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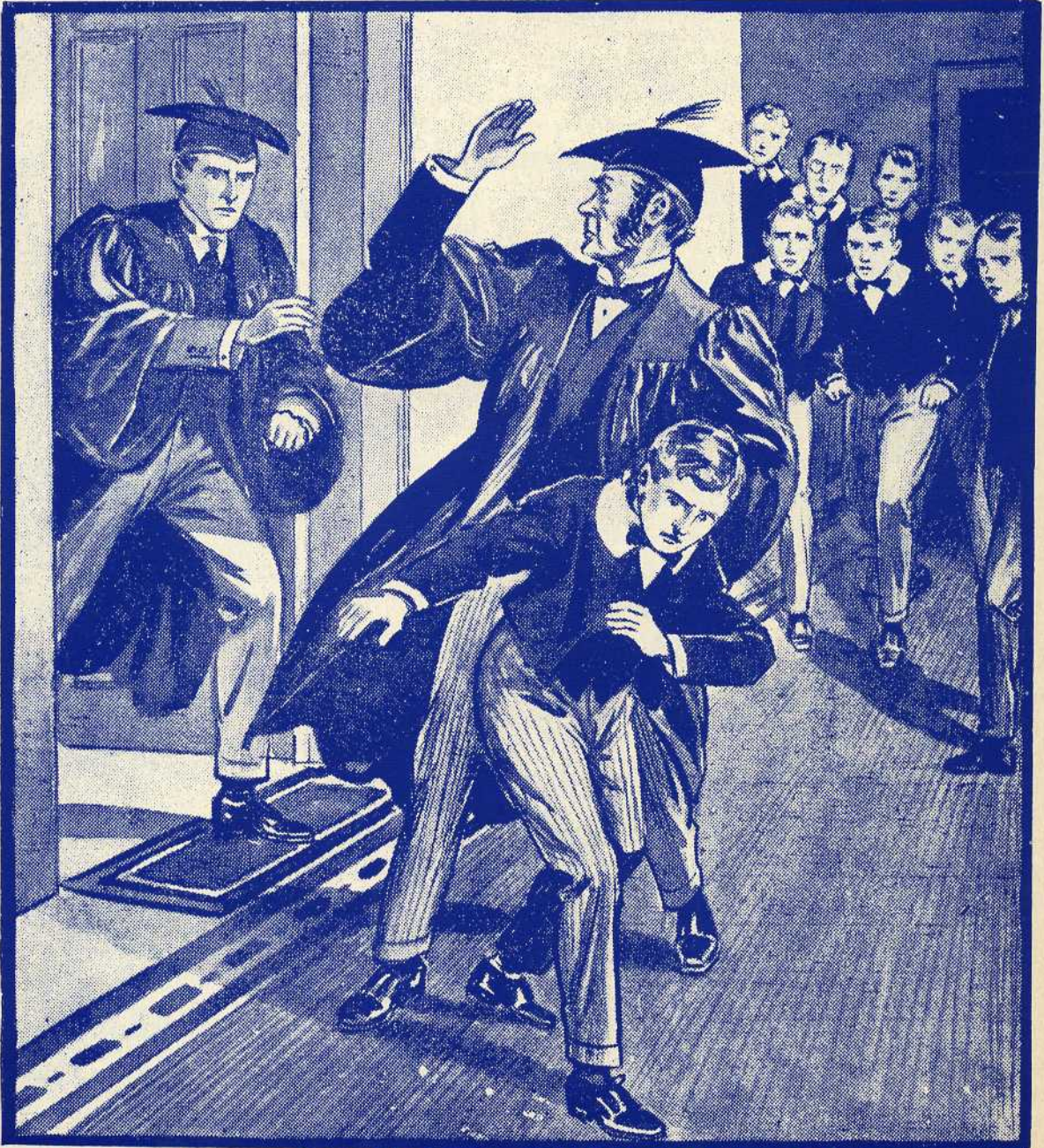
No. 720
Vol. XX

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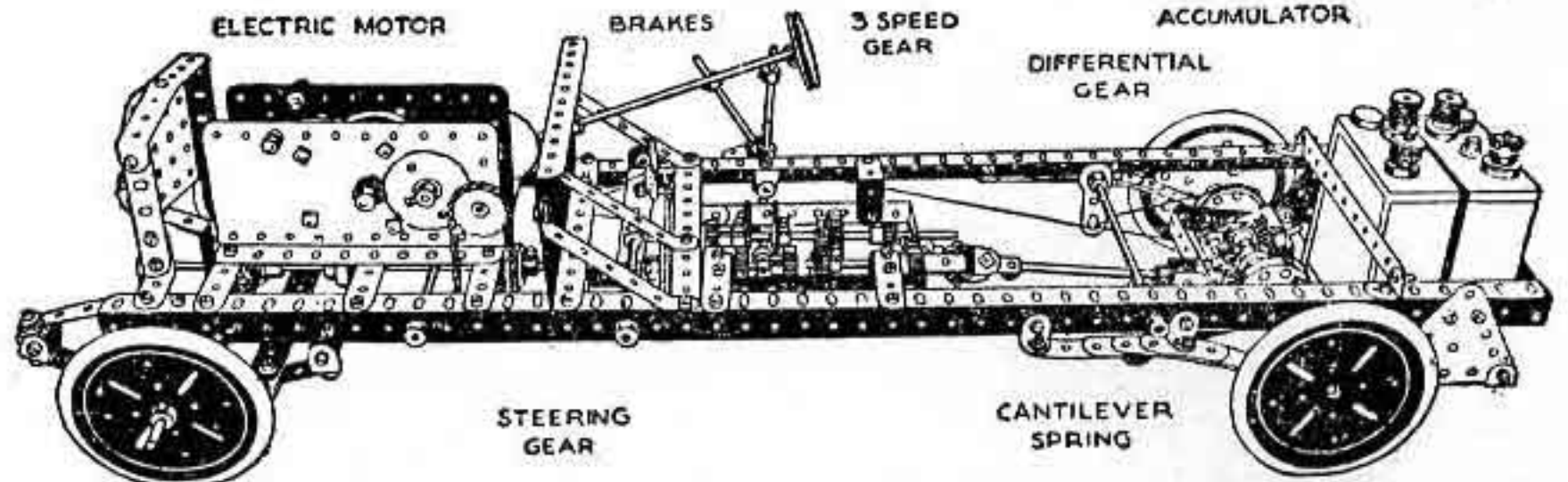
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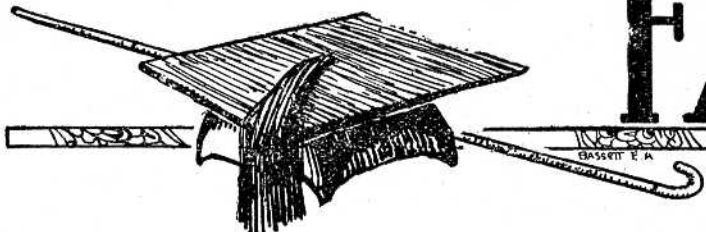
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CHAPTER 1. In Ambush!

"FIGGY!"

Tom Merry stopped and stared.

He was taking a stroll in the Head's garden at St. Jim's, after lessons. As the Head's garden was "taboo" to juniors, Tom was sagely keeping to the secluded path; he did not want to risk running into Dr. Holmes, who might have been taking a stroll at the same time.

Tom Merry was thinking out an article for the "St. Jim's News"; and certainly he was not thinking of Figgins & Co., of the New House. But it was Figgins & Co. that suddenly dawned upon his vision.

Three youths were crouching, with their backs to him, peering through a clump of rhododendrons, beyond which was a gravelled walk.

Tom could only see their backs, but he recognised Figgins & Co. easily enough.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were quite motionless, waiting and watching, evidently in ambush. Tom Merry had arrived unexpectedly behind the ambush. From the gravelled walk in front the three New House juniors would have been quite invisible.

Tom stared at the three backs, and at the three faces that were turned round to him as he spoke.

"What on earth are you fellows doing here?" exclaimed Tom.

"Shush!"

"What?"

Figgins held up his hand for silence.

"Not a word!" he whispered.

"Back out, and clear!" said Kerr, in a low voice. "What the thump are you wandering about here at all for, anyhow, you School House duffer?"

"Well, what are you doing here, if you come to that?" asked Tom Merry. "Watching the path for somebody?"

"That's it!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins held up a large garden squirt. It was dripping, and evidently full of water.

"That's for Ratty!" he said.

"For Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes."

"Your Housemaster?" exclaimed Tom.

"Housemaster or not, he's going to get this, right in the neck," said Figgins. "Don't shout! He may be coming along the path any minute now. We know he's gone in to see the Head, and he's bound to come back by this path to the quad."

"But—"

"Ratty's been laying it on too thick," said Fatty Wynn. "Three cuts each for sliding down the banisters is too rich!"

"Little boys shouldn't slide down the banisters," said Tom Merry chidingly.

"You cheeky ass!" breathed Figgins. "If we weren't waiting for Ratty, I'd let you have the squirt."

Tom Merry stepped back rather quickly.

"Pax!" he said, laughing. "If it's Ratty you're after, you

can go ahead, and get on with it. But it's jolly risky, squirting a Housemaster, Figgy."

Figgins shook his head.

"No risk in this case," he said. "We're not supposed to be in the Head's garden at all, and we shall clear jolly quick when we've drenched the old bird. Nobody will know we've been here. Ratty will never know what hit him. Safe as houses!"

"He will raise Cain over it—"

"Let him!" said Figgins recklessly. "I tell you, we're fed up with Ratty, and he's going to get it in the neck!"

"Right in the neck!" said Fatty Wynn vengefully.

"Look here, old infants—"

"We don't want any advice from School House chumps!" interrupted Figgins. "You'd better clear off, Tom Merry, or you may get mixed up in it, if you're seen around."

"But—"

"Oh, buzz away, little fly!" said Kerr.

Tom Merry gave a slight shrug of the shoulders, and turned away. The New House trio were not to be moved from their purpose; they were on the war-path for vengeance, and they meant business. So Tom Merry walked on, and left them to it.

Behind the rhododendron hedge, Figgins & Co. waited, silently and watchfully, the big squirt ready for Mr. Ratcliff when he should pass. They listened for the sound of his footsteps.

Tom Merry was soon out of sight; but he did not continue his stroll in the Head's garden. When such an event as the drenching of a Housemaster was about to occur, Tom felt that it was wiser to be well off the scene, and he threaded his way through the gardens in the direction of the quadrangle. He had almost reached the gate on the quad, when a harsh and unpleasant voice fell upon his ears.

"Merry! Stop!"

Tom spun round.

He was a good distance from Figgy's ambush, and well out of sight of it, screened by trees and bushes. And here was Mr. Ratcliff—right on him. The tall, angular gentleman looked very sourly at the School House junior. Tom realised that Mr. Ratcliff had not, after all, taken the direct path, as Figgy expected, from the Head's house through the gardens to the quad. He had taken a stroll round first, and quite missed the ambush, and arrived at the gate by a by-path almost at the same moment as Tom Merry. And Tom was caught in forbidden precincts.

"What are you doing here, Merry?" asked the New House master, with a sour smile. "I believe you know that juniors are not allowed in this garden without special permission from the Head."

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Tom.

"Has the Head given you special leave to come here?"

"N-n-no sir!"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Walking, sir."

"Don't be impertinent, Merry!"

"You asked me the question, sir, and I answered it," said Tom Merry meekly.

Mr. Ratcliff opened the little wooden gate.

"You will leave this garden at once, Merry!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"And I shall report your trespass to Mr. Railton, your Housemaster."

"Very well, sir!"

"I trust," said Mr. Ratcliff "that he will punish you as severely as you deserve."

"I trust so, sir!" said Tom, with great meekness.

Mr. Ratcliff gave him a very impressive look, apparently not pleased by that meek reply. The soft answer, in this instance, failed to turn away wrath. The Housemaster motioned him out of the garden, followed him out, and closed the gate.

Then he stalked away in the direction of the School House, losing no time in reporting Tom's delinquency to the School House master.

"Rotter!" murmured Tom, not loud enough for Mr. Ratcliff to hear.

The Shell fellow looked back over the gate. He did not care to enter the garden again, after being caught there once and reported. But he was thinking of Figgins & Co.—still lying in wait by the gravelled walk for the New House master, who had already left the gardens by another route. Figgins & Co. were likely to wait there, in vain, a long time, and Tom Merry was considering whether he could venture to "cut in" and warn them that the bird had flown.

He was still considering, when there was a sudden uproar from beyond the trees. A startled, gurgling yell rang out:

"Ooooooooooch!"

Tom Merry jumped.

The ambush had not been laid in vain, after all. The squirt had gone off. Somebody had passed along the gravelled walk—evidently not Mr. Ratcliff. Who that somebody was, was an interesting question; and Tom Merry, with a start of horror, asked himself whether it was the Head!

CHAPTER 2.

The Wrong Man.

"HERE he comes!" breathed Fatty Wynn.

"Ready?" whispered Kerr.

Figgins nodded without speaking.

Kneeling beside the rhododendrons, he gripped the garden squirt and waited.

Footsteps were coming down the path.

The three juniors could not see the passer-by. He was shut off by the shrubbery before them. But they had no doubt that it was Mr. Ratcliff returning to the quad after his visit to the Head's house. They even caught the rustle of a gown.

Through a narrow opening in the shrubbery the squirt was directed on the path.

The passing figure came opposite the opening, and Figgins caught a slight glimpse of a gown.

He let fly at once.

Squish—sloooooosh!

The garden squirt was charged to the full, and it held quite a lot of water. Nearly every drop of that water shot full at the gentleman who was walking past the shrubbery, and as the squirt was directed upwards it landed right in his face. It did not exactly catch him "in the neck," as Figgins expressed it, but it caught him under the chin and under the nose. And the startled yell that rang out from the surprised victim echoed far and wide over the gardens.

"Ooooooch! Oh dear! What—what—what—whatever—Oh, upon my word!"

Figgins & Co. were already upon their feet to flee.

But the sound of that voice seemed to freeze them to the spot.

It was not the voice of Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's. It was the voice of Dr. Richard Holmes, the headmaster of the famous old school!

Two words dropped from Figgins' lips in a faint gasp:

"The Head!"

"The Head!" breathed Kerr, horror-stricken.

"Ooooooch!" came through the shrubbery. "Goooooch! I—I am drenched! What—what—what—Help!"

"Hook it!" breathed Figgins.

He started at a run, and Kerr and Wynn followed him fast. They dashed away for the nearest trees and disappeared.

They were sorry they had caught the Head by mistake. They liked and respected the Head, and their regret was sincere. But they did not want to interview the old gentleman just then. They wanted to place the greatest possible distance, in the shortest space of time, between Dr. Holmes and their noble selves. A headmaster who had been drenched with a garden-squirt was a headmaster to be avoided.

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Figgins & Co. did not think of approaching the quadrangle; they did not want to be seen leaving the Head's garden.

Only Tom Merry knew that they had been there; and Tom, of course, could be relied upon not to give them away.

The chums of the New House sprinted through the gardens, winding this way and that, till they reached the wall by the Fives Courts. There they clambered over and fled.

"We shall have to prove a jolly strong alibi for this!" Fatty Wynn gasped. "Get back to the New House!"

"Yes, rather!"

In a few minutes more the three juniors had entered the school gates, and were walking very fast towards their own House.

"Figgay!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, hailed the trio. The swell of the School House bore down upon them and held up his hand as a sign for them to stop.

"Don't bother now, Gussy!" said Figgins. "We're in rather a hurry—"

"Haven't you heard what's happened, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Figgins halted.

"Nunno. What's happened?" he asked.

"There has been a feahful assault upon the Head in his garden!" said D'Arcy impressively. "It is weally extwawordinawy and unpwecedented!"

Figgins suppressed a groan. Evidently the news was half over St. Jim's already.

"Somebody—somebody damaged the Head?" asked Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Awful!" said Figgins.

Arthur Augustus nodded seriously.

"Yaas, it's wathah awful, Figgay," he remarked. "Japin' the Head is wathah too thick. Vewy bad form, you know."

"Rotten!" said Figgins gravely. "Who could have done it?"

"I weally do not know. Some fellows heard the Head yellin', and washed into the garden. Tom Mewwy was one, and Lowthah and Mannahs, and Kildare of the Sixth. They found the Head simply drenched. Somebody had gone for him with a pail of watah or somethin'."

"Great Scott!"

"Howwid wottah, don't you think, deah boys, to play such a twick?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Oh rats!" said Figgins crossly. "Perhaps they took him for somebody else."

"Wats! How could they take the Head for somebody else? They were a set of awful wottahs, whoever they were that drenched the Head, and if I knew who they were I would give them a feahful thwashin'!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's warmly.

He started the next moment.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not particularly observant, but he observed that Figgins' hands and cuffs were wet, and that there were wet marks on his jacket.

A startled look came over Gussy's face.

"Bai Jove! You, Figgay—"

"Eh?"

"You have been gettin' yourself wet! Was it you—"

"Shut up!" hissed Figgins, as Baggy Trimble of the Fourth came rolling up. "Not a word!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You fellows heard?" chortled Baggy Trimble. "Somebody's swamped the Head with water! He, he, he! Old Railton had to help him back to his house. The old gander was fairly knocked out! He, he, he!"

"You diswepful young wascal, Twimble! How dare you allude to the Head as an old gander?"

Trimble chuckled.

"There's a terrific row in store for somebody," he said. "The Head will be on the warpath over this. Somebody is going to get scalped!"

"Who did it?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Blessed if I know! Blake, perhaps—"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"Well, Blake and Herries and Dig are somewhere. I haven't seen them lately," said Trimble. "Or perhaps it was Tom Merry. I saw him hanging round the gate of the Head's garden. Or p'r'aps it was you New House bounders—"

Figgins & Co. hurried on without waiting to hear any more of Baggy Trimble's surmises.

They were feeling rather sick. What had happened would have been serious enough if Mr. Ratcliff had been the victim. As the headmaster of St. Jim's had been the hapless victim it was doubly serious. It was quite certain that there would be a severe inquiry, and that the culprit or culprits would be sought for far and wide.

In their own study in the New House Figgins & Co. looked at one another.

"What a life!" groaned Figgins. "To miss Ratty and catch the Head! What awful luck!"
 "Rotten!" said Kerr. "Not a word outside this study!"
 "D'Arcy's guessed, and Tom Merry will guess—"
 "They're safe."

"Yes," said Figgins with a breath of relief; "they're safe, thank goodness! If it had been Trimble—"

"Thank goodness it wasn't! Not a word about it. Get out the books," said Kerr. "We'd better be busy if anybody looks in."

Figgins & Co were very busy a few minutes later, when the study door opened, and Redfern and Owen of the Fourth looked in. The two juniors were looking rather excited.

"Heard about the Head?" asked Redfern breathlessly. Figgins affected to yawn.

"We're rather busy," he said. "Anything about the Head?"

"He's been squirted and drenched!"

"Gammon!" said Figgins, with an incredulity that did him credit as a member of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society.

"Honest Injun!" said Owen. "The whole school's buzzing with it!"

"No end of a dust-up!" said Redfern. "Somebody will get it in the neck for this! Some School House bounder, of course! A New House chap would have more sense."

Redfern and Owen passed on, and Figgins & Co. exchanged eloquent glances once more. They remained very busy, while half a dozen fellows looked in, one after another, to tell them the startling news. It was not Figgins & Co.'s happy afternoon.

**CHAPTER 3.
False Witness!**

"MERRY!"
 "Yes, Kildare."
 Tom Merry was in his study, with Manners and Lowther, when Kildare of the Sixth looked in.

The Terrible Three were discussing the startling happening which was being discussed now from one end of St. Jim's to the other.

Somebody had drenched the Head—intentionally and wilfully! It was no accident—it was a jape! Such a happening was almost incredible; but it had happened.

"The sack for somebody!" Blake of the Fourth commented; and most of the fellows agreed with Blake.

Certainly, if the delinquent was discovered, he was likely to be expelled from the school.

For that good reason, the hapless delinquent was likely to lie very low; and nobody was very anxious to see him discovered.

Tom Merry knew; but he had not breathed a word of his knowledge even to Manners and Lowther, his bosom chums. In such a serious matter the least said was the soonest mended.

So while Manners and Lowther surmised and wondered as to the identity of the culprit or culprits, Tom Merry did not utter a word on the subject of Figgins & Co. and their ghastly mistake.

The discussion was interrupted by Kildare of the Sixth. The captain of St. Jim's looked into the study with a grim brow.

"You're wanted, Merry," he said. "The Head?" asked Tom.

"The Head isn't in a state to deal with you at present, I think," said the St. Jim's captain dryly. "It is Mr. Railton who has sent for you."

"What's up, Tom?" asked Monty Lowther curiously.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"Only Ratty again!" he answered. "He caught me taking a walk in the Head's garden, and told me he would report me to my Housemaster. That's all."

"In the Head's garden!" exclaimed Manners, in startled tones.

"Yes. I was an ass to go in there," confessed Tom. "But dash it all, fellows often take a ramble in the garden, and no harm done."

"But—but—" Manners broke off. Tom glanced at him, and, reading his thought in his face, burst into a laugh.

"All serene, old bean," he chuckled. "It's nothing to do with what happened to the Head. Ratty turned me out of the garden before that happened."

"Jolly lucky for you," said Lowther. "Was it long before?"

"No; only a couple of minutes."

Manners and Lowther looked very grave. They knew that the word of their chum was as good as gold; but they realised that he had been in the forbidden precincts at an awkward time for himself. If he had left the garden only a couple of minutes before the outrage, he had certainly been very close upon the scene. Kildare of the Sixth looked curiously and keenly at Tom Merry.

"Are you sure it was before the affair happened that you left the garden, Merry?" he asked.

"Quite sure."

"Mr. Railton seems to have a different opinion," said the captain of St. Jim's dryly.

Tom Merry started.

"You don't mean to say, Kildare—" he began.

"You'd better come with me at once," said Kildare, rather gruffly, and he turned and walked down the passage.

Tom Merry followed him in silence.

He was feeling decidedly uneasy now. Hitherto he had only supposed that it was necessary to keep very dark his knowledge of Figgins & Co.'s actions. Now he began to realise that he might have to prove his own innocence.

He followed Kildare very quietly to Mr. Railton's study. The captain of St. Jim's left him there.

Both the Housemasters of St. Jim's were in the study. Mr. Railton was looking very grave and concerned. Mr. Horace Ratcliff had a slightly sneering smile upon his thin lips.

Tom Merry faced his Housemaster quietly.

He was determined to take no notice of Mr. Ratcliff. That angular gentleman eyed him very sourly. He had never liked Tom Merry; Mr. Ratcliff never did like anyone who was open and frank and good-natured. And it pleased him to believe that Tom was impertinent. Mr. Ratcliff was always discovering offence where no one else would have discovered it.

"I have sent for you, Merry," said Mr. Railton, "on a very serious matter. Dr. Holmes has been treated with scandalous disrespect, and has caught a cold in consequence. The doctor has been sent for."



Tom Merry walked up to the three crouching juniors. "What on earth are you fellows doing here?" he asked. "Watching the path for somebody?" "That's it!" said Fatty Wynn. Figgins held up a large garden squirt. It was dripping, and evidently full of water. "That's for Ratty!" he said.

"I am very sorry to hear it, sir," said Tom, sincerely enough. Tom could have punched Figgy's head at that moment for having given Dr. Holmes a cold.

"You are aware of what has happened, Merry?"

"All the school knows about it, sir."

"What hand had you in the matter?"

"None, sir!"

Mr. Railton raised his eyebrows.

"Take care how you answer me, Merry. You were in the Head's garden at the time!"

"Not exactly at the time, sir," said Tom steadily. "Mr. Ratcliff found me there, and saw me out; he will tell you so."

"Mr. Ratcliff came to report to me, Merry, that he had had occasion to turn you out of the Head's garden; and he was still speaking to me when I received the news of what had happened to the Head," said the School House master. "If you were not on the scene, Merry, where were you at the time?"

"Near the gate, sir, where Mr. Ratcliff left me!"

"You did not re-enter the garden?"

"No, sir."

"And the affair had not happened before you left?"

"No, sir! When it happened, I heard the Head call out, but I did not go into the garden again till Kildare came along."

"Kildare has mentioned that you were at the gate, Merry. You assert that the affair happened after Mr. Ratcliff turned you out of the garden?"

"Why, of course, sir," exclaimed Tom. "Mr. Ratcliff was there then, and if it had happened while he was in the garden, he would have heard the Head call. He called out very—ahem—loudly when he was drenched."

Mr. Railton nodded, and turned to his colleague.

"That point is well taken, Ratcliff," he remarked. "If the outrage had occurred while you were still within the garden, before you found Merry and turned him out, surely you would have heard something?"

"Not necessarily," answered Mr. Ratcliff. "The scene was, I believe, at a good distance from the gate. My impression is that Merry had flung the water over Dr. Holmes, and was hurrying to the gate to escape, when I came on him in the garden."

Tom Merry caught his breath.

He took a quick look at the Housemaster. Probably Mr. Ratcliff believed his own statement. He was prone to believe anything that was to the disadvantage of a person he disliked. And doubtless he did not know how loudly the Head had exclaimed when he was drenched. At that time Mr. Ratcliff had been far off the scene, and had heard nothing.

Mr. Railton glanced at Tom Merry again, evidently perplexed.

"You still assert that the outrage occurred after you had left the garden?" he asked.

"Most certainly, sir!"

"Had you been in the garden any considerable time?"

"Perhaps a quarter of an hour, sir."

"You should not have been there at all, Merry. But I will not go into that now. The important matter is, what happened to the Head—it is a matter that must be cleared up completely. While you were in the garden, did you see anyone but Mr. Ratcliff?"

Tom was silent.

He had seen Figgins & Co. there; but that was a dead secret. He could not lie to his Housemaster; but certainly he could not betray the chums of the New House. A troubled look came over his face, and his cheeks flushed.

Mr. Ratcliff openly sneered, and Mr. Railton's kind face grew sterner in its expression.

"I expect a plain answer to my question, Merry," exclaimed the School House master. "If it was not you that attacked the Head in this flagrant manner, someone else must have been in the garden while you were there. It is very probable that you saw the person. Answer me! Did you see anyone?"

Still Tom was silent.

"You refuse to answer me, Merry?"

"I—I have nothing to say, sir," stammered Tom Merry desperately.

Mr. Ratcliff broke in impatiently.

"Surely, Mr. Railton, you can see through this very obvious trickery!" he exclaimed. "Merry wishes to give you the impression that he is shielding one of his schoolfellows in order to divert suspicion from himself. It is a paltry trick!"

Tom flushed crimson.

"If you do not answer me, Merry, I shall have to conclude that you were the only junior in the Head's garden at the time of the outrage," said Mr. Railton.

Tom did not speak.

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"Mr. Ratcliff believes that you were leaving the scene of the outrage when he found you, Merry."

"That is not the case, sir. It happened after I'd left."

"Did the boy look as if he were running away, Mr. Ratcliff?" asked the School House master, glancing at his colleague.

"He certainly did."

"I did not!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "I was going out of the garden, but I was walking as usual, not running away. There was nothing to run away for."

Mr. Ratcliff's thin lips closed.

"You certainly were running away!" he said.

"I was not!"

"Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"I can't help it, sir. Mr. Ratcliff says I was running away, and it's not true!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly.

The New House master flushed. A venomous glitter came into his greenish eyes. To do him justice, Mr. Ratcliff fully believed that Tom had drenched the Head, and was escaping at the time of the encounter near the gate. A moment's reflection would have reminded him that the junior was walking to the gate in quite an ordinary manner. But Mr. Ratcliff was too angry and too spiteful to reflect. He had said that Tom Merry had looked as if he was running away. Now, angered by the boy's indignant denial, he proceeded to amplify his statement. Believing, as he did, that Tom was guilty, it hardly occurred to Mr. Ratcliff's mind that he was, as a matter of fact, uttering a falsehood in what he proceeded to state.

"Merry was running away!" he said deliberately. "He was running fast, and he looked startled and frightened when he saw me. I did not then know the cause. I did not know what had happened to the Head! I know now, and I know that Merry was running away after what he had done."

"You are certain that he was running, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Absolutely certain! I can believe my own eyes, I suppose?" snapped the New House master.

"I was not running!" shouted Tom Merry savagely.

"Silence!"

"I tell you, sir—"

"I have heard enough, Merry! The evidence is completely against you, and Mr. Ratcliff's statement clinches the matter. There is no doubt whatever in my mind that you are guilty!"

"I am not! I—"

"Enough! You will return to your study, Merry, and wait there until you are sent for. I shall ascertain now whether the Head is able to see you, and deal with you as you deserve."

"But, sir—"

"You may go!"

"I repeat, sir—"

"Go!"

Mr. Railton's tone was final. Tom Merry, with his heart beating fast with indignation, turned and left the Housemaster's study.

CHAPTER 4.

Trouble for Tom!

"TOM!"

"What the thump—"

Manners and Lowther spoke together, in startled tones, as Tom Merry came back into Study No. 10 in the Shell, his cheeks flushed and his blue eyes glittering.

His chums could see that there was something very much amiss with the captain of the Shell, and their looks were inquiring and anxious.

Tom burst into an angry laugh.

"I'm to stay in this room till sent for!" he exclaimed.

"I'm found guilty on Ratty's lying evidence!"

"Tom!" ejaculated Manners.

Tom Merry threw himself into the armchair.

"I'm to go before the Head as soon as he can see me!" he exclaimed. "I'm found guilty! Ratty's made up his mind that the Head was drenched before I was out of the garden, and Ratty says he saw me running away." Tom Merry clenched his hands. "The awful rotter!"

"You—you weren't running?" faltered Lowther.

"No."

"But—but if Ratty says—"

"He's lying!" said Tom Merry savagely.

"Oh, Tom!"

Manners and Lowther eyed their chum uneasily. Certainly, they had no high opinion of Mr. Ratcliff. But it required an effort to believe that a Housemaster would speak falsely in giving evidence against a junior schoolboy. Tom read the doubt in their faces, and burst into a laugh that had a hard and angry ring.

"Don't you believe me?" he exclaimed.

"Ye-es, of course. But—"

"Ratty must have thought—" stammered Manners.

"Oh, of course, he thought I did it!" said Tom. "I dare

say he's persuaded himself by this time that I was running away when he saw me in the garden. But it's false all the same! I wasn't running away, and nothing had happened to the Head till after I was out of the garden, and Ratty had gone off to sneak to Mr. Railton about me, confound him!"

"Hallo! What's the merry trouble here?" Jack Blake of the Fourth looked into the study. "Tommy exercising his vocal chords? Old chap, your voice could be heard half-way to Wayland!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom crossly.

Blake laughed.

"That's a nice way to receive a chap who's come to ask you to tea!" he remarked.

"Bother tea!"

"Jolly polite!" said Herries, looking into the study with Digby. "Come on, Blake! We don't want those Shell bounders, if you come to that!"

"Never mind Tommy," said Monty Lowther. "He's a bit ratty. He's got trouble hanging over his head."

"All serene!" said Blake amicably. "What's the trouble?"

Lowther explained, and Blake & Co. looked very serious. Tom Merry sat silent, with a frowning brow.

"Well, you giddy ass!" commented Blake. "Fancy you, Tommy—"

Tom looked up.

"What do you mean, you ass? Fancy what?"

"Too jolly bad, drenching the Head!" said Herries reprovingly. "The Head is a decent old bird, and it's rotten bad form japing him. You really ought to have known better, Tommy!"

"I'd jolly well have stopped you if I'd been there!" declared Digby.

Tom Merry jumped out of the armchair, his eyes blazing.

"You silly owls!" he bawled. "I never did it!"

Blake waved his hand soothingly.

"Don't be an ass, old chap!" he said. "Mustn't tell whoppers, you know. Of course you did it! I'm shocked at you, Tommy!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Manners, as Tom Merry advanced on Blake, his fists up.

There would have been a fight in Study No. 10 the next moment, for Jack Blake did not recede a step. But just then Mr. Railton looked in at the doorway. At sight of the Housemaster, Tom Merry dropped his hands, his face flushing a deeper crimson.

Mr. Railton gave him an icy glance.

"Come with me, Merry!" he said.

"The Head can see you now!"

"I'm ready, sir!" said Tom, with a touch of defiance in his manner that was very new to him in addressing his Housemaster.

Mr. Railton took no notice of it, however. He left the study with Tom Merry, and they disappeared down the passage. A grim silence fell in Study No. 10. It was broken by the dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as his celebrated eyeglass gleamed in at the doorway.

"Bai Jove! What's w'ong, deah boys?"

"Everything!" grunted Manners curtly.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Don't jaw, for goodness' sake!" said Lowther peevishly.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Let's get out!" said Blake.

"Hold on a minute, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I should weally like to know what is the mattah. I have just passed Tom Mewwy and Mr. Wailton in the cowwidah, and Mr. Wailton was lookin' as gwim as a mewwy old judge, and Tommy looked as waxy as anythin'; not at all so wespectful as he should have looked in the pwesence of his Housemastah. Is Tom Mewwy in for a wow?"

"Yes, ass!" snapped Manners.

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"I wish you'd wefuse to be one!" grunted Manners. "It would be a bit of a change!"

"I decline to answer that wemark, Mannahs! I wegard you as lackin' in good taste!"

"Oh, blow away!" said Lowther.

"I should weally like to know what is the mattah with Tom Mewwy—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Come on!" said Herries. "We want tea, anyway, even if Tommy is going to be licked. He's asked for it!"

Blake & Co. left Study No. 10, leaving Manners and Lowther in a decidedly worried mood. On the way to Study No. 6 Blake explained to his noble chum what had happened to Tom Merry. Arthur Augustus halted in the passage and turned his eyeglass on Blake.

"Tom Mewwy is found guilty of dwenchin' the Head!" he ejaculated.

"That's it! Come on!"

"But it is imposs, deah boy!"

"Don't see anything impossible about it," grunted Herries.

"He says he didn't do it, but it's pretty clear that he did."

"Tom Mewwy is not a liah, Hewwies."

"Well, lots of chaps would stretch a point when it's a question of being sacked from the school," observed Digby.

"I twust that Tom Mewwy would not stwetch a point undah any circs, Dig. Howevah, there is no time to waste in talkin'." Arthur Augustus started for the stairs at a run.

His chums stared after him.

"Where are you going?" bawled Blake.

"Ovah to the New House!" answered Arthur Augustus over his shoulder, without stopping or turning his head.

"What are you going to the New House for?"

"To see Figgins."

"Bother Figgins! Come in and have tea."

"Wats!"

With that monosyllabic rejoinder, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared down the staircase. Blake & Co., much puzzled, went into Study No. 6—and they started tea without their noble chum. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in too much of a hurry to think of tea just then—he had pressing business with Figgins & Co. at the New House.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins Butts In.

TOM MERRY followed Mr. Railton across a corner of the quad to the door of the Head's house, which adjoined the School House, and was, indeed, part of the same building. It was for that reason that Tom Merry & Co. were accustomed to exasperate Figgins by assuming that the Head was a School House fellow. Mr. Railton entered the Head's house, with the junior at his heels.

Tom was breathing hard with suppressed indignation



The passing figure came opposite the opening, and Figgins caught a slight glimpse of a gown. He let fly at once. Squish—sloosh! A startled yell rang out from the surprised victim as the water shot full in his face. "Oooch! Oh dear! What—what—whatever—"

He did not look much like a culprit—at least, he looked like a very unruly and defiant one. Mr. Railton believed him guilty, and Mr. Ratcliff believed it also. That did not alter the fact that he had been convicted on false evidence. And Tom, though he was well aware of what was before him now, was feeling more excitement and indignation than apprehension.

Dr. Holmes was seated in a deep armchair by a fire. He was looking very pale, and was evidently ill. At the sight of the pallor in the kind old face Tom Merry felt his hot resentment melt away. The Head was certainly unwell, but his manner was as kind and gentle as ever. Tom Merry stood before him with downcast eyes.

Mr. Ratcliff stood with his back to the fire, his hands crossed behind him. His manner was quiet and grave, but there was a gleam of triumph in his narrow eyes. Mr. Ratcliff was looking forward to a condign punishment for the junior he disliked, and he found the prospect pleasing.

The Head's glance rested on Tom Merry's face.

"Merry," he said quietly, "you know why you are here! Why did you do this, my boy?"

Tom caught his breath.

"On my word of honour, sir," he exclaimed, "I never did it! I wouldn't have done it! It would have been rotten! No fellow at St. Jim's, sir, would have treated you like that purposely—"

Dr. Holmes raised his hand.

"Do not deny it, Merry, please! You were in the garden, and no one else was discovered there; and Mr. Ratcliff met you running away—"

"I was not running away, sir!"

"You must not dispute Mr. Ratcliff's positive statement, Merry!" said the Head severely.

"It's not a true statement, sir; I was not—"

"That is enough!" said the Head, frowning. "I am sorry to see you resort to prevarication, Merry! I had entertained a higher opinion of you. You are adjudged guilty of this outrage, on evidence that cannot be questioned. It remains only for me to deliver judgment."

"On my word, sir—" said Tom Merry earnestly. "On my word of honour, sir, I never did it! And nobody would have done it to you—"

"It was done, Merry."

"By mistake, sir—" said Tom eagerly.

"What do you mean? You could not have drenched me with icy water from a garden squirt by mistake—"

"I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?" said the Head coldly.

Tom opened his lips, but closed them again. He could not speak without betraying Figgins—and that he was determined not to do. It was by chance that he had seen the New House juniors in their ambush; only by chance that it was in his power to shift the penalty from his own shoulders to theirs. That power he certainly would not avail himself of. Apart from his sense of schoolboy honour, he would not expose the culprits to the vengeance of their Housemaster—and well he knew how bitter would be Mr. Ratcliff's rage if he learned the truth.

The hapless junior stood silent, and the Head, after waiting a moment or two for the reply that did not come, sighed.

"We need not discuss the matter," he said. "I am more sorry than offended, Merry, by your conduct. I had believed that you respected your headmaster—as I have never given you cause to do otherwise. You have changed my opinion of you. It is my duty to punish you, and I tell you plainly, Merry, that it is only regard for your guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and my desire to avoid giving her pain, which prevents me from sending you away from the school."

"Oh, sir—"

"Silence! I shall not expel you," said the Head. "You have deserved that punishment, but I shall not inflict it. You will be flogged in public to-morrow morning, before the assembled school, Merry."

Tom breathed hard.

"I—I assure you, sir—" he faltered.

"Say no more, my boy. Your punishment will be inflicted by Mr. Ratcliff, in my place—I shall not be well enough to be present," said the Head. "Your conduct has made me ill, my boy, and it will probably be necessary for me to leave the school for a time. I can only hope that, on reflection, you will be sorry for what you have done."

"Oh, sir! I—"

Tom Merry was interrupted.

There was a hurried knock on the door, and it flew open. Three red-faced and breathless juniors burst into the room.

The Head started, and Mr. Railton frowned. Mr. Ratcliff turned a brow of thunder upon Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn.

"Boys!" he gasped. "How—how dare you! How dare you rush into the Head's presence in this way! Begone!"

"We—we—" gasped Figgins.

"Begone! Instantly!"

"But, sir, we've come to confess!" panted Kerr.

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Mr. Ratcliff jumped.

"To confess!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir," stuttered Figgins.

"Bless my soul!" murmured the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff's face was a study. He did not need telling upon what subject these three boys of his House had come to confess. He knew that their confession must relate to the happening in the Head's garden. Mr. Ratcliff saw his victim escaping him; he saw himself being placed in a very unpleasant position. His eyes positively glittered at the excited trio.

"Leave the room at once, Figgins!" he thundered.

"One moment!" said Mr. Railton quietly. "Figgins, have you anything to state with regard to the attack upon the Head?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the boy must be heard, Mr. Ratcliff."

"The boy belongs to my House, Mr. Railton, and I decline—"

The Head's voice broke in calmly.

"I will hear what the boy has to say."

"It is some trick, sir, to save Merry from his just punishment!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff.

"I hardly think so, Mr. Ratcliff. At all events, I will hear what these boys have to say. Come here, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn."

The New House Co. approached the Head shamefacedly. They avoided meeting their Housemaster's angry eyes. They stood in a row before the headmaster, their eyes on the carpet.

Tom Merry felt his heart lighter. He knew now that he was going to be cleared. But he felt almost as much concerned for the devoted Figgy as he had felt, a minute earlier, for himself.

"You may speak, Figgins," said the Head quietly.

"I—I did it, sir!" blurted out Figgins.

"You!"

"Yes, sir! Kerr and Wynn were with me, and they've come to own up along with me. It was all a mistake, sir!" groaned Figgins. "We—we never meant it for you, sir. We—we—we couldn't see you through the shrubbery, and—"

"You discharged the squirt at me, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir, I did!"

"And why have you come here?"

"To own up, sir."

"Because Merry was charged?"

"We never knew till a few minutes ago that Tom Merry was suspected, sir," said Figgins. "We never dreamed of anything of the kind. We—we thought nobody would be suspected. But—but D'Arcy came over to our House, and told us Merry was before the beaks—"

"What?"

"I—I mean that—that Merry was taken before the Head, sir," stammered Figgins, crimsoning with confusion. "He told us Merry was going to be found guilty—had been found guilty, in fact—so—so—so we couldn't do anything else but come over and own up, sir."

"Good old Figgy!" murmured Tom gratefully.

Dr. Holmes looked curiously at the shamefaced trio.

"You have acted in a very manly way, Figgins, in coming here," he said. "You are aware, of course, that the punishment intended for Merry will now fall upon you?"

"I expected that, sir," said Figgins.

"And why," said the Head—"why did you act as you have done, Figgins? What cause have I ever given you to treat me in such a manner?"

Figgins gulped.

"I'd have cut off my hand sooner, sir!" he stammered. "I—I could have kicked myself when I found that it was you! You—you can't believe, sir, that I'd have done it purposely—or anybody at St. Jim's, sir? Why, I'd scrag any fellow that thought of playing such a rotten trick, sir!"

"I do not quite understand you, Figgins. You say that you did it—"

"Yes, sir; but it was all a mistake. We—we were waiting for somebody else, and when you came along the path we—we thought he was coming, and I let fly, like a silly idiot, sir!" groaned Figgins. "I—I never dreamed for a tick, sir—I mean a moment, sir—that it was you. We—we thought it was—was—was the other chap, sir."

"Let me understand you clearly," said the Head. "Tom Merry was in the garden about the same time. Was your trick intended for him?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then for whom was it intended, Figgins?"

Figgins was silent. Under the glittering eyes of Mr. Horace Ratcliff it was difficult to state the exact facts.

The Head looked at him.

"I believe your statement, Figgins, that it was a mistake," he said. "I should be very sorry to believe that any boy in this school would willingly act in such a manner towards me, his headmaster. On that account, and also on account of

your straightforward conduct in coming here to tell me the truth, I shall pardon you and your companions."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Figgins.

"But I must know the whole facts," said the Head. "You state that you mistook me for someone else. For whom, then, did you mistake me?"

"We—we—I—"

"For whom was your ambush laid, Figgins?" exclaimed the Head sternly.

"For—for Mr. Ratcliff!" gasped Figgins, at last.

It was out now! Mr. Ratcliff stared hard at Figgins.

"For your Housemaster, Figgins?"

"Ye-ee-es, sir!"

Dr. Holmes set his lips.

"I have already said, Figgins, that I pardon you," he said, "otherwise I should assuredly punish you most severely for entertaining such a project against your Housemaster. Mr. Ratcliff acts under my authority, and an attack upon him is equivalent to an attack upon myself. I am surprised and shocked, Figgins!"

"Oh, sir!" mumbled Figgins miserably.

"You have done very wrong, my boy, and I hope that you will realise it, on reflection," said Dr. Holmes. "For my part, I have pardoned you; and, in the hope of your amendment, I trust that your Housemaster will do the same." He glanced at Mr. Ratcliff. "Mr. Ratcliff, will you consent to overlook the disrespectful conduct planned by these boys, at my request?"

It was a request, but from the Head of St. Jim's it amounted to a command. Mr. Ratcliff could scarcely refuse to accede.

"It—it is as you wish, sir!" he muttered.

"Thank you, Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Thank you, sir!" mumbled Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn in a downcast chorus. "It—it's very kind of you, sir. We—we're sorry, sir!"

"Now you may go," said the Head wearily. "Merry, I am sorry that you were suspected. You may all go."

The juniors quitted the room together. They saw the Head sink back wearily in his chair as they went, and Figgy's heart smote him sorely. Outside the closed door, the juniors looked at one another.

"Many thanks, Figgy, old chap!" said Tom.

"Well, we couldn't do anything else, when Gussy told us how the matter stood," said Figgins. "I—I say, I feel awfully rotten—about the Head! He—he looks ill, doesn't he?"

"Ratty would have looked ill, if you'd swamped him," said Tom, rather dryly.

Figgins grunted.

"Never mind about Ratty," he said. "He can look as ill as he likes. But—but I'd do anything to—to undo what we did, as it was the Head. Not much good saying that, though."

"Ratty will take it out of us," said Kerr.

"He's agreed to let the matter drop," said Figgins innocently. "He can't raise it again, after what he said to the Head."

The Scottish junior shrugged his shoulders.

"He will find a way," he answered.

"Well, I don't care," said Figgins. "The Head's a brick, and I'm awfully sorry we drenched him. I believe he knows that. I don't care about Ratty."

And Figgins & Co. went back to their own House, and Tom Merry returned to No. 10 in the Shell, where he was received with great relief and rejoicing.

CHAPTER 6.

All Figgy's Fault.

THERE were serious faces at St. Jim's on the following day.

From Kildare, the captain of the school, down to Wally & Co. of the Third, the St. Jim's fellows were unusually grave.

The Head was ill!

It was not, fortunately, a serious illness. The drenching with cold water had given the Head a cold, and the cold had taken a rather unpleasant turn; that was all. It was, however, enough. The Head was missing from his usual place in the Sixth Form-room that morning; the fellows knew that he was confined to his bed, and that the doctor was in attendance. And there were few fellows who were not concerned to know it. Even Racke and Crooke were rather sorry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was greatly distressed. He asked Blake's opinion as to whether the Head would be likely to feel cheered up if a fellow dropped in and had a chat with him. Gussy did not mind the risk of catching the Head's cold.

But Blake and Herries and Dig were so emphatic in reply to the suggestion that Arthur Augustus gave up the idea of dropping in for a chat with the invalid. Really, it was rather

improbable that a chat with the swell of the Fourth would have done the Head any good.

Probably the most miserable fellow at St. Jim's was George Figgins.

Figgins had done it—he could not deny that he had done it! True, he had intended the drenching for his own Housemaster. But the Head had received it, and the Head was ill, and it was all Figgy's fault! School House and New House agreed upon that point.

The Head's forgiveness was like coals of fire to the unhappy Figgins. He could have kicked himself hard, if that would have done any good. Unfortunately, it wouldn't!

But Figgy's own remorse was not his only punishment. Fellows came over from the School House, almost in droves, to tell Figgins what they thought of him for making the Head ill. And for once, the New House fellows failed to stand by their leader. They were as much down on Figgins as the School House fellows were. Redfern and Owen slanged him up hill and down dale. Even Jameson of the Third put his cheeky head into Figgy's study to tell him he was a silly owl. Monteith of the Sixth cuffed him, without giving his reason—Figgy guessed the reason. For the whole of that day, George Figgins was something like a pariah at St. Jim's.

There was only one streak of silver lining to the cloud. Mr. Ratcliff ignored him.

In the innocence of his heart, Figgins had supposed that Mr. Ratcliff would let the matter drop, after stating to the Head that he would let it drop. But on reflection, Figgy had had to agree with the canny Scottish junior, that Mr. Ratcliff was the very last man in the world to let such a matter drop. Certainly he could not raise the case again officially. If he punished Figgins & Co., he would have to find some other reason to give. But Ratty was extremely unlikely to forgive Figgins & Co. for having entertained the notion of drenching him with a garden-squirt—the actual attack on the Head could not have seemed so serious to Ratty as the intended attack upon himself. And Mr. Ratcliff was quite clever at finding reasons for punishing fellows whom he wanted to punish.

So all that day Figgins & Co. waited for the storm to burst. It was not till evening, when the storm had not burst, that they felt relieved in their minds, and concluded that Mr. Ratcliff was keeping, after all, his word to the Head.

Truth to tell, Mr. Ratcliff had more important matters than Figgins & Co. to think about—though he had not forgotten them. The Head was unwell; and it was fairly certain that he would leave the school for a time as soon as he was able to move, to recuperate in some warmer spot on the South Western Coast. And while the Head was away in Devonshire or Cornwall, Mr. Ratcliff, as senior Housemaster, would be temporary Head of St. Jim's.

For many years Mr. Ratcliff had nourished the ambition of stepping into the Head's shoes on that gentleman's retirement. His temporary retirement would give Ratty a taste of the pleasures of fulfilled ambition.

Mr. Ratcliff's greenish eyes gleamed with satisfaction at the thought.

Even if he were in authority in the school for only one week, or a couple of weeks, he would make his power felt. He would rule his own House, at least, unrestrained by superior authority; in every way he would spread himself, where hitherto he had been kept in check. He would be over Mr. Railton's head, and he could snub the School House master ruthlessly. He would have some opportunity, at least, of interfering with the affairs of the School House—though in that matter he knew he would have to tread warily. In fact, Mr. Ratcliff was looking forward to playing the tyrant to the top of his bent; and it is much to be feared that Mr. Ratcliff's sorrow for the Head's illness, which he expressed at considerable length, was to a very considerable extent sheer humbug.

The Head's being "crooked" was the chief topic in both Houses that day, and most of the fellows were sympathetic. When Baggy Trimble expressed a cheery opinion that it would probably turn to pneumonia, Baggy Trimble was promptly seized by the Terrible Three and bumped on the floor of the Common-room. It was made clear to Master Trimble that his happy surmises were not welcome.

On the following day, the Head was still hidden from the public eye, but it was known that he was going on as well as could be expected. It was also known for certain that he was going away the following week. Arthur Augustus admonished his comrades on that subject.

"While the cat's away the mice will play, you fellows," Arthur Augustus remarked sagely. "Old Watty won't be much good—he isn't much respected. He even tells whoppahs, you know!"

"He does!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Well, as I was sayin', he isn't much good anyhow, and pwobably some of you thoughtless youngsters—"

"Us what?" ejaculated Blake.
 "Thoughtless youngstahs," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Pwobably some of you thoughtless youngstahs will think of kickin' ovah the twaces while the Head is away. I shall disapprove of that vewy strongly!"

"Which, of course, will nip any such idea right in the bud!" remarked Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"I twust so, Lowthah!"

"Fathead!" said Manners simply.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Ass!" remarked Tom Merry.

"I wepeat, Tom Mewwy, that I shall disapprove vewy strongly any disordahly goin'-on while the Head is away on sick leave," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "No more of your twespassin' in the Head's garden—"

"Bow-wow!"

"It is up to us, deah boys, to play the game, while the Head is on the shelf," said D'Arcy. "I shall insist upon all you fellahs wallyin' wound and playin' up. And we shall have to keep an eye on the New House boundahs. We are bound to see that Figgins & Co. toe the line and behave them-selves with pwopah circumspection."

"Hear, hear!"

"As cock house of St. Jim's, we are bound to keep those boundahs in their places, especially as it was that howlin' duffah Figgins that cwoked the Head. If the New House doesn't keep in good ordah, deah boys, we shall keep ordah for them."

"You bet!" grinned Blake.

The idea of keeping the New House in order certainly seemed to appeal to the School House fellows. Whether order would be kept in a very orderly way was another matter.

Arthur Augustus, feeling that it was up to him, dropped in at the New House to explain the programme there. He let Figgins & Co. know that they would be expected to toe the line during the Head's absence, and that the School House was prepared to see that they did it!

When Arthur Augustus returned from paying his call, he was found bathing his noble nose under a bath-room tap. Apparently the explanation in Figgy's study had not gone off quite peacefully.

When the Head at last left St. Jim's in his car, with his wife and daughter, a numerous, silent, and respectful crowd saw him off from the gates. The juniors turned back into the quadrangle in a rather subdued mood. They were sorry that the Head was gone. They would get used to his absence certainly, but for the present, St. Jim's did not seem like St. Jim's. Grundy of the Shell, a School House fellow, strode over to Figgins & Co. and displayed a formidable set of knuckles under Figgy's nose.

"All your fault, you silly ass!" snorted Grundy. "I've a jolly good mind to mop up the quad with you!"

"Take your face away and bury it!" suggested Figgins. "It's not a thing that ought to be seen about in the daylight."

"You cheeky New House rotter!" roared Grundy.

"You fooling School House chump!" retorted Figgins.

"I'll jolly well—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Look out!" whispered Kerr. "Cave! Here comes Ratty!"

Mr. Ratcliff strode upon the spot, full to the brim with his new authority. It was said by the immortal William that man, vain man, dressed in a little brief authority, plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep. Certainly that was true in the case of Horace Ratcliff. Being dressed in a little brief authority, he was now proceeding to do his best to make the angels weep.

"Grundy! Figgins! Cease this instantly!"

"Yes, sir!" murmured Figgins.

"I will not have quarrelling in the quadrangle!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "You will understand that, once and for all!"

Figgins did not reply; but Grundy looked rebellious. As a School House fellow, he was not under Mr. Ratcliff's authority—at least, when affairs were normal. But the senior Housemaster was a gentleman of much greater authority than usual now.

Mr. Ratcliff noted Grundy's rebellious look, and he did not fail to take advantage of it. He had a cane under his arm, and he let it slip down into his hand.

"Hold out your hand, Grundy!" he snapped.

Grundy stared.

"You hear me, boy?"

"I hear you, sir," said Grundy, still staring. "You can't cane me, sir! I don't belong to the New House!"

Whack!

Mr. Ratcliff's cane came down across Grundy's broad shoulders with a resounding whack. George Alfred Grundy jumped and yelled.

"If you are insolent again, boy, I shall flog you!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "You will kindly understand that I hold full authority in the school now, over both Houses."

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"My hat!" gasped Grundy.

"Now hold out your hand, or I will flog you in Hall!"

Grundy held out his hand.

Swish!

"Let that be a lesson to you, Grundy!" And, tucking his cane under his arm, Mr. Ratcliff stalked away.

Grundy of the Shell rubbed his hand, and blinked round at the juniors.

"Caning a School House chap!" he gasped. "Caning me! Me! Why the impudent old hunks! Does he think we're going to stand this?"

"You seemed to have stood it!" grinned Racke.

"Bai Jove! I shall certainly not stand anythin' of the kind!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If Watty thinks he is goin' on like that, Watty is vewy much mistaken, you fellahs!"

"He is," said Monty Lowther. "He ars!"

But it was quite clear, ere long, that Ratty fully intended to keep "going on like that." And there was much surmise in the School House as to what Mr. Railton would do. Would Railton stand it? And Tom Merry & Co. agreed that, if Railton stood it, they wouldn't! Though exactly what they were going to do about it was not clear.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Ratcliff Tries It On!

MR. VICTOR RAILTON, Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's, frowned.

The cause of his frown was the sight of Mr. Horace Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House, crossing the quadrangle.

Mr. Ratcliff was coming over to the School House.

His tall, angular figure crossed the quad with quick, jerky strides, and he paused in his career only one moment to box the ears of D'Arcy minor of the Third Form, a School House fag.

Mr. Railton frowned yet more darkly.

It was a couple of days since the Head's departure, and during those two days Mr. Ratcliff had shown his hand, as it were, more and more plainly.

The position was rather a difficult one.

Undoubtedly Mr. Ratcliff was senior Housemaster, and had been left, by the Head, with the supreme authority in his hands.

How far that gave him the right to interfere in the internal administration of the School House was rather an open question. It was a position requiring tact on both sides.

In tact Mr. Ratcliff was greatly wanting. Mr. Railton certainly had plenty of tact and good nature, too. But if it takes two to make a quarrel, it also takes two to make a bargain. Mr. Ratcliff was obviously inclined to stretch his authority, such as it was, to the utmost limits. And Mr. Railton was already growing extremely restive under it.

He had shown signs of restiveness which Ratty had calmly ignored. Apparently, Horace Ratcliff considered that he held his colleague in the hollow of his hand. It was borne in upon Mr. Railton's mind that the time was approaching for a frank explanation with the other Housemaster, in which the position should be defined. Several times already Mr. Ratcliff had dropped into the School House to exercise authority there. Once he had "slanged" the prefects in the prefects' room, much to their anger and astonishment. Once he had caned a junior within hearing of Mr. Railton's own study. Now he was coming over again, and Mr. Railton's brow darkened more and more. For the sake of the school, for the honour of authority generally, he wished to keep the peace with his colleague. But he felt that Horace Ratcliff was fast approaching the limit.

Mr. Ratcliff did not seem conscious of it as he walked into the School House. Some juniors at the doorway capped him not very respectfully.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced round. Levison minor of the Third was near at hand, and the Housemaster called to him.

"Levison minor!"

"Yes, sir?" answered Frank.

"Do you know where Tom Merry is?"

"In the Common-room, I think, sir."

"Tell him to come to me here at once!"

Levison minor hesitated the fraction of a second. Then he answered "Yes, sir," and headed for the Common-room.

A number of fellows had gathered round already. Fellows came from the quad and looked in at the big doorway. Blake & Co. assembled on the staircase. Mr. Ratcliff had a cane under his arm, and was obviously on the warpath. And they knew that Mr. Railton was in his study, that he could not fail to hear what went on in the Hall. Matters were coming to a climax now.

Tom Merry came out of the Common-room with Manners and Lowther. His face was a little flushed. He did not like receiving orders from the New House master, and still less he liked obeying them. But rebellion was rather too serious

a matter to be lightly undertaken. Tom Merry came quietly into the presence of the new authority.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said, as respectfully as he could. "I sent for you, Merry." Mr. Ratcliff held his cane hard, and his eyes glittered. "A short time since, Merry, you had the insolence to declare, in the presence of the Head, that a statement I made to him was untrue."

Tom drew a quick breath.

That old affair of the Head's garden was not dead and done with, after all. Ratty had waited till the Head was gone, and now, regardless of the Head's wishes and of his own pledge, he was bent on raking it up again.

"You hear me, Merry?"

"I hear you, sir."

"I require a humble apology, in the presence of your House," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall cane you, Merry, for you were guilty of insolence that I cannot possibly overlook. But if you do not apologise, fully and contritely, I shall flog you!"

"Bai Jovo!" came in a sudden ejaculation from the staircase.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I cannot apologise for saying what was true, sir!" he answered.

"Bwavo!"—from the staircase.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Fetch Railton!" yelled Grundy from the landing above.

"Somebody go and fetch old Railton!"

"Silence! Merry, how dare you answer me as you have done?"

"I can't answer any other way, sir!" said Tom Merry fearlessly. "You told the Head that you saw me running away, and that made me suspected. I was not running away at the time, as you know."

"You dare to contradict me, Merry?"

"I'm bound to, sir, in this case."

Mr. Ratcliff gave a bitter smile.

"It is fairly clear that the management of this House requires supervision," he said. "I shall see to it in good time. Merry, you have dared to repeat your insolence—"

"I have told the truth, sir," said Tom steadily.

"Silence! I shall punish you severely, and I trust that your punishment will be a warning to you and to others here." Mr. Ratcliff swished his cane in the air. "Hold out your hand, Merry!"

"You are not my Housemaster, sir."

"Hold out your hand!"

"I will be caned by my own Housemaster, sir, if he thinks fit," said the captain of the Shell quietly, though his heart was beating.

"Does that mean that you refuse to be caned by me, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bravo, Tommy!" came in a yell from the staircase, which was now crowded with School House juniors.

Mr. Ratcliff glared at the crowd.

"Silence! Silence there at once, I command you!"

"Oh, come off, old bird!" sang out a voice that could only have belonged to Ralph Reekness Cardew of the Fourth. And there was a laugh. Mr. Ratcliff turned crimson.

"I can see, Merry, that your House-fellows are prepared to follow your example of rebellious insolence!" he exclaimed. "I command you to hold out your hand at once."

Tom Merry did not stir.

"You hear me, Merry?"

"You have no authority in this House, sir!"

"What?"

"I will do as Mr. Railton tells me, sir," said Tom. "If he tells me to let you cane me I will do so. Not otherwise."

"Yafs, wathah!"

"Stand up to the old gander, Tommy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you hold out your hand, Merry?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, almost choking with passion.

Tom Merry put his hands behind him.

That was enough for Mr. Ratcliff. His temper, never good,

was nearly at boiling-point, and now it boiled over. He made a stride towards the Shell fellow, and grasped him by the shoulder with his left hand, and swung him round. With his right, he brought down the cane across Tom's shoulders.

The crack of the cane rang loudly.

Tom Merry gasped. Without stopping to think, he turned on Mr. Ratcliff, wrenched himself loose, and snatched the cane from the Housemaster's hand.

The cane went whizzing down the passage, flung far by Tom Merry, with all the strength of his arm.

Mr. Ratcliff stood petrified for a moment. Then he grasped the Shell fellow again, and boxed his ears savagely. Smack, smack!

"Shame!"

"Kick his shins, Tommy!" yelled Wally of the Third.

"Stop!"

The door of Mr. Railton's study was flung open, and the School House master strode upon the scene.

CHAPTER 8.

Paying the Piper.

"STOP!" Mr. Railton's voice rang out sharply and clearly.

The New House master gave him a glance, but he did not stop. His hand was raised for another blow.

"Mr. Ratcliff! Stop!"

"I refuse to take any instructions from you, Railton!" snapped Horace Ratcliff. "Kindly refrain from interfering!"

"This boy belongs to my House!"

"I need not remind you, Mr. Railton, that the Head has left me with full authority over both Houses!"

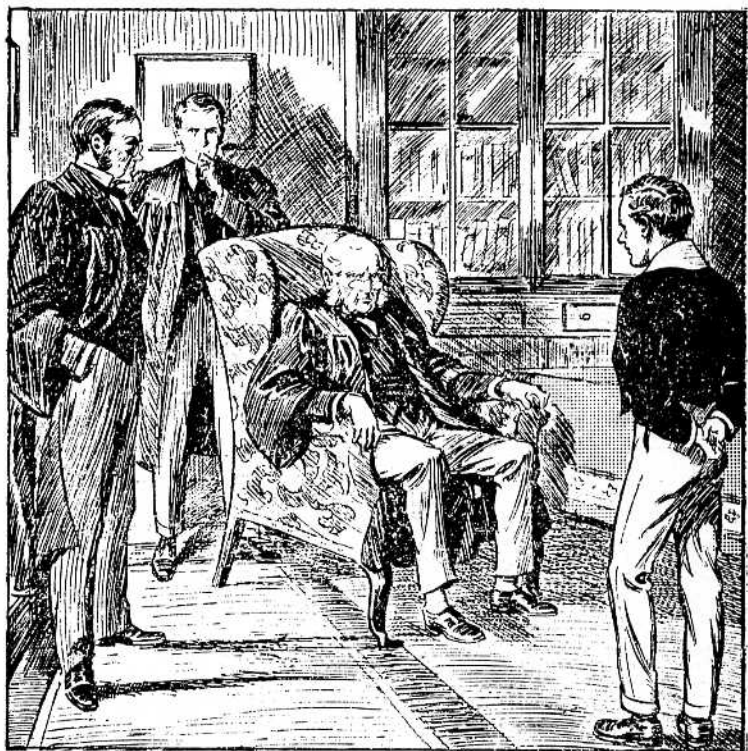
"Within certain limits, sir," said Mr. Railton quietly. "I shall not allow my boys to be punished by anyone but myself!"

"What! You will not allow—"

"Certainly not!"

Smack!

Mr. Ratcliff's open palm smote Tom Merry again. A second more, and Tom would have followed the counsel of Wally of the Third, and kicked the Housemaster's shins, but



The Head's glance rested on Tom Merry's face. "Merry," he said quietly, "do you dispute Mr. Ratcliff's statement that you drenched me with icy cold water from a garden squirt?" "It is not a true statement," answered Tom. "On my word of honour, sir, I never did it!"

Mr. Railton strode forward, and his grasp fell like iron on Ratty's shoulder.

With a powerful swing of his arm the athletic School House master swung Ratty away from the junior.

It was a powerful swing, and Mr. Ratcliff went reeling. He just recovered his balance, and that was all.

There was a roar of laughter from the crowded staircase. It died away, however, as Mr. Railton turned a frowning look in that direction.

Mr. Ratcliff tottered and gasped.

"You—you—you have dared to—to—to lay hands on me!" he spluttered.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Railton. "But I cannot allow you, or anyone, to interfere with my authority in my own House."

"The—the Head—"

"I am quite prepared to place the facts before the Head on his return, Mr. Ratcliff. I suggest that this painful scene had better not be prolonged."

Mr. Ratcliff panted. In his rage he seemed quite lost to any sense of his own dignity.

"Stand back, Mr. Railton! I order you to stand back and cease to interfere between that junior and myself—that insolent boy, whom I am determined to punish!"

"If the boy should merit punishment, I will inflict it myself," said Mr. Railton.

"Stand aside!"

"I decline to do so!"

Mr. Ratcliff clenched his hands, and for a moment it looked as if he would attack the School House master. The crowd looked on breathlessly, hoping that he would! They would have been delighted to see the unpopular Housemaster "mopped up" by Victor Railton.

Fortunately for himself, Horace Ratcliff restrained his rage in time.

"You shall repent this, sir!" he stammered.

And with that, Horace Ratcliff turned and whisked out of the School House.

A deep and derisive groan from the School House crowd followed him.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Disperse at once!"

The Housemaster went back to his study. The crowd broke up, excitedly discussing the thrilling scene.

Ratty's defeat had been complete and decisive. The New House master had been forced to retreat. There had been, in fact, nothing else for the angry man to do, and it was his own fault that he had forced the matter too far for his retreat to be a dignified one.

Some of the juniors crowded out into the quad to watch the defeated man return to his own House. Mr. Ratcliff was striding away rapidly, his gown whisking round his long legs. It was plain that he was anxious to get out of sight of the sea of mocking eyes as fast as possible.

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chuckled.

"The old bird bit off more than he could chew," he remarked. "I was suah that old Wailton would stand up to him, you fellows!"

"Good old Railton!" said Tom Merry.

"I guess he will take it out of Figgins & Co.," remarked Kit Wildrake.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I shouldn't care to be a New House chap while the Head's away!" he said.

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!"

"Well, it's all Figgins' fault," said Jack Blake. "He did it on the Head, and he's only got himself to thank."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I dare say it will do the New House good to have some lickings handed round," added Blake judiciously. "Of course, we couldn't stand it in the School House. But I dare say it will do the New House good."

Judging by Mr. Ratcliff's expression as he entered his own House, that House was not likely to derive much good from him at present. The long, thin face of the Housemaster was white with rage and chagrin.

Monteith of the Sixth was near the doorway, and he started as he saw his Housemaster's face.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" he exclaimed involuntarily.

"What should be the matter?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "Don't ask me foolish questions, Monteith!"

"Oh! Ah! Certainly not, sir!" stammered Monteith.

In his own House, at least, Mr. Ratcliff was master; there his sway was undisputed. It did not occur to him yet that the time might come when his authority might be disputed, even there, if he stretched it too far.

"Send Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn to my study, Monteith!"

"Very well, sir."

Monteith walked away with a crimson face. Mr. Ratcliff whisked on to his study.

He had never had the intention of letting the affair of the Head's garden drop. The knowledge that Figgins & Co. had intended the drenching for him was alive in his narrow, resentful mind. He had acceded to the Head's request to allow the matter to drop—and he had allowed it to drop until now. Now, with the Head at a safe distance, it was to be raked up again, and Figgins & Co. were to be made to feel sorry that they had ever entertained the idea of drenching their Housemaster.

There were slow and reluctant steps in the passage. Figgins & Co. appeared in the study doorway at last.

Exactly what Mr. Ratcliff wanted, they did not know. But they knew well enough that the summons to his study portended trouble.

"Figgins, Kerr, Wynn!" Mr. Ratcliff picked up his cane. "A few days ago you confessed that you had lain in wait for me in the Head's garden, with the nefarious intention of drenching me with water from a garden-squirt!"

Figgins drew a deep breath! It had come at last!

"Yes, sir!" said Figgy, in a low voice.

"I am about to punish you, Figgins, in a way that you will remember if such a piece of unparalleled insolence should ever come into your mind again."

"The Head said, sir—" began Kerr.

"You need not refer to the Head, Kerr!"

"But he said that the matter was closed, sir!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"That is enough! Hold out your hand, Figgins!"

George Figgins slowly and reluctantly held out his hand. Mr. Ratcliff's cane came down with a heavy swish.

"Ow!" gasped Figgins.

"The other hand, Figgins!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

Swish!

"Now the other again!"

Swish!

"Now, Kerr—"

The Scottish junior's eyes gleamed.

"You have no right to cane us for that affair, sir, after what the Head said!" he exclaimed.

"I will not bandy words with you, Kerr! Hold out your hand this instant, or I will send for the porter to hoist you for a flogging!"

Swish, swish, swish!

"Now, Wynn—"

David Llewellyn Wynn did not argue the point. He knew that he had to go through it; and he went through it with all the philosophy he could muster. But his plump face was rather pale when Mr. Ratcliff had finished.

The Housemaster pointed to the door with his cane.

"Go!" he said sternly. "In addition to your caning, you will take one thousand lines of Virgil each, and you will remain in to-morrow afternoon until they are finished. Half the imposition must be handed to me to-night, or you will be punished again. Now go!"

Figgins & Co. went.

CHAPTER 9.

The Limit!

FEELIN' wathah wctten, deah boys?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked the question in tones of sympathy. He had dropped into Figgins' study to see how the New House Co. were going on. The Terrible Three had come over with him.

The Chums of the School House surmised that Ratty would be "taking it out" of the fellows in his own House; and at the sight of Figgins & Co. they knew that their surmise was correct.

Figy and Kerr and Wynn were fairly doubled up. It was getting late in the evening, but they had not touched a line of their heavy impositions so far. The ache in their palms made it difficult for them to handle their pens, for one thing. And for another, they were in a savage and rebellious mood.

"Licked?" asked Tom Merry; rather a superfluous question. It was only too clear that Figgins & Co. had been severely licked.

George Figgins nodded.

"Wotten, deah boys!"

"What was the row—or the excuse?" asked Manners.

"That affair of the squirt!" said Kerr savagely. "Ratty dragged that up again."

"The uttah wottah!"

Tom Merry glanced at the sheaves of impot paper on the table—as yet unsoiled by a single line.

"Lines as well?" he asked.

"Five hundred each this evening, and the same to-morrow, to fill up the half-holiday!" said Figgins bitterly.

"My hat! Ratty is going it strong!"

"They won't be done," said Fatty Wynn. "Blessed if I can hold a pen! Anyhow, I'm not starting on a thousand lines."

Tom Merry looked rather anxious.

"Ratty's got you under his thumb here," he said. "It isn't as if you were in the School House, old fellows. Better do the lines."

"Better rats!" said Figgins. "We couldn't if we wanted to. Ratty knows we can't, he only wants another excuse for piling on us."

"Let's all help, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus generously. "I will w'ite as many dashed lines as you like."

"Same here!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice. But Figgins shook his head.

"Nothing doing!" he said. "Ratty's as sharp as a needle, and he would spot the fist at once. Besides, we're not going to do the lines. If Ratty keeps on as he has started, there's going to be trouble in this House—and it may as well come soon as late."

"Quite as well!" said Kerr.

"He'll come here for the lines, as we don't take them to him," said Figgins. "Let him comc! They won't be done!"

"No fear!"

The door was thrown open, and the juniors all rose to their feet as Mr. Ratcliff appeared. The New House master gave Tom Merry & Co. a sour look.

"What are you School House boys doing here?" he snapped.

"We came ovah to have a chat with Figgins, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy mildly.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered at Tom Merry.

"Leave this House at once!" he said. "I refuse to allow School House boys on this side! Leave the House!"

"Weally, my deah sir—"

"Go!"

Tom Merry & Co. quietly left the study. When they were gone, Mr. Ratcliff fixed his eyes on Figgins & Co. The juniors who had planned to drench him had not satisfied his vengeance yet; and, moreover, the tyrant was bent upon indemnifying himself, in his own House, for the defeat he had suffered in the School House.

"Have you done your lines, Figgins?"

"No, sir!"

"And you, Kerr and Wynn?"

"No, sir!"

"They are doubled," said Mr. Ratcliff acidly. "You will remain indoors on all half-holidays until you have written out two thousand lines each."

Figgins & Co. remained grimly silent.

If Mr. Ratcliff had left it at that, it would have been all the better for him, and for the authority he was stretching to the uttermost. But he was not disposed to leave it at that. It was characteristic of Mr. Ratcliff that he never realised when he was going too far—until he had gone!

"I shall cane you for leaving your lines undone," he said. "Follow me to my study."

He whisked out. A minute later he whisked in again. Figgins & Co. had not stirred.

"Did you hear me command you to follow me to my study?" thundered the Housemaster.

"We heard you, sir," said Kerr.

"Then why did you not follow me?"

"We've been caned enough for to-day!" said the Scottish junior quietly.

"What?" Mr. Ratcliff could hardly believe his ears. "What—what did you say, Kerr?"

"We're not going to be caned again," said Figgins, loyally backing up his chum.

"We've had enough!" chimed in Fatty Wynn. "You wouldn't treat us like this if the Head was at home."

"What? What?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

It was something like rebellion, at last, and in his own House! He had asked for it, and now he had it!

He stood in the doorway, with a basilisk glare fixed on the three grim-looking juniors.

"You refuse to obey me?" he stuttered.

"We're not going to be caned!" said Figgins.

"Unless you obey me immediately, Figgins, I shall not merely cane you—all three of you will be flogged in Hall!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

Figy's face set obstinately.

"You hear me, Figgins?"

"I hear you, sir!"

"Follow me to my study!"

Mr. Ratcliff whisked out. Figgins & Co. did not move. He whisked in again, with a crimson, furious face. Undoubtedly it was rebellion now!

"For the last time, Figgins—"

Figgins looked at him. He looked at him grimly and deliberately, and his answer came with the same deliberation as his look.

"Shut the door after you!" he said.

"Wha-at?"

"Shut the door after you!"

Mr. Ratcliff stood speechless. For a moment or two he glared, and then he made a stride into the study. Figgins' grasp closed on a heavy ruler, and he stood up, his eyes ablaze. Mr. Ratcliff started back quite suddenly.

"You—you—you would dare—" he articulated.

Figgins stood grim and silent. Two or three scared faces were peering in from the passage. Mr. Ratcliff seemed speechless once more, but he found his voice at last.

"You will be flogged in the morning!" he said thickly. "You will be flogged, and then sent home. I shall make an example of you!"

And with that, Mr. Ratcliff strode away—defeated once once. Figgins & Co. looked at one another.

"Flogged!" muttered Kerr. "Flogged, and sent home!"

Figy's jaw set squarely.

"We sha'n't be flogged, and we sha'n't be sent home," he said quietly. "We're up against Ratty now, you fellows—up against him all the time, and all along the line! There's going to be trouble in the New House of St. Jim's!"

That night there was thrilling and breathless discussion in the junior dormitories in the New House. Figgins & Co. were "up against" their Housemaster; the die was cast now. On the morrow, it was to be open rebellion, or surrender, for Figgins & Co.; and those who knew Figgins & Co. best were sure that there would be no surrender.

THE END.

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IS BLAKE THE THIEF?

BY ETHEL CLEVELAND.

(Continued from last week.)

ST. JIM'S was really amazed at the news. Jack Blake, the leader of Study No. 6 and the Fourth Form generally, was charged with having stolen a large sum of money from a New House senior's study! The evidence was already very strong against Jack, and the fact that he spent half-a-sovereign in the tuckshop after the money had been missed had yet to be disclosed. Blake's chums were, of course, certain that he was quite innocent. Figgins & Co. were in the same boat.

After Monteith had laid the complaint before the Head, Blake was sent for. Jack entered the Head's study looking very pale, but with his head quite erect. The Head looked at him searchingly, but was compelled to admit that he could discover no signs of guilt in the boy's face. As Blake stuck firmly to the fact that he was innocent, the Head decided that the best thing to do would be to send for Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy.

Then, by dint of careful cross-examination, Dr. Holmes elicited the fact that the chums of Study No. 6 had been stony for several days.

"Since Blake's visit to the New House, have you noticed him in possession of more money than usual?" asked Dr. Holmes.

Herries was about to say "No," when he suddenly stopped. Flushing, he gave Blake a helpless glance. In another minute Dr. Holmes knew that Jack Blake had been in possession of half-a-sovereign. When asked where he had obtained the money, Blake bravely replied that he had found it in his pocket. But he could plainly see how heavily this was going to tell against him.

James Monteith openly sneered at such an excuse. Kildare could not help looking uneasy, and the Head's brow was set.

Blake then described how he had pulled out his handkerchief, and the coin had tumbled out on the floor. He announced that Herries had witnessed the action.

"So Blake flicked out the coin by accident, Herries?" asked the Head casually.

"Y-y-yes, sir. Quite by accident, sir!" said Herries eagerly.

Monteith grinned a broad grin, as he saw what the Head was driving at. Herries, dull-brained, but with quite the best intentions in the world, had given blacker evidence against his chum than anyone.

GUILTY.

"I am very much afraid you have stated a physical impossibility," said the Head calmly. "You have had no pocket-money for over a fortnight, and yet you suddenly pull out your handkerchief, and this coin is in it. You more or less mean to say your handkerchief has not been touched for over a fortnight. You have hitherto borne an excellent character, Blake, but I find it impossible to believe you. If you choose to restore the money, I will deal with you as leniently as I can. You must, of course, leave the college. However, in view of your good character, I will allow you to leave quietly, without a public expulsion, if you return the money in full."

Herries, D'Arcy, and Digby could restrain themselves no longer. I can't remember

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 720.

what they did say, but I'm sure their remarks were rather fiery.

Kildare proved to be Blake's last hope. The captain of St. Jim's suggested to the Head that he should suspend judgment for a few days, with the chance that something might turn up in Jack's favour. The Head granted the concession, much to Blake's joy. That evening George Figgins paid Jack a visit. He sympathised, and resolved to do all he could do to vindicate Jack.

(Does anything turn up in his favour? Does Figgy manage anything? The next time I write I shall have to describe an expulsion. Look out for it shortly in the "St. Jim's News."—COUSIN ETHEL.)

Our Information Bureau.

Conducted by Richard Julian.

LOOK FOR THE ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS HERE.

DORIS LEVISON'S age is fifteen years and five months. Tom Merry says she is certain to appear again in the "St. Jim's News" before long.

THERE are fifty-two fellows in the School House Shell and Fourth Forms.

PLANS of St. Jim's are in preparation.

THERE are many horse-chestnut trees within the walls of St. Jim's, and conker-fights have been all the rage for many weeks. The number of carelessly-tied strings can be ascertained by counting the number of juniors who have black eyes and swollen knuckles.

THERE is no weekly publication at Rylcombe like the "St. Jim's News."

CARDEW is a fairly good mechanic, and has won prizes for carpentry and woodwork. He built a model liner entirely with his own hands, while the fittings and enamel cost him twenty-five pounds.

BERNARD GLYN has obtained one of those rare little instruments for taking the blood pressure. It has been applied to Baggy Trimble and Percy Mellish on several occasions, and the pair, realising how impossible it is to err from the truth, provided much amusement in trying to work out excuses which kept the blood pressure at its ordinary level.

HARRY MANNERS' camera is fitted with an astigmatic lens.

TWENTY of the boys in the New House and School House Shell and Fourth Forms go to Wayland twice a week for dancing lessons.

THE Frivolity Theatre at Wayland sometimes gives a variety programme on music-hall lines, and occasionally has a long comedy or revue. The Theatre Royal deals only in the usual comedy, drama, and revue turns. The town also has three cinemas. They are the Empire, the Wayland Riviera, and Somerset Road Electric Palace.

CUTTS is in the Fifth Form, and has a swelled head.

FIGGINS' sister is called Kathleen. THERE is a dark-room provided at St. Jim's for amateur photographers.

REGINALD TALBOT will have quite a lot of sporting events to report shortly.

SWIMMING in the River Rhyl has ceased, but the hot water baths at Rylcombe enable the boys who are keen on perfecting their strokes to continue practice. Exciting water-polo matches also take place when the weather is unsuitable for outdoor sports.

OTTERS are destroying many trout in the waters of the Higher Rhyl. A hunt is shortly

to be organised, and many of the boys are contemplating taking part in the chase.

COUSIN ETHEL is fifteen years and two months old.

MARIE RIVERS is nearly eighteen.

RACKE has just made another offer to Tom Merry. He said he'd write an article on how he'd go to Monte Carlo and blew a quarter of a million pounds. I don't know what Tom Merry said, but I know Racke came out of his study a jolly sight quicker than he went in.

NO, Jack Blake doesn't come from Glasgow, as was published in error. He is from Yorkshire.

CARDEW'S motor-bike is a "N.U.T." Talbot's cycle is a Sunbeam.

CARDEW owns an electric punt, and the chums of Study No. 9 go for many little river picnics in it.

LORD EASTWOOD—D'Arcy's father—is the son of old Lord Reckness' sister. You can now see how Gussy and Cardew are related.

Latest Football Results

MATCHES PLAYED LAST SATURDAY.

BY HARRY NOBLE.

(Exclusive to the "St. Jim's News.")

TRUMPER & CO. DEFEAT ST. JIM'S—LOW SCORES VERY NUMEROUS—KILDARE KEEPS ST. JIM'S FLAG FLYING—GRUNDY ON THE WARPATH—LUST FOR GOALS—JUNIOR ROOKWOOD'S FAST GAME—BOLSOVER BEATEN BY HIS OWN FORM.

SENIOR.

No.	Match	Results
1.	St. Jim's v. Bagshot	2-0
2.	Abbotsford v. Highcliffe	1-1
3.	Redcliffe v. St. Jude's	0-2
4.	Rylcombe v. Greyfriars	0-5

JUNIOR.

5.	St. Jim's v. Courtfield	3-4
6.	Bagshot v. Rookwood	3-5
7.	Greyfriars v. Redcliffe	2-1
8.	Rylcombe v. Highcliffe	0-1

INTER-HOUSE.

9.	Rookwood Shell v. Grundy's Growlers	19-20
10.	Bolsover's Bashers v. Remove Second Team	8-11
11.	Horace Coker's XI. v. Highcliffe Elect	3-4

OTHER MATCHES (Unofficial).

12.	Bunter Minor's XI. v. St. Jude's Fags	2-0
13.	Redcliffe Fags v. St. Jim's Second	8-3

Goal-scorers, and grounds on which matches were played:

No. 1.—Played at Bagshot. Darrel and Baker. No. 2.—At Abbotsford; Stephens and Langley. No. 3.—At St. Jude's; Haselby and Richards. No. 4.—At Greyfriars; Wingate (2), Hammersley, Bland, and Gwynne. No. 5.—At St. Jim's; Talbot, Levison, Figgins, Trumper (2), Grahame, and Wickers. No. 6.—At Rookwood; Pankley (2), Poole, Silver (2), Oswald, Dodd, and Lovell. No. 7.—At Redcliffe; Vernon-Smith and Cherry and Slimby. No. 8.—At Highcliffe; De Courcy. No. 9.—At Rookwood; Smythe (8), Selwyn (4), Howard (3), Tracy (4), Grundy (20), Gore (6). No. 10.—At Greyfriars; Bolsover (8), Brown (5), Penfold (3), Newland (3). No. 11.—At Highcliffe; Horace Coker (3), Ponsonby, Monson, Gadsby, and Vavasour. No. 12.—At St. Jude's; Sammy Bunter (2).

The Queer Case of Dr. Brutell

Written By Professor Hector Gordon, Science Master of St. Jim's.



An extraordinary story, dealing with incidents in the life of Dr. Brutell, the well-known scientist. Brutell, in his normal moods, is a highly respected man, but he is afflicted with a strange malady which alters his whole character.

The package.

DR. BRUTELL, who was an early riser, was one of the first to meet the sheriff's man in the morning, and the two men had a short chat together while the morning meal was being prepared.

In the course of the conversation Brutell learnt a good deal of interesting information concerning the movements of the police, and of the success with which their efforts had so far met.

A large number of the members of the gang had apparently been traced to a country bungalow, and with a well-planned raid, a successful haul was made. All those who were caught were now successfully lodged in gaol. Unfortunately, however, the two men known as Hammer and Pinchers, whom the police had good reason to believe were the ring-leaders of the villains, had made good their escape.

It was these two members whom the authorities especially desired to catch, for there was little doubt that they provided the "brains" of the gang. Needless to say, the police had not the slightest idea that a certain much-respected scientist and doctor, known by the name of Brutell, was the principal adviser of the villainous circle.

Brutell himself would also receive a tremendous shock if it were suggested that he was the arch-rogue of this dangerous gang. Another interesting item of news that the doctor learnt from his new-found friend was that the valuable box of papers and bonds which had been stolen from Mr. Stanton's residence had now been recovered.

It was proposed to send these by a special messenger to Madeleine, who had taken up her residence in her father's mountain home. But, unknown to everybody, Hammer and Pinchers had obtained knowledge of this plan, and as it was their desire to again possess Mr. Stanton's valuable papers, they proposed to waylay the messenger on his journey.

Pinchers undertook to carry out this all-important work, while his colleague went off to attend a meeting of the remaining members of the Black Circle at their hiding-place in a cave in the mountains.

In spite of the vigilance of Pinchers, the messenger entrusted with the package to deliver to Madeleine, got well on his journey without being caught.

Pinchers was naturally very annoyed to be outwitted in this manner. He had succeeded in following the trail of the messenger, but, unfortunately for him, no opportunity to capture the man had so far offered itself. Pinchers was determined to keep him under observation, and follow him, if necessary, to his destination, so that, at all events, he would be aware of the ultimate resting-place of the important package.

Dr. Brutell Returns.

I SHALL be leaving you for a short while in order to pay a visit to my home!"

When Dr. Brutell broke this news to Madeleine she could not help feeling a trifle sad. It was true his absence would not last

very long, but since the strange disappearance of her father, the doctor had to a great extent taken his place.

Madeleine never felt uneasy when she knew he was in the house, in spite of the threats of the Black Circle. Everybody liked Dr. Brutell, and Robert Stanton's daughter was no exception. He seemed to be able to solve most difficulties which came along, and nothing went wrong when he attended to it.

Although Madeleine very naturally did not try to persuade Dr. Brutell to change his mind, she did express a hope that he would return to them again in the shortest possible time, and the doctor, with a kindly smile, promised that he would do so. But strange things were going to happen before Dr. Brutell returned once again to the mountain ranch-house.

Very shortly after his departure for the city, the police messenger arrived and delivered the package belonging to her father to Madeleine. The girl was delighted beyond words to receive the papers again. She knew now that the police were on the right track, and she hoped that before long they would succeed in tracing the whereabouts of her beloved father. This was the news she longed to hear, night and day.

Sometimes she became depressed, and wondered if it would ever be her good fortune to see her father alive again. She knew the villainous members of the Black Circle would show him no mercy if he refused to fall in with their wishes. For all she knew, he might even now be dead!

It made the unhappy girl shudder to think of such a thing, and had it not been for the cheery presence of Dr. Brutell, who always did his best to keep her in good spirits, she wondered what would become of her. Thank goodness she had such a good friend near her! Now he had gone away from her again.

But Madeleine told herself that she would not be alone for long. Dr. Brutell would come back to her and protect her again as soon as he had finished his business. She felt sure of that! But unfortunately for poor Madeleine, the friend of her father, the man she had so much faith in, was even now about to strike at her happiness in some terrible way.

For shortly after his arrival home, Dr. Brutell was seized again by one of his terrible spells of evil. He had gone to his laboratory to carry out one or two urgent experiments, and had at the same time taken the opportunity of recharging his "double X-ray" battery. This had become exhausted during his stay at the ranch-house.

Brutell had not sooner completed this task than the evil demon took possession of his mind and body once again. With the return of this malady, the doctor assumed the sinister garb and the secret powers of the Black Circle gang.

He lost no time in calling a meeting, and he ordered the remaining members of the gang to assemble in their weird meeting-place in the city. Brutell heard the official story of the raid by the police on the gang's headquarters, and he did not disguise his anger at the men for falling into such a trap. He declared his intention of releasing the captured members at once.

The news caused great surprise to the remnants of the gang. Their leader had often amazed them by his wonderful powers, but they could not believe it possible that he would succeed in his desire to release the prisoners.

The police, having secured such dangerous members of society, would have them well-watched, and there would not be many loopholes for escape. That seemed quite certain. But the members of the Black Circle had not reckoned with their leader's mysterious powers. Would he succeed in his desire?

The Triple X-Ray.

"HAMMER," the second in command of the Black Circle gang, was about to try to persuade Dr. Brutell to change his mind. But the doctor was not the sort of man to alter a decision when he had made one.

With a wave of his hand, he indicated that he did not wish to hear any arguments against his proposal from anyone, then, standing up suddenly, he ordered Hammer and Pinchers to accompany him.

"Show me where the prison is!" he demanded in a loud voice.

The two men at once indicated their willingness to obey the orders of their fiery chief.

It was the mad doctor's intention to release the captured members of the gang, and then proceed at once to the Stanton Ranch, and recover the bonds and other valuables which the police had returned.

Pinchers had reported that he had seen Madeleine deposit the valuable parcel in a strong secret safe in the wall of the ranch-house, and, possessed of this useful information, Brutell knew that he would have no difficulty in obtaining them.

The doctor was now fully in the throes of his evil passion, and under his strange influence he was becoming very excitable. The three men at once made their way to the prison in which the other members of the gang were held captive. In a short time their destination was reached, and the party halted.

Hammer and Pinchers looked at each other in dismay as they stood outside the prison walls.

Their leader was a clever man, no doubt. On many occasions previously he had accomplished seemingly impossible tasks. His wonderful success often bewildered them, but how did he propose to crumble the walls of this mighty gaol? This seemed to be the only way in which he could hope to be successful.

No man could succeed in gaining an entrance to the prison, for all the doors and windows were too well watched.

But Dr. Brutell had a powerful ally, of which even his two chief assistants were ignorant.

The doctor always believed in keeping his own counsel as much as possible. He did not consider it good policy to let his men be as wise as he was himself, and there was not the slightest doubt that he was right in taking this course. Even now Brutell was not going to let Hammer and Pinchers into his well-guarded secret.

In a few moments now they would be the witnesses of something which would amaze them, but only the mad scientist would know how this extraordinary result was brought about.

Dr. Brutell's hands moved under the big black cloak which he was wearing, and immediately the triple X-ray, the deadly force which the doctor knew only in his evil moments, was set in motion.

Brutell directed the battery towards a portion of the prison walls, and immediately they commenced to crumble like dust. The thing happened with startling suddenness, and in addition, the operation was quite a noiseless one.

This was all-important, for the conspirators had no desire to arouse the curiosity of the prison guard. The slightest noise would be sufficient to make them suspicious. Then an investigation would be made, and the alarm given, and Brutell had no wish to be made a prisoner.

For a moment Hammer and Pinchers looked in astonishment at the work of their leader's strange and mysterious power. The stone walls and masonry of the prison had crumbled away before their eyes as though they had been made of sand.

(To be continued in next Wednesday's GEM.)

THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE

Read this magnificent story dealing with the adventures of three chums in a strange country.

By REID WHITLEY.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Hobby Tarrant and Tony Matthers, with Billy Kettle, a trusted negro servant, are on an expedition in the Andes. A volcanic eruption, causing a tremendous tidal wave, carries their canoe into the Valley of Surprise. The party explore the valley, and meet many weird and wonderful animals, and experience many adventurous times. Reaching a village, they are confronted by a race of strange primitive men, who show great hospitality, and make friends. But Maxla, the medicine-man, hates the newcomers, and through a dastardly scheme which he hatches, they very nearly lose their lives. Later, the three chums have an exciting fight with a gigantic prehistoric creature, called a stegosaur.

A Narrow Escape.

THE stegosaur wobbled. His head whirled up, his mouth opened, showing a fearsome double line of keen teeth, then the neck grew suddenly limp. Down dropped the head, the forelegs gave way, the whole forepart of the brute collapsed. It was dead.

But, strangely enough, the hindquarters and the great tail were still alive. The brain, the intelligence that directed its movements, had ceased to function since the lines of communication were cut. But, like all the other gigantic reptiles, the stegosaur had a sort of secondary brain set far along the spine near the tail, and this had still vitality enough to keep that formidable weapon flailing.

"Off we get!" yelled Tony. "Keep away from its stern. Over to that narrow cave there! Something is coming!"

They slid to the ground and began to run as, with a long-drawn hissing, a second stegosaur, smaller than the first, but yet terribly huge, appeared from a gully and made for them.

Over the rough ground they raced, dodging between the big stones that bestrewed it, up the fall of loose rubble to a broad platform of weather-worn rock, and in at the door of the cave which was so narrow that they could barely squeeze through.

And it was lucky that this was so, for, with a rush that sent the small stones flying, the stegosaur came flying on their heels. Tony, who brought up the rear, felt something pluck at his jacket tail. For one awful moment he was dragged back, then the scorched cloth gave way, and he stumbled forward into the gloom of the cavern and fell headlong against Hobby.

The pair rolled together over the floor and picked themselves up breathless, while Billy wheeled and struck at the huge reptile head, hissing and snorting as its owner strove to force itself in.

It drew back at the blow. Presently they heard it move away, and ventured to peep out. The beast was nosing its fellow. Then, having made sure that one half at least was out of action for ever, it calmly began to eat, even though the tail still swung to and fro.

The Keepers of the Cave.

NOW, for the first time since the beginning of their wild ride, Tony and Hobby had breath and leisure to speak.

"We're in a beastly hole!" began Hobby. "And we daren't leave it. That brute would run us down in a few strides, and even if he

didn't get us, something else would. D'you think we could get back to the forest along the cliffs? I thought I saw ledges."

"We might," agreed Tony. "I'll look."

He squeezed his way out and glanced upwards, but he was allowed only a moment to see that there was no way up close at hand. Though the stegosaur was busy with its comrade, it yet kept an eye on the cave. It saw him, whirled about, and made a swift dash that sent him scuttling back with only a yard or two to spare.

"No road that way—and no chance of getting clear, anyhow, so long as that brute's in the offing," he said. "The only thing we can do in the meanwhile is to explore this cave. There may be an outlet higher up. It seems to run a long way back."

But to explore the place they must have a light, since to proceed in the dark meant a deadly risk of falling into some crevice, or perhaps walking into the jaws of some abomination which lurked in the depths.

They had matches, but nothing with which to make torches, the floor of the cave being clear of everything except stones and fungus. Outside, however, were sundry logs and branches, dry as tinder, which had been swept down from aloft by some cloudburst.

Tony made another sortie, and succeeded in getting one fair-sized branch, but, as before, the stegosaur was on the alert, and he barely escaped its teeth.

"Too risky!" he panted, as the brute once more returned to its interrupted meal. "We'll have to wait till the beast goes off, or goes to sleep."

The day wore on, but the terrible sentry still remained on duty. Its appetite satisfied, it lay down, but, if it slept, it snoozed with one eye open, and at the least movement from the cave prepared for action.

At last, towards sundown, it moved away downhill to drink at a runnel, and, taking advantage of its absence, Tony and Billy hauled in more wood. But by then it was too late to do more. Even if they found an outlet they could not venture to clamber along ledges or down precipices in the dark.

"We must sleep here and start early in the morning," said Tony.

"But I'm uncommonly peckish," remonstrated Hobby. "In fact, I'm starving!"

"Bosh! Time enough to talk of that in a couple of days," returned Tony. "Go to sleep! We don't need any fire."

"Mebbe not, Marse Tony," put in Billy. "But mebbe something narrow crawl in through de door in de night. I reckons we best take some of dese here rocks and fill it up a bit."

They spent the last of the light on this job; then, certain that nothing could get at them, settled down to sleep. Outside the usual night chorus began to echo along the rocks. Once they heard the stegosaur sniffing and snorting at the cave mouth. But inside all was silent.

Hobby was snoring; Billy's heavy breathing told that he, too, was in a land where neither Stegys nor Brown Toes troubled him, and Tony had fallen into a doze. High overhead was a faint rustle as of dry leather sheets rubbing against each other. Then something fluttered softly past Tony's cheek, and he awoke.

Surely something living was near them. Faint squeaks, such as might come from microscopic mice, strange flappings, odd rustlings, sounded on every side. He kept perfectly still. Again a waft of air fanned his cheek. Something dropped ever so lightly upon his shoulder; he smelt a faint, musty-mousy reek—and then there was a tiny pricking at the lobe of an ear.

He threw up his hand. It struck a warm, furry body, that appeared to be perched on his shoulder. It fell over with a fluttering and squeaking.

"Rouse up!" he shouted, and lit a match.

Almost at once it was blown out by the rush of air from a score pair of leathery wings, but in that moment he had seen enough. They were assailed by bats—vampire bats—which spent their days sleeping in crevices of the rock roof, and fluttered out at night to feed on whatever beast would allow them to suck its blood while it slept.

Striking right and left in the darkness with his hat, Tony lit another match and

set fire to a pile of dry chips which he had laid handy for an emergency. As they flared up, Hobby and Billy woke, in time to see the dazzled creatures flap away from the sudden illumination.

"Ough!" exclaimed Billy, sitting up and looking ruefully at a toe protruding from a worn boot. "I forgot about dem dere suckers. Dey been biting us. Look at your knee, Marse Hobby—and your ear, Marse Tony, and dis here toe o' mine!"

Certainly the vampires had made good use of the short time they had been at work. Blood streamed from the tiny punctures they had made. If Tony had been soundly asleep when they started operations the three might never have awakened again, but passed into the sleep of death, drained of their blood by scores of small but very hungry mouths.

"I hardly felt the bite," said Tony, wiping away the blood from his ear-lobe. "If I had been asleep—ugh! We must take it in turns to watch and keep the fire up."

And so, throughout the weary night, one of them kept vigil. For a while the bats circled about at a respectful distance from the fire-light, but in a while they grew discouraged and departed. Hobby, who was on guard at the time, saw them flit away, not by way of the partly blocked door, but in the opposite direction, deep into the recesses of the cave.

"I guess they know another way out," he muttered. "I hope it's big enough to get through. Another day without grub will about settle me."

Dawn came at last, creeping in through the upper part of the doorway. Aloft, squeaking and rustling announced that the bats had returned, and were settling down for the day's sleep. Outside, the stegosaur still kept watch and ward, making an eager rush when Tony displaced a bit of rock to view the morning.

"The sooner we get going the sooner we may get out," he said, and, holding aloft a flaring torch, while the others carried the spare stock of wood, they set off into the depths of the cave.

Presently they found a pool of water and slaked their thirst, for though they had started with full water-bottles, they had exhausted them during the night. Refreshed by a sluice, they went on over an irregular flooring, which rose in a steep slope.

The cave wound about a good deal. Sometimes it was so low that they could touch the roof with an uplifted hand—sometimes so high that the light of the torch did not reach it. The air, however, was quite fresh, and this gave them hope that they would soon find an outlet.

At last Tony paused, wetted a finger, and held it up. A draught cooled it. They were surely nearing another mouth. And then, as they turned a bend of the tunnel, they saw before them what looked like a star. It was the glorious light of day, which they had begun to despair of ever seeing again.

It grew larger with every step forward, and soon they were able to dispense with the torch and quicken their pace. It was almost at a run that they covered the last hundred yards to the mouth, where they halted.

A glorious panorama of the whole valley lay stretched before them. They had travelled some considerable way from the place where they had entered, and risen several hundred feet in the course of their wanderings in the bowels of the cliff. Beneath them the rocks dropped sheer to a tangled scrub growing on the slopes of deep and narrow gulleys, down some of which water ran towards the lake.

In the distance they could distinguish the patch of forest land where lived the Arik, and, but for the dazzle of sunlight, might have made out the smoke of their fires. It was no very great distance. They might have covered it in less than a couple of hours—if it had not been for the various delightful creatures that lurked between.

As if to remind them of the dangers that lay in wait for the traveller, the waters of the lake rippled suddenly, and up from the depths came a long, snaky thing, which paddled itself ashore and waddled swiftly

(Continued on page 18.)



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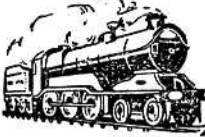
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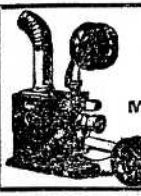


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THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE.

(Continued from page 16.)

into a thicket on webbed feet. A minute after it emerged, bearing something that writhed and wriggled, and plunged under water, to be seen no more.

"Jiminy! That's a sweet creature!" exclaimed Tony. "What is it, Hobby?"

"I don't know!" growled Hobby. "And I don't care! All I know is that I'm so peckish I believe I could eat the beggar at a sitting. Look here! This ledge is very narrow, but I think we can get along it all right."

"Him wider further on," said Billy, who had been inspecting the cliff face with an expert's eye. "Us can go a long way, Marse Tony, and dere's a way down, too."

It was ticklish work at first. With their faces to the cliff they sidled along a ledge barely a foot wide, knowing well that a slip would be fatal. But ten minutes' breathless side-stepping brought them at last to a wider platform, where they could halt and decide their next move.

A bit of branch lay in a corner of the niche. Tony glanced at it, and his eyes narrowed. It had been broken from its parent stem not long before, and roughly trimmed. What creature had brought it there? He inspected the ground. A little soil had gathered on the ledge, and it was soft enough to betray the imprint of feet—feet that looked human, yet were bigger than any man's that Tony had ever seen.

The answer was plain. The Mangas, the red-haired, semi-human brutes who plagued the Ariki, and had tried to waylay the adventurers, had been there but a short while before.

In one way this discovery was consoling. It proved that there was a more or less safe path along the cliff, and some means of reaching the forest without crossing open ground. On the other hand, if the Mangas should discover that their foes were on the cliff, they could make the remainder of the journey very unsafe, if not impossible.

Tony glanced up. There were many other ledges running across the rocky scarp. If the Mangas got upon one of them and threw stones, they could make further progress impossible. Billy seemed to have read his thoughts.

"Dat's so, Marse Tony," he said, with a sage nod. "Us must get on. We get along to where dat crack go down to de gully. Den we can get down if we has to."

They waited no longer, but made on, and had almost reached the place Billy had indicated when, without any warning, a great stone sung through the air, struck the ledge almost at Hobby's feet, and bounded off into space. The Mangas were on the alert, and their line of retreat was cut.

Up Against the Mangas.

IF the Mangas had been wise they would have waited a little longer before opening hostilities. But patience wasn't their strong point. They had spied the strangers, and at once began to throw stones. And it happened that the cliff at that point was somewhat hollowed, so that the three were not so much exposed as they might have been farther along.

For the same reason the Mangas on the ledge above had to lean far out in order to see their foes at all. Tony saw a hairy arm and shoulder protrude from the cliff face some fifty feet overhead. His rifle was ready, and as a full-moon, fur-fringed face followed, he fired.

A loud yell, a shower of dust and stones followed the shot, then down the cliff slid a Manga, howling wildly as he plunged to his doom on the rocks far below.

The shower of stones ceased. There were howls of fury and dismay. That lucky bullet had reminded the near-humans that these strangers were gifted with the curious and dreadful power of slaying at long range, with a certainty that no stone or thrown stick could approach.

For a minute they howled and jabbered, and during that minute the three had gained the head of the crevice slanting to the gully. There they were sheltered from direct discharge by an overhanging rock.

After a wild hullabaloo, the Mangas began throwing again, but their missiles pattered impotently upon the protecting rock. They edged along their shelf till they could job chunks of sandstone under the cover, but in doing so they had to expose themselves, and again Tony's rifle took toll, toppling another red down the cliff, whilst a third got a bullet through the shoulder, and retired hurt.

After that there was a pause. The fight had come to a deadlock. While the three could not move under pain of being brained, the Mangas could do nothing to dislodge

them without exposing themselves to the terrible freestick that flashed and banged and alew so unerringly.

Tony took advantage of the lull to glance from the shelter up the rock. A path, very rough, but climbable, led to the shelf on which the enemy were clustered.

"We can't stay here much longer," he said. "If they don't clear off, we had best attack. While two of us covered him, the other might climb aloft. A shot or two on the level should send the beggars to the rightabout."

"I'll go, Marse Tony! I see a sure shot wid de pistol. I sure will start dem off so's dey not wait to see what hit dem."

Tony was about to assent when a long-drawn yell from aloft announced some fresh happening. What was it? The Mangas were all yelling together. Tony could see them moving, though they crouched low. They were retreating. Stones still fell, but they were dislodged by flying feet, not thrown.

Then Hobby and Billy, who were looking out on the other side of the stone that sheltered them, gasped together, as down the cliff, spreadeagled, but moving easily and swiftly, came a bear.

It was of the same species as that which they had first seen on the morning after their arrival in the happy valley. If possible, it was even bigger. It was the sort of bear that an artist might have drawn as a portrait of the Great Bear, the father of all the bears. And, very unfortunately, it seemed to have winded or caught sight of the three crouching under the rock.

It might have pursued the Mangas along the ledges. Instead, it chose what seemed the easier prey, and made straight for the three.

(Another instalment of this grand serial will appear in next week's issue of "THE GEM LIBRARY." Order EARLY.)

EDITORIAL ::

My Dear Chums,—

I am sure our forthcoming Christmas Number will fulfil all possible requirements. It is going to be a record one in every way.

This special issue will do more than recall the triumphs which go back to long before the war. I am confident the Christmas Number will establish a new record, and that is better than starting comparisons with what has been. A new season must have its own special kind of success.

You would be surprised at the bright ideas that pour in from some of my readers. Somebody would like Tom Merry & Co. to go on a lengthy exploring expedition in the uttermost wilds. There is nothing more against the notion than that it would not fit in with the series. Tom Merry bagging lions and tigers would be mighty interesting, and Skimpole could collect butterflies of the gayest hues and put them in boxes, but both these characters would be badly missed at St. Jim's. It seems to me that the new serial "The Valley of Surprise," supplies all the adventurous romance one wants. It is no good getting outside the picture. That is a thing Mr. Martin Clifford never does. Hence his success.

If real adventure is wanted, there it is

in the splendid serial. Reid Whitley has conjured up a picture of a mysterious jungle which will long be remembered. It is a really great story, as a chum in Scotland says. "One likes to read of what may seem to be impossible." It holds you, and you go on from start to finish, believing it all."

The "St. Jim's News" is being enjoyed as much in Australia, and the other countries beyond the sea, as here at home. I hope later to give in the amusing supplement more concerning the peculiarities of some of the characters. A day in the life of Monty Lowther would furnish something very readable; Monty, in his more serious moments, might be able to tell us much of interest. Gordon Gay, too, must have many more ideas than he makes out. As a rule, the light-hearted and troublesome Grammarian comes into the limelight because he and his friends contrive to waylay Gussy, and, thanks to superior odds, to work their will, and escape a "faithful thwashin'." I am pretty well convinced, too, that Herries could contribute something pretty weighty on the subject of dogs and how to keep them. D'Arcy is full of notions. There is plenty more to be added to the chronicles of St. Jim's, and the additions will be made all in good time.

Baggy Trimble does not hesitate to say what is passing in what he is pleased to call his mind. If he cared to write "Things I Have Heard," there would be a rush—for Baggy hears most things. By the way, Glyn is due with another invention. But all this takes me away from the Christmas Number. Bear it in mind, and make sure your order is placed well ahead.

YOUR EDITOR.

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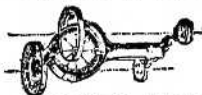
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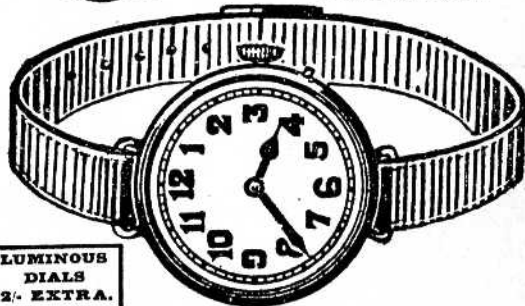
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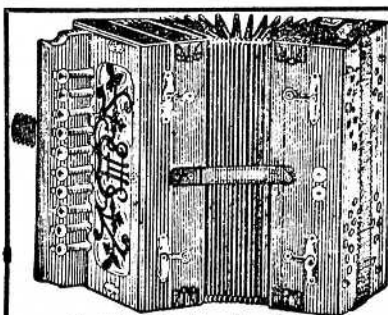
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