent.

CHAPTER 12.

Quite Cleared Up!

FIGGINS looked at Redfern, and Redfern looked at Figgins. Neither spoke.

They had nothing to say. They had fought because they were on bad terms, and they both believed that they had every reason to be on bad terms. But they did not want to explain all that to the Head. For one fellow to complain about another to a master came under the head of "sneaking." And that was a thing that Figgins and Redfern wanted to avoid. They stood with their eyes upon the carpet, and the flush deepening in their cheeks, and made no answer to Dr. Holmes. "Come," said Dr. Holmes quietly and kindly. "I will ask you first, Figgins. Both of you boys have impressed me favourably. Neither of you is of a spiteful or revengeful nature. You must surely have had some powerful motive for acting in this manner which Mr. Ratcliff justly describes as outrageous and disgraceful. You must admit that you are in a state which would be a disgrace to any school."

"I—I suppose so, sir," said Figgins.

"Why did you fight without gloves?"

"Because—because—"

"Well?"

"Because we were ratty, I suppose, sir."

"You mean you felt very bitter against one another?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"Why?"

Figgins was silent.

"Can you answer me, Redfern?"

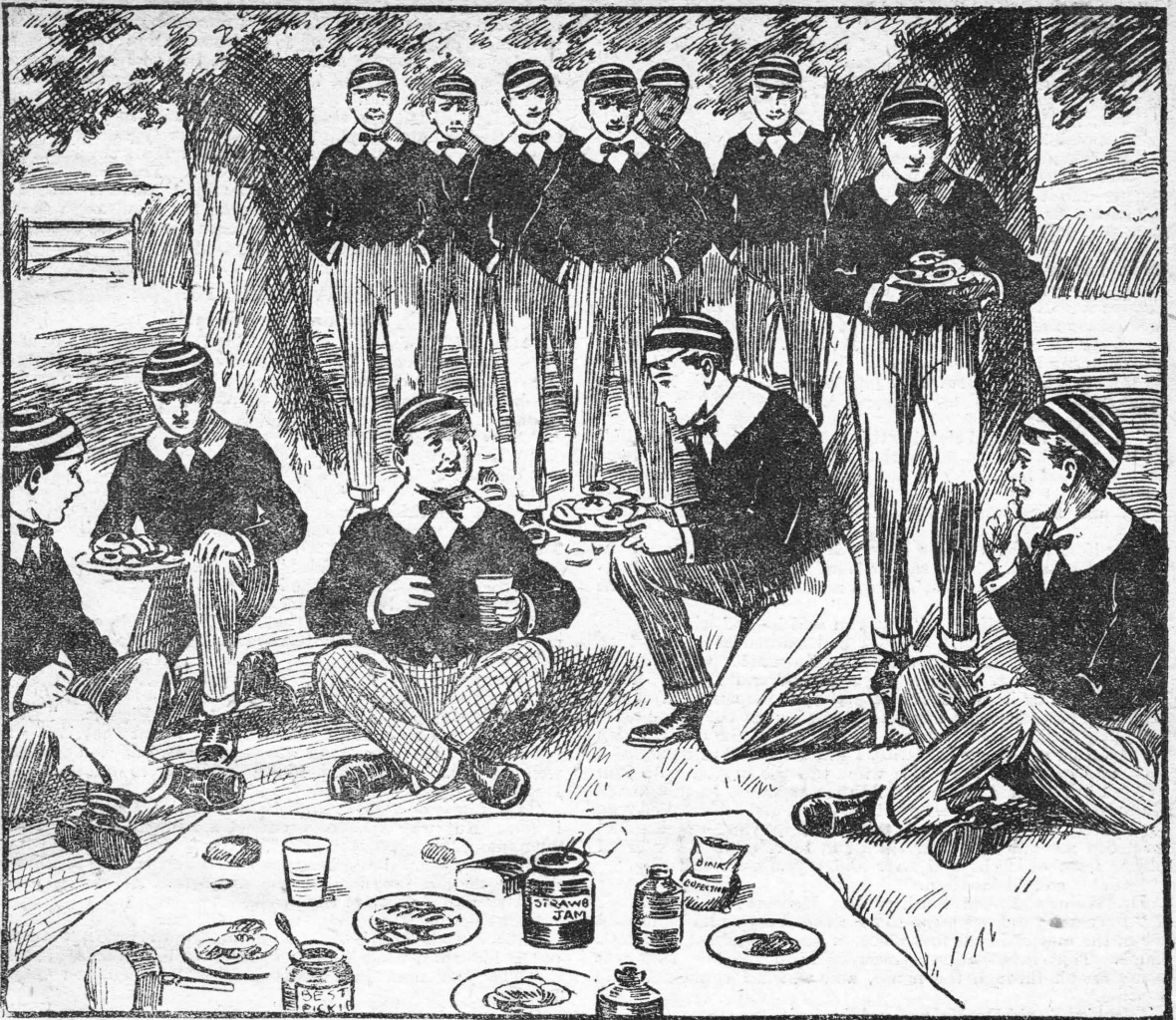
No reply.

"Come," said the Head, who could see far more deeply into the matter than the juniors themselves. "Come, this will not do. What cause can you possibly have had for this bitterness? What had Redfern done to you, Figgins? I insist upon an answer?"

Figgins looked at Redfern.

"Go ahead," murmured Reddy. "I don't mind."

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Tom Merry & Co., stared at the amazing spectacle of Figgins & Co. sitting down to Redfern's tea, and Redfern, Owen and Lawrence waiting on them with meek attention and civility. "Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the little game?" "It's our place to wait on Figgins," said Owen, with owl-like gravity. "And we're doing it!" (See Chapter 4.)

"He called me a sneak, sir," said Figgins, flushing at the remembrance of the insult.

"That was very wrong, Redfern. Why did you do so?"

"Because he sneaked, sir," said Redfern promptly.

Figgins clenched his hands.

"If we weren't here——" he began, hotly.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"Silence, Figgins."

Figgins turned crimson.

"I—I'm sorry, sir."

"You deny what Redfern has stated?"

"Yes, sir. I've never sneaked in my life. It's a rotten thing to say about any chap," said Figgins. "I've never given him any cause to say it."

"You jolly well have, and you know it," said Redfern.

Mr. Rateliff walked to the window, biting his lip. His impatience at this peculiar scene was so great that he could scarcely hide it, even in the presence of the Head. The Head of St. Jim's was acting like a good-natured prefect trying to make peace between two quarrelsome juniors. It seemed absurd to Mr. Rateliff. He had certainly never tried to make peace in his life.

It did not seem absurd to the Head. If he could remove a misunderstanding, and set two fellows who were bitter against one another upon good terms, he would not regret the quarter of an hour it had cost him.

"We will go into this," said the Head good-naturedly. "I think perhaps there is a misunderstanding. Tell me the whole matter. You have no objection, Figgins, to Redfern telling me why he makes this charge against you?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Then go on, Redfern."

"We japed Figgins yesterday, sir," said Redfern. "He raided our tea, and we physicked him—put physic in the jam and lemonade, sir, and gave him and Kerr and Wynn a twist. I dare say it was rather thick——"

The Head smiled.

"You should not have done that, Redfern. But, after all, there was no great harm done, I daresay."

"No, sir," said Figgins, "we didn't mind—after we got over the physic, Redfern can't say that we bore malice about it. We jape each other often enough."

"But you sneaked about it," said Redfern.

"I didn't!" roared Figgins. "I——"

"Silence, Figgins!"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry."

"Do you mean, Redfern, that Figgins informed a master?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Rateliff sent Monteith to fetch us into his study, and he caned us for it," said Redfern. "We didn't mind the caning, if Ratty—ahem!—if Mr. Rateliff had found it out by accident. But to have a fellow sneak——"

"Look here, Redfern——"

"Did you inform Mr. Rateliff, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"My hat!" exclaimed Redfern. "How can you have the nerve to stand there and say that, with Mr. Rateliff himself present?"

"Perhaps you made a mistake, Redfern, in supposing——"

"But Mr. Ratcliff himself told us, sir!" exclaimed Redfern, excitedly.

"Oh! That alters the case, of course," said the Head. Figgins almost staggered.

"You—you say that Mr. Ratcliff told you we had told him?" he gasped.

"Yes, he did."

"Impossible!"

"He told all of us—Lawrence, Owen and me."

"But—but he couldn't have!" panted Figgins. "I tell you we didn't tell him. I—"

"Please be silent, Figgins. Mr. Ratcliff, perhaps you can clear this up?" said the Head, gently. "As I supposed, it is a case of misapprehension."

Mr. Ratcliff turned from the window, his lips tightening a little. He was beginning to wish that he had not brought Figgins and Redfern to the Head's study, after all. He had certainly not anticipated anything of this sort. But he felt that he ought to have remembered that Dr. Holmes's methods were nothing like his own.

"Did I tell you about that jape of Redfern's, sir?" burst out Figgins.

"Ahem—"

"You will not mind clearing this up, I am sure, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, gently, but with a tone of firmness in his voice that was like iron. "You are aware that it would be very much against my wish to encourage tale-bearing among the boys, and I am sure that you have not intentionally done so."

"Redfern appears to—to have placed a somewhat erroneous construction upon what I said to him," said Mr. Ratcliff, haltingly. "I cannot say that Figgins actually informed me of the occurrence."

"Oh!" said Redfern. "But you said he had, sir!"

"I did not, Redfern. I said I had learned of it, and that Figgins had—er—told me what was the matter with him, or words to that effect. I do not remember the exact words I used, as I attached no importance whatever to the matter. You see, sir," the Housemaster explained, turning to the Head with a slightly flushed face, "after I had learned of the affair, which was the talk of the whole House, I saw Figgins and questioned him, and extracted from him what was the matter with him and with Kerr and Wynn. I cannot say that he mentioned Redfern's name. In fact, he did not do so, and I did not convey to Redfern that he did. I told Redfern that Figgins had informed me of the matter, meaning to refer to the dose of physic from which he and Kerr and Wynn were suffering."

"Oh!" gasped Redfern. Dr. Holmes looked hard at the Housemaster.

"I certainly did not mean to infer that Figgins had informed me of the matter in the first place, or had mentioned Redfern's name. That information I received from the talk that was going on all through the house, and which I could not help hearing."

"Indeed," said Dr. Holmes, coldly.

Redfern looked at Figgins.

"I—I say, I'm sorry, Figgy," he faltered. "I—I misunderstood Mr. Ratcliff, and—and I came to your study, and you didn't deny it—you just went for me—"

"What would you do if a chap asked you if you were a sneak?" demanded Figgins.

"Go for him!" said Redfern, promptly.

"Well, then—"

"This is a very unfortunate matter," said the Head. "You appear to have used unfortunate words, Mr. Ratcliff, which gave Redfern the impression that Figgins had been telling tales. I do not see what other construction he could really have put upon your words, though, of course, I understand that you did not wish to give him that impression. It was very, very wrong for these juniors to fight as they have done. But I am sure that both of them are very sorry now."

"Oh yes, sir!" said both the juniors.

"I shall therefore excuse you," said the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

"Excuse them, sir!" he ejaculated.

"Certainly!" said the Head. "As a matter of fact, they appear to have punished one another severely enough. And as the whole matter was due to a misunderstanding, I shall allow it to pass. I warn them never to allow such a thing to happen again, and I caution them to be more careful before they jump to conclusions. You may go, my boys."

"Thank you, sir!"

The two juniors quitted the study.

"One moment, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, as the New House master was about to follow, "I have a few words to say to you."

Mr. Ratcliff paused, almost blind with rage. He did not speak—words failed him at that moment.

"You have been the unconscious cause of this trouble, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, gravely. "I regard it as a serious matter for a boyish friendship to be broken. You might even give a suspicious boy the impression that you had deliberately misled Redfern, in order to break a friendship."

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I know you have a prejudice against these two boys, on account of the old trouble in your House. I must ask you, Mr. Ratcliff, to be more careful, and to try to overcome this prejudice against two boys who may be a little unruly, but who have splendid qualities, and are a credit to the school. I hope you will think over what I have said."

Mr. Ratcliff left the study, breathless with fury. He had taken Redfern and Figgins there to be severely punished—to be flogged, if not expelled. And, instead of that, the Head had reconciled them—and reprimanded him. Truly, Mr. Ratcliff was a bad hand at Machiavellian plotting! Mr. Ratcliff's face was quite white as he walked across the quadrangle to the New House. And he did not even turn his head as somebody hissed him from behind the elms.

CHAPTER 13.

Two on the Warpath.

TOM MERRY & CO. were waiting for Figgins and Redfern to come out of the Head's study. When the two battered champions emerged from the passage into the hall, they were surrounded by an eagerly inquiring crowd at once.

"How did it go?"

"What have you got?"

"Flogged?"

"Sacked?"

Redfern chuckled.

"No, my sons!" he said. "None of those nice things! The Head is a brick."

"A real, gilt-edged brick!" said Figgins, enthusiastically.

"Let me hear anybody say he isn't, that's all."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Nobody's likely to say that the Head isn't a brick," he remarked. "We all know that he is. But has he let you off?"

"Yes, rather."

"Hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah; huwway, deah boys."

"He went right into the matter," said Figgins. "Ratty told Redfern that I had sneaked to him about that jape with the physic. He pretends he didn't mean it, but we know jolly well he did. He wanted Reddy and me to quarrel. And Reddy, like a silly ass, took it in."

"Oh, pile it on!" said Redfern, meekly. "I know I deserve it all. But who'd have suspected a Housemaster of telling whoppers?"

"It would not have been respectful to suspect a Housemaster of doin' anythin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

"But he did it, though," said Lawrence.

"Not exactly whoppers," said Figgins, judiciously. "Mustn't put it like that, when I come to think of it. Must be just!"

"The just man just made perfect!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, this is not a time to be funny—"

"Ratty is awfully deep," said Figgins. "He's never got over that barring-out we had while the Head was away. He pretends he has—but he hasn't! He's been down on Reddy and me like a ton of bricks ever since. And I know it worried him to see us stand by one another. He deliberately worded what he said to Reddy to give him the impression that I had sneaked—trying to make trouble like some rotten, miserable little fag!"

"The rotter!"

"Nice dignified occupation for a giddy Housemaster!" said Tom Merry, with a curl of the lip.

"Yaas, wathah! I am quite shocked at Watty."

"The Head doesn't believe he meant to deceive us—he couldn't suspect him of that—he's too simple," said Redfern. "But that was what Ratty meant—just to set us by the ears, and give him a chance at us. The awful beast!"

"And I think the Head's jawing him now!" grinned Figgins.

"Serve him wight!"

"So you two silly asses have made it up?" Manners remarked.

"Well, yes," said Redfern, colouring. "I was taken in, and I was wrong about Figgins. I've begged his pardon."

"Same here!" said Lawrence.

"And here!" said Owen.

"Quite wight, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, beaming approval. "Between gentlemen, an apology is quite sufficient."

"Quite!" grinned Figgins. "But look here, we've been done in the eye by Ratty. We never did anything to him, and he has jumped on us like this. In effect it was Ratty who's given Reddy and me these black eyes and thick ears!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And Ratty's got to sit up for it!" said Redfern.

"Just what I was thinking!" said Kerr.

And the rival Cos. of the New House walked away, discussing very amicably how Ratty might be made to "sit up" for the trouble he had caused.

Figgins and Redfern spent the next hour or so in the Fourth

Form dormitory in the New House, bathing their eyes and other injured places.

When they came down, they presented shocking sights. It was likely to be several days before even the worst traces of that terrific combat passed away.

The Head's intervention had put an end to the bitterness that had grown up between the rivals of the New House, but they were rivals all the same. Later in the evening, the New Firm looked into Figgins's study.

Figgins was sitting at the study table doing his preparation with great difficulty. He could hardly see with his blackened eyes, and he was aching all over. Fatty Wynn and Kerr were helping him as much as they could. Redfern grinned at Figgins, blinking out of one eye. The other was quite closed.

"Well, you look a pretty object," he remarked.

"So do you," said Figgins. "I think we're a pair."

"Look here," said Redfern. "I've just had fifty lines from Ratty for whistling in the passage."

"Shouldn't think you felt much like whistling," said Kerr.

"I wasn't whistling," said Redfern. "That was the excuse. Ratty seems to have been jawed by the Head, and he's down on me."

"Nice man!" murmured Lawrence.

"It comes to this," said Redfern. "Ratty's called the tune and now he's got to pay the piper. You fellows have some queer idea in your heads that this study is the top study in the New House."

Figgins looked warlike.

"And isn't it?" he demanded.

"No fear!"

"Look here, Reddy, if you want your left eye to match the right eye, you've only got to say so."

Redfern laughed.

"I've got an idea," he said.

"We've been up against one another, and we very nearly got it in the neck. We shall never agree that this is top study, and you won't agree that we are the great chiefs—"

"Not much!" said Kerr emphatically.

"Then suppose we come to an arrangement," said Redfern. "We're agreed that Ratty has got to go through it for what he's done—"

"Yes, rather."

"Then we'll go for his scalp, and the study that gets ahead of him is to be considered top study," suggested Redfern. "Is that fair?"

Figgins reflected.

"You've got a scheme?" he asked.

"Yes," grinned Redfern.

"Good! So have I. If you down Ratty, you're top study; if we down him, we're top," said Figgins.

"That's square as a die."

"Done!" said Redfern.

"You'll have to be jolly careful," said Kerr. "Ratty is jolly deep. And he will be on the look-out for trouble now."

"I'm going to be careful," said Redfern. "Now, which study goes on the warpath first? Shall we toss up for it?"

"Certainly."

Figgins tossed a penny in the air and caught it.

"Head!" said Redfern.

Figgins showed the figure of Britannia upward.

"I've won," he remarked. "It's my innings."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Redfern & Co. departed, and Figgins struggled on through his preparation.

CHAPTER 14.

The Patent Powder.

MR. RATCLIFF was in a very bad temper the next day. His experience in the Head's study had been very exasperating, and with the exception of inflicting petty little punishments, he was unable to wreak his wrath upon Redfern and Figgins.

If the cheerful juniors had been in his Form he would have had many opportunities, but fortunately for them Mr. Ratcliff was Form-master to the Fifth. It was not fortunate for the Fifth, however. As the Fifth were seniors Mr. Ratcliff could not cane them, but he worried them into a most exasperated state in the Form-room that morning. Lefevre of the Fifth confided to Dalton, after morning lessons, that he had come very near to shying Cicero at the Fifth Form master.

"He's an awful beast!" Lefevre said, with great feeling. "That's what I say—he's simply a beast. He's going for us because the fags have bothered him. I wish the old bouncer would take another holiday, and never come back."

And Lefevre's wish was heartily echoed by the rest of the Fifth.

But Mr. Ratcliff was not likely to take another holiday. He was sure to remain, as Dalton remarked, where he could make himself most unpleasant.

After morning lessons Mr. Ratcliff returned to the New House with a frown upon his brow.

He looked round for Redfern and Figgins, but those two cautious juniors were keeping very carefully out of sight. They did not mean to give Mr. Ratcliff the slightest excuse for punishing them.

Mr. Ratcliff went into his study, still frowning. The Head's words rankled very much in his mind. His little scheme to make the obnoxious juniors feel the weight of his resentment had recoiled upon his own head, and he knew that it was useless to make further complaints about Figgins and Redfern to Dr. Holmes. The Head had told him very plainly that he expected him to cease feeling his prejudice against those two juniors, and outwardly Mr. Ratcliff felt that it would be only judicious to affect to have forgotten his dislike of them. For Mr. Ratcliff, although appointed by the governors of the school, could be removed from his post at the Head's wish—and he was in too comfortable a position at St. Jim's to wish to leave. And if he gave the Head the impression that he was persistently unjust, there was no doubt that pressure would be brought upon him to make him resign.

Mr. Ratcliff thought that matter over, and decided that he had better be careful. When he went into the New House dining-room to lunch—the dinner of the school—he glanced at the Fourth Form table. Figgins and Redfern were sitting there, looking very black and blue, but behaving themselves in the most exemplary way. There was not the shadow of an excuse for finding fault with them.

Mr. Ratcliff ate his dinner silently and sullenly. He retired from the dining-room with his usual attack of indigestion, caused chiefly by want of exercise. In his study he sorted out a paper from a cardboard box which he kept on his mantelpiece.

The folded paper contained a white powder which Mr. Ratcliff took for his indigestion—a remedy which, like many patent remedies, probably made the complaint worse instead of better.

Mr. Ratcliff was much given to taking patent medicines. If he had taken a little healthy exercise and more cheerful views of things generally he would have been sound enough in health; but as it was he kept himself in a more or less unwholesome state, and made matters worse, by doctoring himself with patent medicines. In the medicine-chest in his study there were all

kinds of fearsome powders and liquids and tablets and pills, and he had his regular hours for taking them, and a little pair of scales for weighing up the quantities. One of the chief interests in Mr. Ratcliff's life was taking his varied assortments of medicines, and the whole House grinned over his peculiar little ways in this respect.

Mr. Ratcliff poured a white powder into a glass, and added water to it, and mixed it up carefully, and took out his watch to time himself. He took that powder every day at exactly 1.30, and he was always right to the second. He drank off the concoction, and made a wry face. As a rule, Dr. Porkins's Patent Powder for Debilitated Digestions was perfectly tasteless. This one, however, had a salty flavour that lingered on Mr. Ratcliff's lips.

"Ugh!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "That powder must have been in the box too long. Ugh!"

Buzzzz!

It was the telephone-bell in his study.

Mr. Ratcliff turned from the table, and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" came a voice, a high-pitched voice which Mr. Ratcliff did not recognise. "Is that St. Jim's, New House?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes."

"Have you taken the powder?"

Mr. Ratcliff started.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Have you taken the powder?"

"Are you Mr. Twist, the chemist?"

"Have you taken the powder?"

"Do you mean the digestive powder?"

"Yes!"

"Yes."
 "Yes, I have taken it."
 "Good heavens!"
 Mr. Ratcliff felt alarmed.
 "Are you the chemist?" he demanded anxiously. "I thought it had a peculiar flavour. Was there anything wrong with it?"
 "You are sure you have taken it?"
 "Yes."
 "All of it?"
 "Yes."
 "Good heavens!"
 Mr. Ratcliff quaked. He had heard of careless chemists making mistakes with powders. He had never supposed that anything of the sort would happen to him. But he might really have foreseen it. A man in the habit of taking medicines, pills, tablets, and powders every day was bound to get a wrong one in the long run. He had sent to the chemist for that new box of powders only the previous day, and it dawned upon him that the chemist had sent him the wrong article now. The salty flavour on his tongue seemed to burn him. What had he taken?
 "What do you mean?" he panted into the telephone.
 "Was there anything wrong with the powder?"
 "Yes. Did it have a taste?"
 "Yes. Oh, dear—yes!"
 "What did it taste like?" asked the voice. "Did it have a flavour like arsenic?"
 "Ow! I don't know the flavour of arsenic. But—"
 "Did it taste like strychnine?"
 "Yow!"
 "Did it taste like—like cyanide of ketchuminside?"
 "Yow-ow! I don't know. I—"
 "Do you think it had a flavour of potassium of twistem?"
 "Yow-ow-ow!"
 "Why don't you answer? It's jolly—ahem!—extremely serious."
 "I—I can't say. It seemed to me to taste of salt."
 "Salt!"
 "Yes."
 "Common or garden salt—I mean common table salt?"
 "Yes."
 "Good heavens!"
 The voice as it came through the telephone was full of horror. Mr. Ratcliff felt his hair rising on end.
 "What—what have I taken?" he gasped. "Is it arsenic? Is it strychnine? Have you made a mistake in the powders? Ow, I will have you prosecuted! Yow, I will have you hung for manslaughter and assault! Yow!"
 "Do you feel any ill effects?"
 "Yes, yes! Ow!"
 Mr. Ratcliff's fears were at work now, and he was feeling creepy all over. The salty flavour on his tongue seemed to burn, and he was quite willing to believe that he had taken a whole cargo of deadly poisons of all varieties.
 "Have you a chill down your spinal column?"
 "Yow! I—I think so—yes."
 "And a pain in the occiput?"
 "Yoop! Yes."
 "And a sort of liverish feeling in the feet?"
 "Oh! Yes. Ow!"
 "Then there's only one thing you can do. Can you hear me?"
 "Yes, yes."
 "You haven't fainted?"
 "No-o-o."
 "You must pour cold water down your back instantly. Go to a bath-room, and let the tap run down your back. Don't wait to undress; go at once. Do you understand?"
 "Ow! Yes. Will that make it all right?"
 "You will be all right afterwards. But buck up—I mean be quick! It may be touch and go, you know. Do you understand?"
 "Yes. Is there anything else?"
 "No, that's all. Quick!"
 Mr. Ratcliff hung up the receiver and dashed out of the study.

CHAPTER 15.

Only a False Alarm.

WHAT the—"
 "Why the—"
 "My hat!"
 "What's the matter?"
 "He's mad!"
 "Right off his giddy dot!"
 Mr. Ratcliff heard the amazed exclamations. But he did not heed. He dashed at full speed into the nearest bath-room, and flung himself, clothes and all, into the bath, without even troubling to shut the door, and turned on the tap.

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Water swished down his back.
 Fellows who had seen him gathered round in amazement and alarm.

The passage was soon crammed with seniors and juniors. Monteith, the head prefect of the House, strode into the bath-room. Behind him faces and faces crowded like a sea. The impression of the whole House was that Mr. Ratcliff had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

Monteith's jaw dropped as he saw the Housemaster on his back in the bath, with the water-tap running at full speed.

"Good heavens! Mr. Ratcliff!"
 "Groo!"

"What is the matter?"
 "Yow!"
 "Mr. Ratcliff! Are you ill?" Monteith did not like to ask the Housemaster if he were mad.

"Yowp!"
 "Can I—can I help you?"
 "Ow! I am poisoned, and this is the only antidote!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "I have taken the wrong powder—yow!"

"But—but—how—"
 "The chemist has just rung me up on the telephone, to tell me that this is the only cure for the wrong powder—yow!"
 "Oh!"

Swish, swish, went the water over Mr. Ratcliff, and in a few minutes he was floating in it, soaked to the skin.

Monteith stared at him blankly.
 "But—but—it's impossible!" he stuttered. "If you've taken wrong powders and things, that can't do it any good, sir."

"The chemist says so. Ow!"
 "But he must have been pulling your leg, sir. Are you sure—"

"Ow! Send those boys away! How dare they laugh when I am in danger!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "Send them away!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the passage.

Monteith, grinning himself, turned to the door and waved his hand to the yelling crowd, with a gesture of command.
 "Go away at once!" he exclaimed.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Clear out!"

The New House fellows, shrieking hysterically, cleared off. Yells of laughter came echoing from the distance.

Monteith turned to the wallowing Housemaster again. Mr. Ratcliff was puffing and panting and snorting like a grampus.
 "Did Mr. Twist say how long you were to do this?" he asked.
 "N-n-no! Groo!"

Monteith grinned. He felt certain that the Housemaster was the victim of a practical joke. If Mr. Ratcliff had not been so craven at heart he might have suspected it himself. But he was too full of horrid fears to think of anything but his supposed danger.

"You'll catch cold if you keep this up long, sir," said Monteith.
 "Shall I ring up Mr. Twist and ask him how long it's to continue?"

"Yes. Groo! Yoop! Yes."
 Monteith hurried away to Mr. Ratcliff's study. He rang up Mr. Twist, the chemist of Rylcombe.

"Is that Mr. Twist?"
 "Yes," came back a squeaky voice.
 "This is St Jim's, New House."
 "Yes."

"How long is Mr. Ratcliff to stay in the bath?"
 "Eh?"
 "I say how long?"
 "What?"

"Is the treatment to continue?"
 "Don't be funny."
 "I say—"
 "You can't work off your jokes on me, young fellow," came back Mr. Twist's voice. "I've been rung up by you young rascals before. You can't pull my leg. Good-bye."

"But I say—listen—"
 But the chemist had rung off.

Monteith returned to the bath-room. Mr. Ratcliff had dragged himself out of the bath now, and a pool of water collected round him on the floor.

"What does he say?" he demanded eagerly.
 "He seems to think it's a jape, sir. You'd better ring him up yourself. He'll know your voice."
 "Very well."

Mr. Ratcliff wrapped himself up in bath towels, and hurried back to his study, squelching out water as he went. Sounds of laughter came from all quarters, but he did not heed. He hurried to the telephone, and rang up Mr. Twist. It was some minutes before he could get into communication with him, and he was in a fever of anxiety while he waited. At length the chemist's squeaky voice came along the 'phone.
 "Hallo! Who is it?"

"I am Mr. Ratcliff—New House."
 "Oh! What can I do for you, sir?" Mr. Twist's voice was very respectful now. The New Housemaster was one of his

best customers. Without Mr. Ratcliff, Mr. Twist would not have sold half so many powders, pills, tablets, and liquids.

"I have been in the bath."

"Eh?"

"I have allowed the water to run down my neck."

"Great Scott!"

"You did not tell me how long the treatment was to continue."

"The—the treatment?"

"Yes."

"What treatment?"

"For taking the wrong powder?"

"Have you taken a wrong powder?"

Mr. Ratcliff almost staggered.

Was the chemist insane? It really seemed so.

"You rang me up to ask me about the powders?" he shrieked into the receiver.

"I did?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"There is some mistake, sir. I have not rung you up to-day."

"Your assistant, then—"

"Assistant's gone, sir, some time. New Act, you know sir—this is his half day."

"Do you mean to say that I have not been rung up from your shop at all?"

"Not to-day, sir. It must have been some joke of somebody, sir."

"Oh!"

"I'm sorry, sir. If you've got wet, you'd better dry yourself, sir, before you catch cold. If you like, I can send you along a special powder for chills—"

Mr. Ratcliff rang off.

"Is it all right, sir?" asked Monteith, looking into the study.

"Yes," said Mr. Ratcliff faintly. "I have been the victim of a practical joke by someone in the village. I will have him prosecuted—if I can discover him. It is infamous. By a peculiar coincidence I fancied that the powder had a salty flavour, which made me the easier victim to this wretched trick."

And Mr. Ratcliff hurried upstairs to his bed-room to change his wet clothes. Monteith grinned. As he left the study he found Redfern & Co. grinning outside in the passage.

The prefect stopped to speak to them.

"Do you know anything about this, Redfern?" he exclaimed.

"No—only what I've seen. Is Ratty mad?"

"Someone rung him up on the telephone with a yarn about taking a wrong powder, and made him duck himself in a bath to remove the ill effects."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where is Figgins?" asked Monteith, suddenly.

"Dunno!" grinned Redfern.

Monteith went out into the quadrangle. Ten minutes later Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn came strolling in at the school gates. They were grinning, and Monteith thought that he understood. He beckoned to the trio to come to him. They came up cheerfully.

"Where have you been?" asked Monteith.

"Stroll in the village," said Figgins airily. "It's all right, Monteith, Baker gave us a pass out of gates."

"You are aware, I believe, that Mr. Ratcliff takes a powder after his lunch every day?" said the prefect, looking hard at Figgins.

"All the giddy House knows that," said Figgins.

"Did you put any salt in his powder?"

"Salt!"

"Yes."

"In his powder?"

"Yes."

"Nice afternoon, ain't it?" said Figgins.

"Have you been to a telephone call-office in the village?" asked Monteith.

"Telephone!"

"Yes."

"What jolly queer questions you're asking, Monteith," said Figgins, looking astonished. "Has anybody rung Ratty up on the telephone?"

"I think you know more about it than I can tell you, you young rascals!" said Monteith, bursting into a laugh. "However, it isn't my business."

And Monteith walked away laughing. Figgins & Co. grinned at one another joyously, and went into the House. They looked into Redfern's study. The New Firm were almost weeping.

Redfern jumped up as Figgins & Co. came in.

"You awful bounder!" he shrieked. "Was it you?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Has Ratty been ramping?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha! He's been wallowing in his clothes in the bath—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern hugged Figgins as if he loved him, and waltzed round the study table with him.

"If you'd only seen him!" he gasped. "If you could have seen him, dripping, wrapped up in bath towels—ha, ha, ha!"

And another attack of hysterics stopped his utterance.

CHAPTER 16.

In Weird Attire!

MR. RATCLIFF looked more savage than ever in the Fifth Form-room that afternoon. The story of the Fifth Form master's bath with his clothes on was all over the school; and St. Jim's had chuckled over it joyously. Mr. Ratcliff was under the impression that the joke had been played upon him by someone in Rylcombe; but most of the fellows guessed that the practical joker might have been discovered a little nearer home. The Fifth grinned when Mr. Ratcliff came in, and there were suppressed grins in the Form-room all the afternoon. But Mr. Ratcliff took no notice. He knew that he had made himself ridiculous, and shown himself up as a poltroon. He was only anxious for the affair to be forgotten as quickly as possible.

When lessons were over, Mr. Ratcliff lingered in the passage a few minutes until the Fourth Form were also dismissed. Blake and D'Arcy and Redfern were the first out of the Fourth Form-room, and they came out into the passage with a whoop. Mr. Ratcliff raised his lean forefinger.

"Redfern!" he thundered.

Redfern became solemn at once.

"Yes, sir?" he said meekly.

"How dare you make such a noise in the Form-room passage?"

"If you please, sir—"

"Take a hundred lines."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff strode away, feeling a little comforted. The hundred lines, bestowed upon the flimsiest pretext, would keep Redfern away from cricket practice, and that was a solace to the genial Ratty.

"Nice man—I don't think!" said Redfern, looking after the retreating form of his Housemaster with gleaming eyes. "I wonder whether he's going down to bathe as usual this afternoon?"

"Pewwhaps it will put him into a bettah tempah if he does," said Arthur Augustus. "I have thought several times of recommending Mr. Watcliff to take more exahoise; but I don't know how he would take advice from a juniah."

"I do," said Blake, laughing. "You would get a licking for your cheek."

"Weally, Blake—"

Redfern & Co. walked away to the New House. It was a blazing afternoon, and most of the fellows were going down to the cricket field. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence went into their study in the New House, and discussed ginger pop and cake while Redfern kept his eye on the quadrangle from the window.

"Figgys' little jape on the telephone was good—distinctly good!" Redfern remarked. "But I think we shall beat it—next time Ratty goes to bathe."

And Lawrence and Owen chuckled.

"Hallo! There he goes!"

The three juniors looked from the window. Mr. Ratcliff, with a little bag in his hand, was crossing towards the school gates with his stilted steps. The juniors knew that little bag. It contained Mr. Ratcliff's towels. The only form of exercise Mr. Ratcliff ever took was a bathe in the Pool of the Ryll river, and that only on specially warm days, where there was no danger whatever of taking a chill. He was a very poor swimmer, but even his nerves were equal to a bathe in shallow water, Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen grinned at one another.

"Time!" said Redfern.

And he picked up a bundle from under the study table, and quitted the study.

Quite unconscious of the interest the New Firm took in his movements, Mr. Ratcliff walked down to the towing-path, and followed the river till he reached the Pool. In one place the Pool was deep and dangerous, and full of currents; but in another spot, sheltered by trees, a space had been marked off for bathing, and was protected by a net in the water. It was a beautiful spot, with the sun shining upon the water through the openings in the thick foliage of the trees.

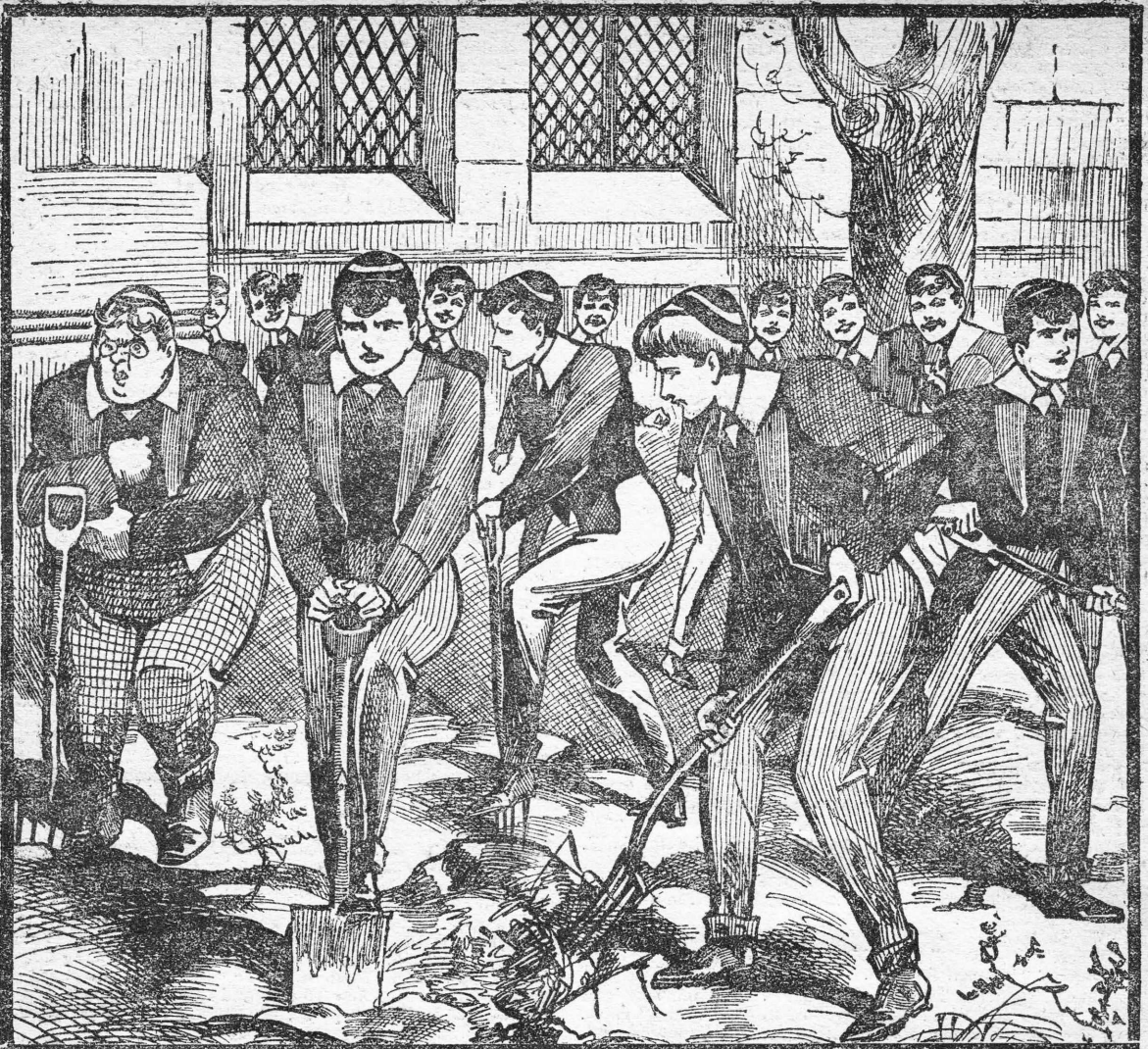
Even Mr. Ratcliff's sour face cleared a little as he stripped for the plunge into the pool. In his methodical way he folded up his clothes carefully, and placed them in a thicket to conceal them from the general view, in case some tramp should happen by and take a fancy to them. Then he plunged into the water to bathe.

As he waded out from the bank, there was a rustle in the thicket where he had placed his clothes and hat, but Mr. Ratcliff did not hear it.

And it was only for a few moments. Then there was silence.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "SHUNNED BY HIS FATHER!" AND "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"



The amateur gardeners delved away unheeding, though their ears began to burn under the fire of chaff from the watching crowd of Juniors. The labour was heavy, and the unaccustomed toil soon made the diggers pant for breath. But they did not intend to give in. It was their intention to show the derisive crowd the stuff they were made of. They dug away, turning up heaps of mud and muddy weeds. Their boots were soon smothered, and their trousers were very quickly splashed and stained. The sweat of honest toil dropped from their brows, and they grew redder and redder, and muddier and muddier, as they dug away. (The above picture appears on the cover of this week's issue of our companion paper, "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, and illustrates an amusing incident in the long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "THE GREYFRIARS GARDENERS," by Frank Richards. Don't miss this magnificent school tale, but get it from your newsagent to-day. Price One Penny.

along the wooded shore, save for the twittering of the birds in the branches overhead.

Mr. Ratcliff disported himself in the Pool in great enjoyment.

He remained about ten minutes in the water, and then waded to shore, and stepped gingerly on the sloping grass with his bare, wet feet.

He extracted the towels from the bag, and rubbed himself down, and felt much better than if he had taken a patent powder, or a patent pill, or a marvellous mixture.

Then he groped in the thicket for his clothes.

His hand came in contact with a bundle, and he dragged it out.

His face changed its expression as the bundle came into view.

His clothes were gone!

Instead of his own clothes, the bundle contained a short, striped skirt, of red and blue, and a bodice of pink with black spots. There was also a large bonnet of an Early-Victorian type, and a pair of very large shoes and stockings. Mr. Ratcliff gazed at the strange garments in amazement.

"Dear me!" he gasped.

He groped in the thicket again. Then he searched round

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about for some distance. But there was no sign of his clothes, if he had looked in a certain hollow tree further up the bank, he might have had more success. But Mr. Ratcliff knew nothing about the hollow tree. He ceased his search at last, and gazed at the weird clothes which were all that remained to him.

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "What am I to do?"

It was only too clear that someone had taken away his clothes, and substituted these in their place. Whether it was a joke or a robbery he did not know—that was really not the important point just now. At the present moment, the pressing question was, how was he to get back to the school?

Certainly he could not return to the school clad in the simple airy attire of only bathing pants.

He coloured all over at the thought. It was nearly a quarter of a mile to St. Jim's, and he would be liable to arrest, if he attempted to return in the extremely spare attire he was wearing at present.

But what was he to do?

To don woman's clothes—and such clothes? His hair rose on end at the thought!

He ground his teeth with rage.

It was a "jape," there was little doubt about that, though there was not the slightest clue to the japer.

Mr. Ratcliff shivered.

If he remained there without clothes much longer he was likely to take a chill. He thought of shouting for help, but it was futile. There was no one in view along the river—and besides, he could hardly ask anybody to give him his clothes, and go without himself.

Mr. Ratcliff sat down to think it out.

The sun was sinking, and a cool breath blew along the river. He shivered, and started to his feet again. This certainly would not do. He resolved to don the ridiculous clothes, to keep himself warm while he was pondering what to do.

Very gingerly Mr. Ratcliff put his long legs into the skirt, and drew it up round his waist and fastened it there. Then he donned the bodice, which was a great deal too large for him, and hunched it up round his spare form and buttoned it. His long thin legs projected below the skirt from the calf. He drew on the stockings, which were of a bright yellow colour. Then the shoes, which squashed about on his feet. They were three or four sizes too large, and he had to draw the laces very tight to keep them on at all.

Then he sat down to rest and think it out.

The evening air was getting a little chilly now, and he shivered again. He cast a despairing glance up and down the river bank. There was no one in sight. What was he to do? It was being borne in upon his mind that he had no choice in the matter. He had to return to St. Jim's—and he had to go as he was!

"Oh!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff. "The—the villains! I presume this is a joke! I—I—I—"

Words failed him.

He felt that he could wait no longer. A sudden thought struck him, and he put the large bonnet on and squashed it down over his face as much as possible to conceal his features. Then he moved from the spot.

He certainly made a most peculiar figure as he hurried through the wood towards the school.

A blue and red skirt, a pink bodice with black spots, yellow stockings, and a poke bonnet could not really be considered suitable attire for a dignified Housemaster of a public school!

But Mr. Ratcliff had to go through with it. He hoped that he would find the quadrangle deserted, and would be able to rush across to the New House, and skip up to his room without being observed.

He arrived at the gates of St. Jim's red and breathless with hurry, fortunately without having encountered anyone en route.

The first person to observe him was Taggles, the school porter. Taggles stared in blank amazement at the queer figure entering the gateway. His first impression was that a female tramp of a particularly unpleasant and intoxicated variety was seeking to obtain shelter within the classic walls of St. Jim's. Taggles' few remaining hairs bristled with indignation at the thought. He strode to intercept the newcomer.

"Ere, you get hout!" he shouted. "This ain't no place for you! You get hout! Do you 'ear, you baggage!"

"Let me pass, you fool!"

Taggles staggered back.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" he gasped.

Mr. Ratcliff dashed past him with fluttering skirt, and the strings of his bonnet floating in the wind behind him.

Taggles staggered against his lodge and gasped.

"Mad as a 'atter!" he murmured. "Stark, starin', ravin' mad! My heye!"

Mr. Ratcliff rushed on. But alas! for his hope of finding the quad, deserted. The quad, was simply alive with juniors. Outside the New House Redfern and Lawrence and Owen were standing on the steps, with Figgins & Co., Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, and Blake and D'Arcy and Digby, and Kangaroo and Reilly, and five or six more School-House fellows, were crowding on the New House steps with Redfern and Figgins—just as if they had been invited over to behold a special sight—as, indeed, they had!

There was a roar from every quarter of the quadrangle as the weird figure was seen rushing towards the New House.

"Hallo!"

"Who's that?"

"What is it?"

"It's Aunt Sally come to life!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wild roar brought fellows and masters to their windows in both houses, to see what was the matter. All St. Jim's seemed to have become alive with eyes for Mr. Ratcliff's special benefit. Dr. Holmes came to his study window and looked out, and gasped. Yells of laughter rose on all sides.

"It's Ratty!" shrieked a score of voices.

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"He's turned Suffragette!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With burning cheeks and flaming eyes, Mr. Ratcliff sped on, his skirt fluttering wildly over his yellow stockings. One wild yell of laughter sounded on all sides. On the steps of the New House, the juniors seemed to be in hysterics. Monteith came out in wonder—and at the sight of Mr. Ratcliff he burst into a whoop and doubled up in a paroxysm of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

"My hat! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Bai Jove! I—wegard—ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff swept up the steps between the rows of shrieking juniors, and swept into the house. His bonnet was hanging down the back of his neck by this time, and one of the big shoes had come off. Yells of laughter followed him into the house, and yells of laughter met him from everyone whom he encountered. Foaming with rage and shame, Mr. Ratcliff tore upstairs, and tore into his room, and the bang of his door echoed through the house.

Out in the quadrangle, fellows were hugging one another, or leaning against walls and elms, gasping and shrieking hysterically.

St. Jim's learned later that Mr. Ratcliff was ill, and obliged to keep his room for some days. Nobody believed in the illness; the school understood well enough that the New House master simply dared not face St. Jim's until some time had elapsed after the ridiculous exhibition. St. Jim's from the headmaster to the smallest fag, laughed over it, and Mr. Ratcliff writhed with rage. His enforced seclusion came as a boon and a blessing to the Fifth Form, and to all the New House. There was no doubt that Mr. Ratcliff had been made thoroughly to "sit up" for his sins against Figgins and Redfern—but those two cheerful youths could not agree as to which had made him "sit up" the most, and so the question of "top study" in the New House remained unsettled—and it was likely to remain an open question for good.

THE END.

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Edited from the Notes of Maurice
Fordham, Esq.

By **SIDNEY DREW.**

Farewell to the City of Triangles—Big Ben's Present—Homeward Bound—Teddy Morgan makes a Startling Revelation.

"Shoot him," Crooks answered coolly. "Wait for the flames, then a straight shot. Natives won't know. Better for the poor beast to die quick."

Fordham and Lance looked at each other, and both realised that there was no other way out of the difficulty. The former dived below, and returned with a rifle. His face was set and stern as he thrust the cartridge home.

"Best let me shoot, sir," Crooks said, taking his rifle from the young fellow's hand. "Killin' seems to ha' come nat'ral to me o' late. I sha'n't feel this—you might. My feelings ain't tender, which is useful."

Torches were thrust into the pyre, the wood caught light, and a hundred spurts of fire shot upwards, growing larger as they ascended. The wood was as dry as tinder, and caught the moment the flames licked it, and in less than a couple of minutes the fire was licking the legs of the doomed man. A wild scream broke from his throat.

"Shoot!" cried Lance hoarsely.

Crooks dropped on one knee, and rested the rifle-barrel on the bulwarks.

A second passed, then another; then the rifle cracked, and the figure at the top of the burning pyre, plain in the light of the flames, seemed to grow suddenly smaller, and hang limp from the supporting pole.

"Through the head!" Crooks remarked, as he rose. "Come below, sirs; I'll be seeing about supper. Excitement is a change, but it ain't fillin'. Why not?"

With the ghastly spectacle of the man atop of the burning pyre painted vividly upon their brains, Lance and Fordham hurried below.

Early the next morning—as soon as the daylight commenced to show in the sky, in fact—the crew of Wings of Gold ascended to the deck. Lance and Fordham beamed with the prospect of setting out for home, and were so full of the prospect that the memory of the tragedy of the previous night was banished from their minds.

Jackson, with the bantam strutting about in front of him, was blowing "Home, Sweet Home" on his mouth-organ; while Von Haagel, beaming through his spectacles, ambled about the deck, falling over everything that he possibly could with much success.

Only one face wore no smile, and that was Teddy Morgan's. He leant against the wheel, a notebook in his hand, his brows knitted sharply, while he worked away at some calculation. None noticed his abstraction, however, and he was left in peace.

"Going to stop and say good-bye to the nigs, I suppose?" Lance asked.

"Yes," Fordham answered, with a grin. "In fact, I have been thinking of trying to pot one for the professor. It's about the only thing about here of which he has not a specimen."

It was soon evident that Big Ben did not mean to let his friends depart without an ovation, for within five minutes of their arrival on deck the streets were full of natives, fully painted, and the Royal Band, stationed unpleasantly close to Wings of Gold, was discoursing the most appalling music.

A few minutes later, Big Ben and Hercules appeared, while behind them walked a man bearing a large basket. The three ascended nimbly to the deck of the aeroplane, and the two chiefs shook hands heartily all round, saying something in their own language.

As soon as the greeting was concluded, Big Ben took the basket from the native, and drew from it seven leather bags.

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He handed one, with a bow, to each of the crew of the airship.

"Blow me!" yelled Tooter. "Diminds!"

He was right enough. The bags contained diamonds, some in rough, others cut with little skill, though formed into fantastic shapes. Each of the bags could be worth little less than a hundred thousand pounds.

"We can't take 'em," Lance said quickly, turning to Fordham. "It's too much."

"You're right," the other answered reluctantly.

"Begg'n' your pardon, gentlemen," Crooks put in, "but why not? They're simply bustin' with these 'ere things; and as there ain't no theatres for their old dutches to wear them in, what's the good of them?"

"Frient Crooks is right," Von Haagel said. "The land here around is one mine of diamonds. If we have these they will not miss them."

"Then I'm for keepin' a hand on 'em," Jackson said eagerly. "We don't get no board wages like these every day."

"All right, then," said Lance, pocketing the bag, "we'll keep them. Now get the farewells over. We must make the pass by to-night."

Once more the crew shook hands with Big Ben and Hercules, who then clambered down from the deck. Morgan, his face still hard and set, stepped to the wheelhouse. His hand closed over a lever, the screws whirled, and Wings of Gold rose steadily in the air. The rest went below, the engineer alone remaining on deck.

Little did the men breakfasting below guess what was in store for them. They only knew of a way out, and that they were homeward bound. Had they known what Morgan knew, their mirth would have changed to the sharpest anxiety.

By the afternoon the pass between the mountains was reached, and Wings of Gold, guided by Morgan's skilful hand, glided into it. On both sides the mountains sloped away, heavily wooded, for a hundred yards; then the vegetation grew scarce, and only bare rock towered up towards the sky. So high were the mountains that the peaks were overhung with mist, and were, therefore, out of sight of the men on board the airship.

"Home!" cried Lance, as Wings of Gold glided smoothly along the gorge. "Home!"

"Mit mine peautiful specimens!" Von Haagel said, his face one great smile.

"Yes; they'll have to build a new museum for them, dad," Fordham answered. "And they'll make you—what can they make you?"

"Little that I am not," Von Haagel answered. "But the honour, which must mit you be share. Ach, it will be too good!"

All through the afternoon Morgan kept Wings of Gold steadily going, at no great distance from the ground; but as evening showed signs of setting in, there were still no signs of the end of the gorge. Lance and Fordham had brought rifles on deck, and Tooter stood ready by the Maximo to do battle with any stray pterodactyls.

As soon as darkness had fallen, Morgan brought Wings of Gold to the ground in as clear a space as could be found, and all was made, fast for the night. It was decided to keep a watch, and while the others supped, Tooter remained on deck. In due course of time he was relieved, and reported:

"All quiet; not a blessed tickle-me or tarryiddle about!"

To Crooks had fallen the watch from midnight to four in the morning, and he took up his position promptly, puffing away at a cigar furnished by Lance.

An hour passed quietly, a second followed, and Crooks, whose exertions during the past few days had been enough to tire any man, dozed from time to time.

Suddenly he started up, fully awake, his head bent, silently listening.

From far above came a heavy, booming noise, like the sound of distant thunder. What did it mean? It was growing nearer and louder with unnerving speed.

As the thought leapt into Crooks's mind, he remembered how, at this particular spot, the mountains overhung like a gorge, and a shudder ran through his heart. Like a madman he sprang to the levers, every screw of the vessel sprang into full life, and Wings of Gold was literally torn from the ground, and run straight ahead, for the gorge was none too broad, and the slightest wrong turn might spell ruin.

The booming grew terrible. A horrible crash rang out behind Wings of Gold, and Crooks calmly pulled back the levers and allowed Wings of Gold to sink to the ground. The avalanche had descended, and the danger was passed.

Late in the afternoon, while he was smoking a cigar on deck with Fordham, Lance noticed that only the fore screw was working, and, in consequence, the speed of the aeroplane was very much diminished.

"Nothing wrong with the stern screw?" he asked anxiously of the engineer.

"No, sir," Morgan answered, after a pause.

"Then why aren't we running her?"

Morgan looked round-sharply, as if to make sure that no one but the two chums was on deck.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a tense voice, "when we wiped out those mastodons you thought that no harm was done."

"Well?" Fordham cried sharply.

"The whole of the chemical apparatus was shivered to pieces.

"And that means," said Lance hoarsely, "that——"

"That we can manufacture no more motive power," Morgan answered between his teeth.

Lance and Fordham stared at the engineer in horror, the full force of his words eating into their brain. They knew that very little force was in the storage cells, and a large tract had to be covered before the yacht would be reached.

"Can we do it?" Fordham asked, in a low voice.

"Heaven alone knows!" Morgan answered solemnly. "We can but try."

The Crew Learn the Terrible News—A Race Against Time—The Last Chance.

The news had come as an awful shock to Lance and Fordham, and for some minutes they stood still, staring at Morgan as if they could hardly believe him. Lance was the first to speak.

"The others," he said. "Ought they to know?"

"Yes, sir," said Morgan, with determination. "There's not a man among them who's not grit right through. Let them know the chances."

Fordham set the alarm-bell on deck ringing, and, with the promptness only found in men constantly living in danger, Jackson, Crooks, Tooter, and Von Haegel scrambled on deck. Crooks trailed a rifle behind him, and so did Jackson.

"Thought it might ha' been some of them tarrydiddles, sir," Jackson remarked, looking round sharply; "but I reckon it's cold enough round here to near freeze their flappers off."

"The alarm-bell havin' rung," Crooks remarked, "there must be some danger. This 'ere part seems mighty full o' that kind o' thing. Why not?"

"Mein poys," Von Haegel cried excitedly, rushing towards his young friends, "you have not the yacht sighted? So?"

"No," Lance answered, and for all his nerve his voice shook slightly.

"Tell them," he said in a low tone, turning to Fordham.

"Dad," the latter said quietly, "and you boys, I have something to tell you, and if it wasn't that I know you to be as true as steel, I should not have decided to speak. I have heard bad news. Would you rather hear it or not?"

"No news bein' bad news in this case, let's have it, sir," Crooks answered unconcernedly.

"Ja, out mit it!" Von Haegel agreed, nodding his head.

"Let us the worst know."

"Very well," Fordham spoke slowly and very distinctly. "The apparatus for making liquid air—the motive power of Wings of Gold—is broken."

"Which means, I take it, sir," Crooks said quietly, "no more apparatus, no more force. It'll be cut and run while the storage cells last."

"Yes."

"Why not?" Crooks answered calmly, a slight tinge of excitement colouring his sallow face. "Difficulties was made to be overcome. We can overcome 'em."

"Blest if we don't try!" Tooter growled. "That their bag of diminds will make me 'ang on pretty 'ard to life!"

"Same 'ere!" Jackson remarked, turning to Morgan.

"Teddy, my bonny boy, jest you remember wot you're a-doin' of. There's a blessed Kerlondyke aboard, so mind your eye."

The crew, having heard the terrible news, returned calmly to their duties, and Von Haegel tumbled below to continue the study of his unique specimens. Only Lance and Fordham remained on deck with Morgan.

"How long should the run take us, Teddy?" Lance asked thoughtfully.

"Call it two days, sir, with our screw crippled."

"And the power will last that time?"

"That's the rub," Morgan answered quietly. "If only a wind would spring up, I'd stop all but the horizontal screws, and so save the power. In that way we should manage it, but otherwise——"

He broke off short, shrugging his shoulders in a horribly suggestive manner.

"We'll at least get over the water on to the ice," Fordham said thickly; "drowning in that freezing water would be too awful."

During the remainder of the day, Wings of Gold ploughed her way with only her fore screw and horizontal screws at work, and by the evening the ice had been reached. No halt was made, for Morgan meant to push on and trust to luck.

As evening fell, Crooks relieved him, the searchlight was switched on, and the airship was forced to her goal.

The white beam of light gleamed ahead, and, slanting downwards, shone full upon the ice, turning its surface into a heap of gleaming crystals. Hummocks, some of them dangerously high, were everywhere, and Crooks had to keep his eyes skinned to be in time to avoid them. Wings of Gold might have been raised higher, but then, should the motive power give out suddenly, the descent would have been terrible.

When Lance came on deck, wrapped warmly in furs, at day-break, even he could see that Wings of Gold was travelling very slowly.

"She can't last?" he demanded abruptly.

"No, sir," Morgan answered, his bloodshot eyes turned towards the horizontal screws. "If we lessen her weight, and only have to work half the screws, we could keep on a bit longer. There's wind in the air, too, and if we can hold out, it may reach us in time."

"May it come from the right direction," he concluded, under his breath.

Lance dived below, and in less than a minute every man of the crew, with the exception of Morgan, was engaged in dragging furniture, cooking utensils, even partitions up on to the deck, and flinging them over the side. Very soon the effect of the wholesale lightening of the craft was felt, and Morgan switched off two of the screws.

In the midst of this, Von Haegel, dragging a long case after him, came puffing up on to the deck. His face, despite his deadly exertions, was white, and there was a suspicious moisture about his eyes. As he was about to tilt the case over the bulwarks, Crooks gripped his arm and calmly jerked him back.

"What's the game, sir?"

"It must go, goot Crooks!" Von Haegel answered hoarsely. "It is ein of my beautiful specimens. They do too much weigh, and mit der rest must go."

"Look here, sir," Crooks said, with quiet determination, "there is things which is valuable to a mighty lot, and things, some on 'em human, which ain't. And why not? That bein' so that case stops aboard."

"Nein, nein!" Von Haegel gasped, in a broken voice. "It must with der rest go."

Without another word, Crooks hoisted his long limbs over the bulwarks, and hung over the side with his hands. Lance and Fordham came rushing up, and gripped him by the arms.

"Save him! Save mein goot freunts!" Von Haegel cried.

"Let me alone, sirs!" Crooks cried quietly, but with a fierce light of determination in his eyes. "The professor is for lightening Wings of Gold. Why not? But those specimens is valuable, which is natural, and your humble servant ain't. Therefore, if weight goes, I go——"

With a jerk, Lance and Fordham pulled Crooks aboard, and the former promptly sat on his chest.

"Teddy," Crooks cried, shaking himself free with the greatest ease, and rising to his feet, "how's the weight now?"

"She's cased enough!" Morgan answered hoarsely. "We may do it yet, with the wind!"

Crooks turned quietly towards the hatch, but Von Haegel gripped him by the hand. Tears were in the old man's eyes, and when he spoke his voice shook.

"Mein tear Crooks," he said hoarsely, "you are mein goot freunt always."

"Proud to hear you say so, sir," Crooks answered, with the faintest possible quiver in his voice; "but it won't do. Different spears of life, sir, was made to be kept. Why not? My own I tries to adorn, and——"

"You would adorn any!" Von Haegel interrupted enthusiastically. "You shall a yellow be of mein societies, for you have der beautiful specimens saved."

"Some is fitted for such things, sir," Crooks answered. "Some ain't. Let it go at that. Why not?"

He turned away, and made once more for the hatch. As he passed Morgan, the latter seized his hand in a grip of iron.

"None of your games, Crooks, old man!" he said hoarsely. "Sooner than lose you, I'd rivet runners on to Wings of Gold and haul her back."

Wind at Last—Running with the Storm—Down on to the Ice—Waiting for Dawn—Saved!

As evening fell, the long expected wind gripped Wings of Gold in its grasp, and hustled it along at a much increased speed; snow began to fall heavily at the same time, so densely that the searchlight was powerless to pierce more than a few feet ahead, and Teddy Morgan switched it off.

The whole of the crew of Wings of Gold, including Von Haegel, were on deck now, for they were too excited to remain below now.

"What will happen now?" Lance shouted, finding it difficult to make his voice heard above the roar of the wind.

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"Can't say, sir!" Morgan yelled back. "I've switched off the fore screw, and only the wind is taking us along now. There's power enough to keep the others moving for three hours!"

"Then?"

"We shall strike the ice!" Morgan answered between his teeth.

It was no good asking more. Three hours of grace were left. In that time, Wings of Gold might be swept along no more than a score of miles; but, on the other hand, it might be a hundred.

An hour passed, and the storm increased rather than diminished to such an extent that Morgan, with the aid of Crooks, lashed himself to the wheel, while the others clung to the bulwarks. They could hardly see each other's faces for the blinding snow.

Half an hour passed; then, with a terrifying thud, Wings of Gold struck something. Morgan jerked back a lever, and set the whole of the horizontal-screws working. Once more the airship bumped, and the wind seemed to lift her higher, and she was whirled on.

"The snow!" Morgan shouted, as Lance clawed his way to him along the slippery deck. "Clear it!"

On their hands and knees—for to stand up was impossible—Lance, Fordham, and Jackson forced great heaps of snow along before them, and sent it showering through the bulwarks. Von Haagel had dropped to his knees with the rest, but Crooks had taken him by the collar, jammed him against the nearest wall, and commanded him to stay there. Crooks himself, crawling along the deck, dived below, and a few minutes later a clanging and hammering could be heard faintly above the howling of the wind; but all were too busy to pay much heed to it.

Lightened by the weight of the snow, Wings of Gold darted upwards, and Morgan switched off two more screws, thus hoping to nurse the little power left. Hardly had he done this when the hatch was raised and Crooks thrust his head out, hailing the others vigorously.

Little Jackson made a run for the hatch, which nearly landed him down it head first, and Lance and Fordham clawed their way there as soon as possible. Crooks signed to them to descend, and then they saw the reason for his clanging and hammering.

Crooks, who must have worked like ten men to accomplish so much in so short a time, had managed to wrench away two great metal plates from the interior of the airship, and had dragged them to the foot of the steps.

By their united efforts, the crew succeeded in hauling these across the deck and letting them slip overboard. The effect was at once apparent, and Morgan's grim face relaxed a trifle as he switched off one more of the screws.

But the time was flying fast. Very soon the power would give out, and the end would come.

An hour passed, and from time to time Morgan strained his eyes to get a glimpse of the screws above him. Already the engines were running jerkily, and he knew the end was very near. Trusting to the strength of the wind, taking a desperate remedy in a desperate crisis, he stopped one more screw. The remaining ones gathered more strength, but it was the strength of a dying giant.

With a suddenness that was perfectly appalling, the screws ceased to revolve, and the bows of the Wings of Gold swerved downwards, flinging Morgan against the engines, and then she struck, with a shivering crash.

Crooks, half stunned by the force with which he had been flung to the deck, crawled towards Morgan and cut him free.

"Overboard!" he gasped hoarsely. "No knowing when ice break. Safer ashore. Why not?"

Following the example of Crooks and Morgan, the others tumbled overboard, sinking nearly waist deep in soft snow. Even Von Haagel managed to drop without his proverbial ill-luck, and the whole crew stood beside their fallen vessel, which now lay on her side.

"Follow!" said Crooks, gallantly leading the way through the snow, although he staggered in his walk.

For a matter of a hundred yards the little party fought their way through the deep snow, and pulled up to windward of a hummock, which acted as some kind of shelter from the snow. Here it was possible to speak without shouting, and to breathe without their breath being rammed painfully back into their lungs.

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THE "GEM" LIBRARY—THE ONLY ALL-SCHOOL-STORY BOOK IN THE WORLD! (See page 15.)

Morgan, the moment this shelter had been reached, sank down in the snow and went fast asleep. Crooks gripped him by the shoulder and shook him violently until his eyes opened again, and helped him to his feet.

"Sleep is a good thing, mate," he said, his own voice dull with fatigue, "but wakin' is better at times."

"Ja!" Von Haagel, who had himself been nodding, agreed, as he roused himself. "To sleep now, mein freunts, would mean death. We must keep awake."

Morgan was once more dropping to sleep, but Crooks shook him fiercely, forcing him to wakefulness.

"It only wants an hour to dawn," Lance said hopefully. "We must keep our eyes open."

It was a strange sight which followed. Lance commenced to walk round in a circle, next came Morgan, with Crooks behind, then Jackson, Tootor, Von Haagel, and Fordham, who was, perhaps, the least tired of all. Round and round they walked, until the snow was beaten down like a circling. Every now and again the men would stumble, falling asleep as they walked, and the man behind would prod him vigorously into wakefulness.

That hour before dawn was the longest any man amongst the party had endured, especially as the snow had stopped, and in consequence there was not the stinging flakes to keep them awake.

The blackness of the night turned to grey, and from grey to pink, the stretches of snow, broken here and there by hummocks, began to show on every side, and the shadowy form of Wings of Gold became clearer.

"The ice has held," said Morgan, little above a whisper, his eyes half closed. "Let us board her and sleep."

"Why not?" Crooks murmured indistinctly.

Up the sides of the stranded craft the men clambered, and in little more than a minute every man of them, except Fordham, was sound asleep in his bunk. Now that it was light, Fordham felt no inclination to sleep; so, taking a rifle, on the chance of meeting a bear, he clambered down the side of the airship and ploughed his way through to the nearest hummock.

As he walked he looked round eagerly, and he found it hard to realise that, unless something remarkable happened, on this spot both he and his companions would meet their death.

Reaching the hummock, Fordham clambered to the summit and looked round. Hardly had he done so when a wild cry broke from his lips; and, lifting his rifle, he fired rapidly again and again in the air, until the magazine was empty.

Not half a mile away the ice ended and water sparkled brightly beneath the rays of the rising sun. But that was not all. At anchor, her spars white with ice, swung the yacht, a thin spiral of smoke rising from the galley chimney.

Unable to keep the news to himself, Fordham bolted back to Wings of Gold, and by dint of much shaking and shouting, succeeded in rousing his companions. Then, stumbling in their haste, the whole party dashed through the snow and mounted the hummock.

"It's 'er!" yelled Jackson excitedly.

"Which, havin' eyes of our own, which is usually the case," Crooks remarked, "we can see."

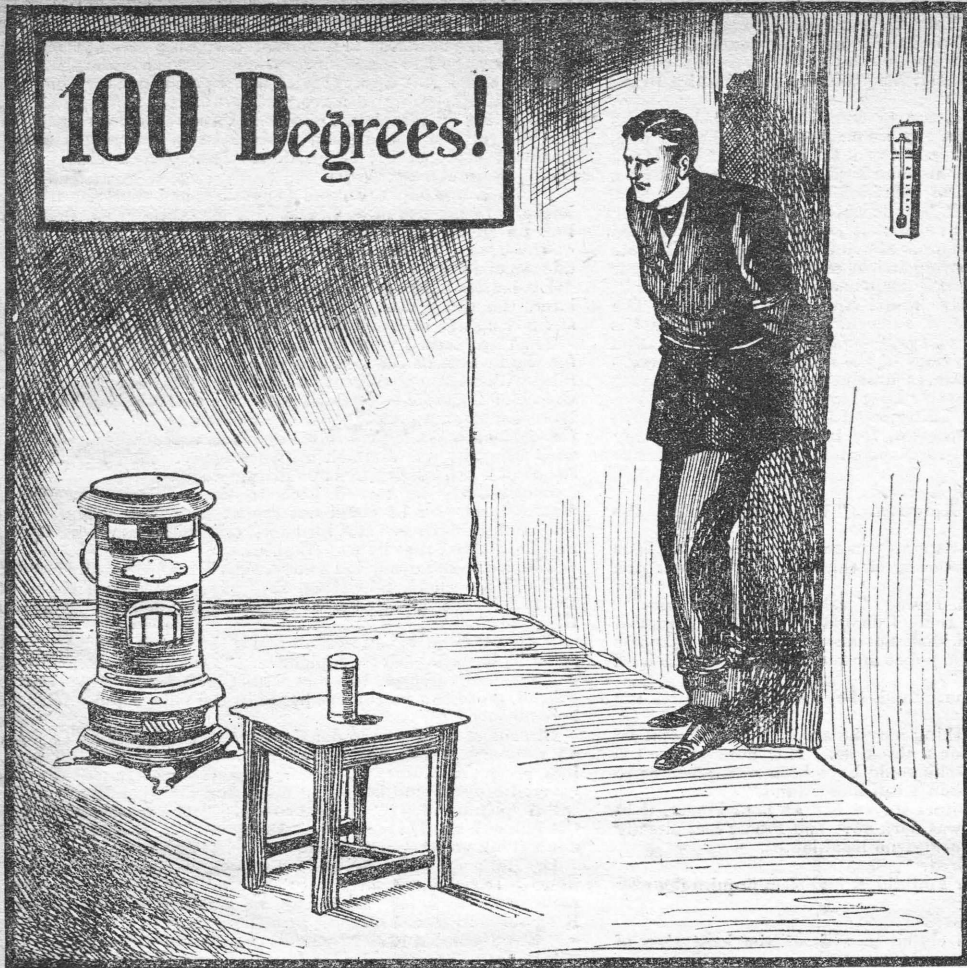
"Mein beautiful specimens safe are!" Von Haagel cried, essaying a dance on top of the hummock. The consequence was that he slipped over the edge and dropped plump into a deep snow-drift below.

"Hurt, dad?" cried Lance anxiously, looking down at the spot where the snow was being churned up as if by an earthquake.

"Nein," Von Haagel spluttered, as his head emerged from the snow. "I have der snow in mein mouth got. But we are safe—hoch!"

"Certainly, sir," Crooks remarked, as he slid down the side of the hummock to the aid of the professor. "And many of 'em. Why not?"

(The concluding instalment of this adventure serial in next week's issue of "THE GEM" Library.)



100 Degrees!

A Splendid
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KINGSTON,**
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— AND —
DOLORES—
His Pretty Lady
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The
First Chapters
of our Grand New
School Serial
**“THE
SCHOOL
UNDER
CANVAS!”**

CHAPTER 1.

Professor Polgrave—A Strange Story—Kingston's Decision.

FRASER, Frank Kingston's faithful chauffeur, brought his master's Rolls-Royce landaulette to a standstill in a quiet road at St. John's Wood. Then he opened one of the side doors, and Kingston and Miss Dolores O'Brien stepped to the pavement.

"Wait here until we return, Fraser," said the great detective.
"Right, sir!"

The May evening was drawing in, and darkness was falling. Kingston pushed open the gate of a dingy, dilapidated house, and walked up the weed-covered path with his fiancée. Dolores looked at the old house with interest.

"Just the same as ever, Frank," she remarked. "What a strange man the professor is!"

"Yes, he is very eccentric, Dolores," agreed Kingston, "but one of the best, for all that."

The famous detective and his fiancée had decided to call upon their old friend, Professor Graham Polgrave, an eccentric old scientist who lived the life of a hermit in the cellars of the dilapidated house. He had helped Frank Kingston again and again during the latter's campaign against the Brotherhood of Iron, and spent his whole life making experiments in his wonderful laboratory. For appearances he didn't care a rap, and the house and grounds were allowed to go to rack and ruin. He only used the cellars, and these were fitted up in a manner which would have amazed a stranger.

"Well, bless my soul—bless my soul!" exclaimed the professor, in his peculiar gruff tones, when he saw who his visitors were. "My dear friends, this is, indeed, a surprise! I haven't seen you for weeks, and was seriously beginning to think of writing!"

He led the way down an electrically-lighted passage to a cosy sitting-room. Passing through this, they found themselves in the old hermit's laboratory—a wonderfully fitted-up apartment, containing everything Polgrave required to carry on his scientific experiments. Overhead blazed a strange light, the professor's

own invention. There were two globes, and the light they shed was identical with sunlight. Indeed, Polgrave declared it was less harmful to the eyes than sunlight, and, without it, he could not have lived down there.

"Just in the middle of an experiment, I see," remarked Kingston.

"Exactly! But that is nothing," said the old man. "You are welcome at all times, good friends—at all times! Dear me, I declare you are looking healthier than ever, Kingston! And you, Miss Dolores," he added, smiling at the girl, "you are positively prettier every time you pay me a visit! Lucky man, Kingston, lucky man!"

Professor Polgrave was geniality itself, but after showing his visitors several interesting results of experiments, he suddenly became thoughtful. After a few moments he fumbled in his dressing-gown pocket and produced a piece of paper.

"Very fortunate!" he murmured. "I had almost forgotten it, Kingston."

"Forgotten what, professor?"

"To tell you of something which will, perhaps, lead to the capture of a great scoundrel," replied the old scientist. "The matter is of grave importance, and I fully intended to write you about it a fortnight ago. An important experiment intervened, however, and drove all thoughts of it from my mind. Dear me! how extremely careless of me!"

"Never mind, professor," smiled Dolores. "Perhaps no harm has been done by the delay."

"Possibly not, my dear girl. But that is no excuse. Six weeks ago, Kingston, I became acquainted with a certain Dr. Julius Rolfe, a fellow-scientist. I met him at a meeting, and was not in the least impressed. But I suspected nothing then. Just over a fortnight ago, however, I again met Rolfe at a certain scientific Institute, and again it struck me that the man was of a scoundrelly nature. We parted, and I then discovered that Rolfe had dropped a piece of paper—evidently when he removed his handkerchief. Please read what it says yourself."

Professor Polgrave handed a half-sheet of notepaper to Kingston, and the detective took it with interest.

"Dear R.," it ran, "must have consignment to-morrow.

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NEXT TUESDAY: "SHUNNED BY HIS FATHER!" AND "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

Urgent. Be very careful this journey. The police are waking up a bit, and it wouldn't do to take risks. Send the things by car during the night, and there won't be much danger.—J. N."

Kingston's eyes glinted, and the professor looked at his friend rather anxiously.

"It was very remiss of me to forget it," he said quickly. "At a glance, I saw that my suspicions were substantiated. That note was obviously addressed to Rolfe, and it clearly proves him to be engaged in some kind of underhand business. I remember at the time that I decided to see you—"

"Never mind, professor," smiled Kingston. "Probably no harm has been done. I can still visit Dr. Rolfe's residence, and ascertain whether everything is above board or not. This note is an exceedingly incriminating article, and Rolfe does not appear to be very careful. Do you know where he lives, professor?"

"Yes. In a little village called Naysbrook, in Kent. The doctor lives at a house called Edgecliffe, which I understand is located just outside the village," explained Polgrave. "You see, being somewhat suspicious of the man, I looked up everything I could concerning him, meaning to consult you. I cannot imagine what drove the matter from my mind—"

"Don't worry yourself," interjected the detective. "Indeed, I am grateful to you, professor, for bringing the case to my notice. I will go there—to Naysbrook—to-night, and make an investigation."

"To-night?" echoed Polgrave.

"Exactly," drawled Kingston. "Why beat about the bush?"

"Bless my soul! What a man you are, Kingston! I believe if Rolfe resided on the summit of the Andes Mountains you would speak just as calmly!"

"Can I come with you, Frank?" asked Dolores eagerly.

"If you can spare the time, I should be delighted," replied Kingston. "Of course, I shall not allow you to run into any danger, little girl, but if the police are required, you can rush off to fetch them in the car."

"Upon my soul!" murmured the scientist. "Upon my soul!"

"Of course, the whole thing may be a mare's nest," went on the detective, "but I don't think so. This note seems too conclusive, though how Rolfe could have been so careless as to have dropped it is more than I can understand."

Professor Polgrave's visitors stayed half an hour longer, then took their departure. It was dark now, and Fraser had already illuminated the powerful acetylene head-lamps.

"Home, sir?" he inquired.

"No, Fraser. Make for Tonbridge, and then inquire the way to Naysbrook."

"Right, sir!"

And Fraser slipped his clutch in without the least sign of surprise, and soon the powerful Rolls-Royce was speeding on its journey. Fraser was too accustomed to his master's sudden departures from London to express surprise.

CHAPTER 2.

At Edgecliffe—The Upper Hand—One Hundred Degrees!

FRANK KINGSTON moved along under cover of the thick hedge with no more noise than a shadow.

Fifty yards away was the large, wrought-iron gate of Edgecliffe, the somewhat gloomy residence of Dr. Julius Rolfe, scientist. Kingston had arrived with Dolores some ten minutes before, and the landaulette was now a quarter of a mile down the road, just round the corner of a side turning. Fraser had been instructed to be engaged in effecting some repair—Kingston did not wish the stationary car to cause comment—while Dolores was in the cosy tonneau, with some illustrated magazines to keep her company.

The time was getting on for eleven, and the country roads were deserted. The village lay half a mile away. Kingston's eyesight was remarkably keen, and he espied a gap in the hedge. In a moment he was through again stealing onwards with the same silent footsteps.

A gap in the trees revealed the short drive, and drawn up against the front door was a small, open motor-car. The sound of voices caused the detective to pause, and though the speakers were conversing in low voices, he heard what was said.

"Perfectly ridiculous coming round as early as this!" a harsh voice was exclaiming, in sharp tones. "Take the car away, and come back again in half an hour's time."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I thought you said—"

"You thought nothing of the sort!" snapped the first voice. "Do you think I'm going to have you waiting out here for half an hour? You're a fool, Beckett!"

The next moment the door slammed, and Kingston smiled to himself. Evidently the doctor was not in an amiable temper—if the owner of the harsh voice was the doctor. The small car took its departure, and the grounds of Edgecliffe were left silent and deserted.

Kingston felt quite convinced that Rolfe was engaged in some kind of criminal work, and he meant to learn something definite

before he left. For a few minutes he remained stationary, thinking.

"Now, the only way in which I could gain certain information is to enter the house and make a closer investigation," he told himself calmly. "I suppose it will be rather risky, but I'm hanged if I'm going to leave with nothing accomplished. If, on breaking into the house, I find Dr. Rolfe to be a respectable member of the community, I shall be in an uncomfortable position, especially if I am discovered. But I really don't think Rolfe is respectable."

Frank Kingston was as cool as possible, and crept towards the house with a sense of enjoyment. Indeed, the great detective had no greater pleasure than undertaking night expeditions of this sort. There seemed to be a certain fascination in the danger of it.

He halted before a small window, and, exactly ten seconds later, the catch was slipped and the sash raised. Kingston stepped lightly in, and felt for his pocket electric torch.

Then he sneezed violently, and clapped his hands to his eyes, for the instant he set foot into the room the whole air seemed filled with a strong, pungent mixture of some powdery substance, the chief ingredient of which appeared to be cayenne pepper. Even Kingston was not prepared for such a reception as this. He felt choked, and the pain in his eyes was excruciating. For the time being he was doubled up with agony. And he was conscious of a bell ringing in some distant room.

Instinctively he turned back to the window, meaning to flounder out—for he could not see an inch on account of the vile stuff in his eyes. But his hands only encountered iron bars, and he realised that he was trapped.

The door burst open, and a large, elderly man entered. Behind him came a short, misshapen foreigner, evidently a Russian. Dr. Rolfe's eyes gleamed as he saw Kingston doubled up before the window.

"Ah, my beauty, you weren't aware that this house is burglar-proof!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Once before a cracksmen endeavoured to enter, but met with the same fate as yourself. Petroff, go to the constable's house in the village and fetch him here at once!"

Of course, Rolfe was under the impression that Kingston was an ordinary housebreaker, and immediately decided to have him given in charge. But the detective had practically recovered himself, and he looked up with a forced smile.

"A splendid idea!" he said coolly. "The policeman is just the fellow I want, Dr. Rolfe! Under certain circumstances, I don't think you'd care much for the sight of his uniform!"

Dr. Rolfe started. He was a big man, with grizzled hair and beard. It came as a surprise to him that Kingston had so soon recovered, but before answering, he and the Russian grasped Kingston and forced him out into the passage.

"Now," snarled Rolfe, "what do you mean, you scoundrel?"

"I mean that you, Dr. Rolfe, have more cause to fear the police than I have," said Kingston boldly. "If may interest you to know that I am a detective, and that your game is up!"

Dr. Julius Rolfe almost staggered, and Kingston knew in a moment that his suspicions were correct. But it certainly seemed rather unwise for him to make such a declaration when, had he remained silent, he could have been handed over to the village constable with little ado. But Kingston had his wits about him, and knew exactly what he was doing.

"Great Heavens!" gasped the doctor. "A detective! You fool," he added, recovering himself, "you've given yourself into my hands, and I'll take good care you don't get away in a hurry!"

"What do you mean?" asked Kingston, in affected trepidation.

"I mean that since you know more about me than I care for I shall take measures to prevent you leaving this house," answered Rolfe harshly. "Petroff, help me to force him to the store-house. I mean to show this fellow that to interfere with me is to court death!"

And Kingston was forced between his two guards down a long passage and out the back door. He was an exceedingly docile prisoner, although, had he chosen, he could have overpowered his captors in one second. But it didn't suit his purpose to do so, and Rolfe thought his captive to be in a state of "blue funk."

The scientist had already made up his mind what to do. Since Kingston had possession of the fact that Rolfe was a scoundrel, he must die. And he wouldn't be the first death, by a long way, that Rolfe was accountable for. The doctor did not pause to think. Kingston's sudden appearance had thrown him into something of a panic, and he came to a drastic decision almost immediately. Yet, if Kingston had had no friends waiting for him, and had he been the docile prisoner he looked, the murder might have been committed and no one the wiser.

For Rolfe's scheme was a dastardly and cunning one. In less than ten minutes Kingston found himself securely bound to an upright beam in a small hut which stood quite by itself at the extremity of the Edgecliffe grounds. As yet he did not understand what was being prepared for him.

A single candle gave a flickering light on the scene, and

Kingston, now looking terrorised—at least, Rolfe was under the impression that he was terrorised—saw that the hut was bare but for a small wooden stool. Rolfe stood by it, looking flushed and anxious.

"Ah," he exclaimed, as the door opened and Petroff appeared, "you have been a long time!"

The dwarf did not say anything, but set down a large patent oil heating stove, and proceeded to light it. Then Rolfe produced from his pocket a small cylinder, about six inches long. In appearance it was very much like an ordinary cocoa-tin, with the exception that it was sealed up at both ends. This he placed on the stool.

"Now, my friend, I will explain," he said, turning to Kingston. "You may think I have gone to elaborate precautions to bring about your end. Well, I have, but I have only done so to safeguard myself. And I am afraid you will meet your death, while I shall be allowed to go scot-free."

"You fiend!" gasped Kingston, still keeping up appearances.

"This cylinder contains liquefied gas of an unknown kind—unknown, that is, except to myself, for I invented it. It is terribly explosive, and, when in its undiluted state, will explode the very instant the atmosphere in which it is placed rises to 100 degrees. To place it in the glare of the sun, for instance, is disastrous."

"What are you going to do?" asked Kingston hoarsely.

"I am going to set this lamp in the centre of the room, turned fully up," said Rolfe. "This apartment is small, and in less than half an hour the heat in here will be stifling. A thermometer will be on the wall, with a mark against the 100, and when you see the mercury reach that mark you may expect death at any moment." He laughed harshly. "I shall be quite safe, for, although the explosion will be heard for miles, I have the explanation to offer that I stored dangerous explosives in this hut, and that, apparently, some tramp broke in and exploded them. For I assure you there will not be an inch of you left to identify. Everybody knows I am a scientist, and I am quite safe."

"Quite safe, eh?" thought Kingston to himself, with quiet serenity, although outwardly he looked terror-stricken. "My dear Rolfe, I am afraid you are a little too sanguine. You take it for granted that I shall sit here and wait for the mercury to rise. By Jove, what a dodge!"

But Rolfe heard nothing of Kingston's thoughts, and departed a minute or two later quite confident that the prisoner was unable to escape. Certainly he was tied up most securely. The detective stood there watching the oil-stove. Then his gaze wandered to the rough wall opposite, where a small thermometer hung. The mercury was just at 65 degrees. With the heat generating so quickly in the little hut, it would not take long to rise to 100.

But Dr. Rolfe thought his captive to be an ordinary detective. The suspicion that he was Frank Kingston never entered his mind. But the prisoner was Frank Kingston—and that made a difference.

CHAPTER 3.

Quick Work.—The Police Arrive on the Scene.

DR. JULIUS ROLFE hurried away from the little hut with Petroff, the dwarf, by his side. The scientist was looking pale and agitated. But his decision remained unaltered; the man who had declared himself to be an enemy would have to die.

"Curse it!" snarled the doctor savagely. "This means we shall have to leave immediately, Petroff! I told the fellow I should be safe, but how do I know he hasn't got companions waiting for him?"

The Russian did not reply. As a matter of fact, he was dumb, although he understood all that was said to him.

"We shall have to get to London immediately, and leave everything here as it is. It will be safer in the end, even though— Ah, but it would be better to leave you here! Then, when the explosion is inquired into, you can say I was away; and if nothing more comes of it I can return here and carry on the work as before. You understand, Petroff?"

The dwarf nodded.

"Good! The risk, for you, will be considerable; but it is all for the cause, Petroff, all for the great cause. Beckett will

be here with the car in a few minutes, and I can be off before the explosion occurs."

The pair arrived at the front door of the gloomy house, and stood still. Only the rustle of the leaves could be heard, as the soft breeze stirred them. Rolfe went into the house, made some hurried preparations, then emerged again after the elapse of about fifteen minutes. A soft thud-thudding was heard, and the small motor-car appeared.

"To London, Beckett," exclaimed Rolfe, in a low voice. "All my plans are altered. There's danger for me here, and I must leave without delay. No questions."

Rolfe scrambled in, and, without a second's loss of time, the car passed out into the road and set off on its journey. But it had hardly covered half the distance to Tonbridge when two bright points of light rounded the bend. Instantly Beckett pulled his car to a standstill, and, with one movement, leapt into the tonneau and stood over Rolfe.

"Now, my dear doctor, I think the game is up," he said quietly.

"I—what—Beckett! What on earth—"

"Pardon me, my name is not Beckett, but Frank Kingston—the man you fondly supposed was still in the hut watching the mercury rise!"

Rolfe gasped with amazement, and, after a short scuffle, the handcuffs were snapped on. The approaching car came to a standstill, and four police-officers stepped out of it. Frank Kingston handed over the prisoner with a smile.

"The affair is almost farcical," he said easily, "and I really think there was no need to fetch you four officers from Tonbridge. However, there is the house to search yet, and we may meet with resistance."

Kingston climbed into the driving-seat of the small car again, and drove back to Edgecliffe. But there was no one there but the Russian dwarf and a young Pole, who was found asleep in one of the bed-rooms. They gave no trouble whatever, and Kingston and the police were allowed to examine the place at their leisure.

It was soon discovered that Dr. Rolfe, whilst pretending to be a scientist, was in reality a dangerous Anarchist, and he had discovered a wonderful new explosive. Assisted by the Russian and the Polish youth, he had spent his time in manufacturing bombs for the use of his colleagues all over the world. The police of England, America, and the Continent had endeavoured to locate the manufacturer of the bombs without success, and it came as a great surprise to find that the seemingly respectable Dr. Julius Rolfe was the culprit.

"Yes, Dolores, it was quick work," smiled Kingston, as they returned to London, "but I had planned it all out in my own mind. I knew, of course, that the ropes which bound me in the hut were not strong enough to hold me long. As a matter of fact, I was free in one minute, and had the door open in another. All along I had been allowing Rolfe to think he had the upper hand, while, in reality, I could have escaped at any moment."

"You deceived him completely, Frank."

"I believe I did. Immediately I had freed myself I dashed off to you, and asked you to whiz to Tonbridge and fetch the police—Tonbridge being only four miles."

"And what did you do after that?" asked Dolores interestedly.

"I hurried back to Edgecliffe, but Beckett passed me in the car. I immediately stopped him, had an interesting little struggle, and left him in the ditch unconscious, having treated him to one of Polgrave's patent little darts, which caused him to go to sleep for three hours. Then I stepped into the car, and drove on."

"Yes?"

"I meant to arrest Rolfe immediately, but when he took me for Beckett I thought I'd keep it up," laughed Frank Kingston. "So I drove him until I spotted you approaching with the police. Then I acted. Poor Rolfe, he was so flabbergasted he couldn't even find strength to resist! He's a demon, though, and is responsible for dozens and dozens of deaths."

Dolores looked thankfully into her lover's eyes.

"How awful it would have been if you hadn't had strength to get out of that hut!" she murmured.

"Yes, the experience would have been decidedly awkward," agreed the great detective. "By Jove, the old professor will be hugely delighted when he hears the result of our journey! It was his case really, you know."

THE END.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE

**Next Week's Story.**

Next Thursday's issue of "The Gem" Library will mark an entirely new era in the progress of this most popular of story papers, in that it will be the

First Full-sized All School-Story Paper Ever Published.

In accordance with the vote of one hundred and fifty thousand or so readers, a grand new story of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk & Co., of Ryloombe Grammar School, has been specially written on absolutely new and original lines, entitled

"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS."

This story is absolutely one of the very best, most original, and absorbingly interesting school tales it has ever been my good fortune to read, and there is not the slightest doubt that it will make an immense sensation. My chums have only to read this magnificent novel school story to see the reason for this for themselves. No one, young or old, can help enjoying

"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS."

In addition to our grand new school serial, next Thursday's "Gem" Library will contain a splendid extra-long, complete school story of the famous chums of St. Jim's, entitled

"SHUNNED BY HIS FATHER."

by Martin Clifford. In addition to Tom Merry & Co., Lumley-Lumley plays a very prominent part in this story. The reformed son of Mr. Lascelles Lumley-Lumley is represented in an entirely new role, in connection with which a vast amount of fun is caused, while the serious aspect of the affair also receives its fair share of attention.

The combination of

"SHUNNED BY HIS FATHER."

the grand complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co., with

"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS."

the wonderful new school serial of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk & Co., together make up

The Finest Number of "THE GEM" Ever Issued.

No one can afford to miss next Thursday's issue of "The Gem" Library, price one penny.

Replies in Brief.

D. M. W. (Barrow).—I have had the idea you suggest before me for consideration before, but the time is hardly ripe for the commencement of such a scheme for the present. I will take care to give my readers due warning when the stories you mention appear in book form. Thanks for suggestions and all your good wishes.

L. R. L. (Liverpool).—Thank you for your interesting letter. With regard to your query as to how to become a reporter, I must inform you that it is necessary to start at the bottom rung of the journalistic ladder. The first step to take is to obtain a situation in the office of a small provincial paper. To be successful, a reporter must be smart, intelligent, and a hard worker, besides possessing a ready pen. I may add that the salary of a reporter varies from £100 per annum to two or three times that amount, on a big London paper, according to his ability and experience. Of course, on a provincial paper a reporter's earnings are considerably less than this.

J. E. Greig (Hale).—In connection with the matter you mention in your letter, I must tell you that nothing definite has yet been arranged. Vol. 6 of "The Gem" Library started with No. 183. Your request for back numbers will be inserted before long.

"Thistle" (Edinburgh).—I am very pleased to hear of the high opinion you hold of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries. With regard to your query I certainly advise you to join the Territorial Army. Every patriotic citizen should be benefited by a knowledge of arms that will enable him to fight for his country in time of need.

Back Numbers Offered and Wanted.

G. E. Stockley, 16, Nile Grove, Morningside, Edinburgh, wishes to obtain Nos. 169, 170, 210, 211, of "The Magnet" Library.

T. R. Batham, 21, Fairfield Road, Chesterfield, has fifteen halfpenny "Gems," twenty old penny issues, and seventeen halfpenny "Magnets" to dispose of.

R. Pearman, 4, Ware Street, Kingsland Road, Bethnal Green, wishes to obtain No. 210, of "The Magnet" Library.

E. Selkirk, 6, Oakdene Road, Birkenhead, Cheshire, has twenty back numbers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet," and three back numbers of "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Library to dispose of.

Forming a Nigger Minstrel Troupe.

One of the most popular attractions of our present-day seaside resorts is still the nigger minstrel troupe. Professional "niggers" on the beach make a good income, and are enjoying a pleasant holiday.

All that is needed to make a troupe a real success is plenty of practice. A troupe may consist of a few or many fellows, and a good number, although considered unlucky by some people, is thirteen.

In this the four "cornermen" have to take tambourine or castanets, while any other kind of instrument, like the banjo, can be given to one or two of the remaining parts. Amongst the others there should be at least one with a strong and powerful voice, as this is a great aid in the choruses. When allotting the parts it is well to give the cornerman's place to someone who has, as some people term it, "the gift of the gab."

When the right number and kind of fellows have been gathered, practices must commence. There are many good songs—coon songs, and the like—to be obtained from the various music publishers, and such people as A. W. Gamage, of High Holborn, W.C., and Messrs. Barr & Co., of 283, Bow Lane, E.C., supply books giving a whole entertainment suitable for a short seaside concert.

After the songs have been selected and allotted to the most suitable "brothers"—they should all have fine, rising choruses, by the way—they have to be learnt thoroughly. Three or four songs should be sufficient for an entertainment and they should all be "the very latest"—original if possible, well if there is a composer amongst the company.

The concert should be run on the following lines:

Start off with a lively tune, which should be accompanied with banjo, tambourine, and any other instrument that may be in use, and, if any of the members are so inclined, and the song is suitable, some kind of jig. A good thing to follow on to this is some cross-talk between two of the cornermen, followed by another good song, and then a stump speech, which should be interrupted with absurd questions from the remaining members of the company. Another song, by one member, with the remainder joining in the chorus, should follow, and, unless time permits of another song or so, the concert should round off with a rattling good farce.

Now, with regard to the dress and the make-up. The minstrel dress can be hired from any costumier's, or can easily be made at home. Make the trousers and vest of some "loud" stripe or check material, and obtain a black "bob-tail" coat and a large white peak collar. This latter can be bought from the costumier's.

Now the make-up. For the complexion burnt cork is rubbed on to the face with vaseline or cocoa-butter—the latter for preference. The lips should be painted with carmine or lake, and a little should be put on the cheeks and round the eyes. The wig should be worn according to the taste and the character impersonated, and should always be put on after the face and neck have been "made-up." Be careful not to overdo any part of this operation, as it is easily noticed and may spoil an otherwise good effect.

THE EDITOR.