

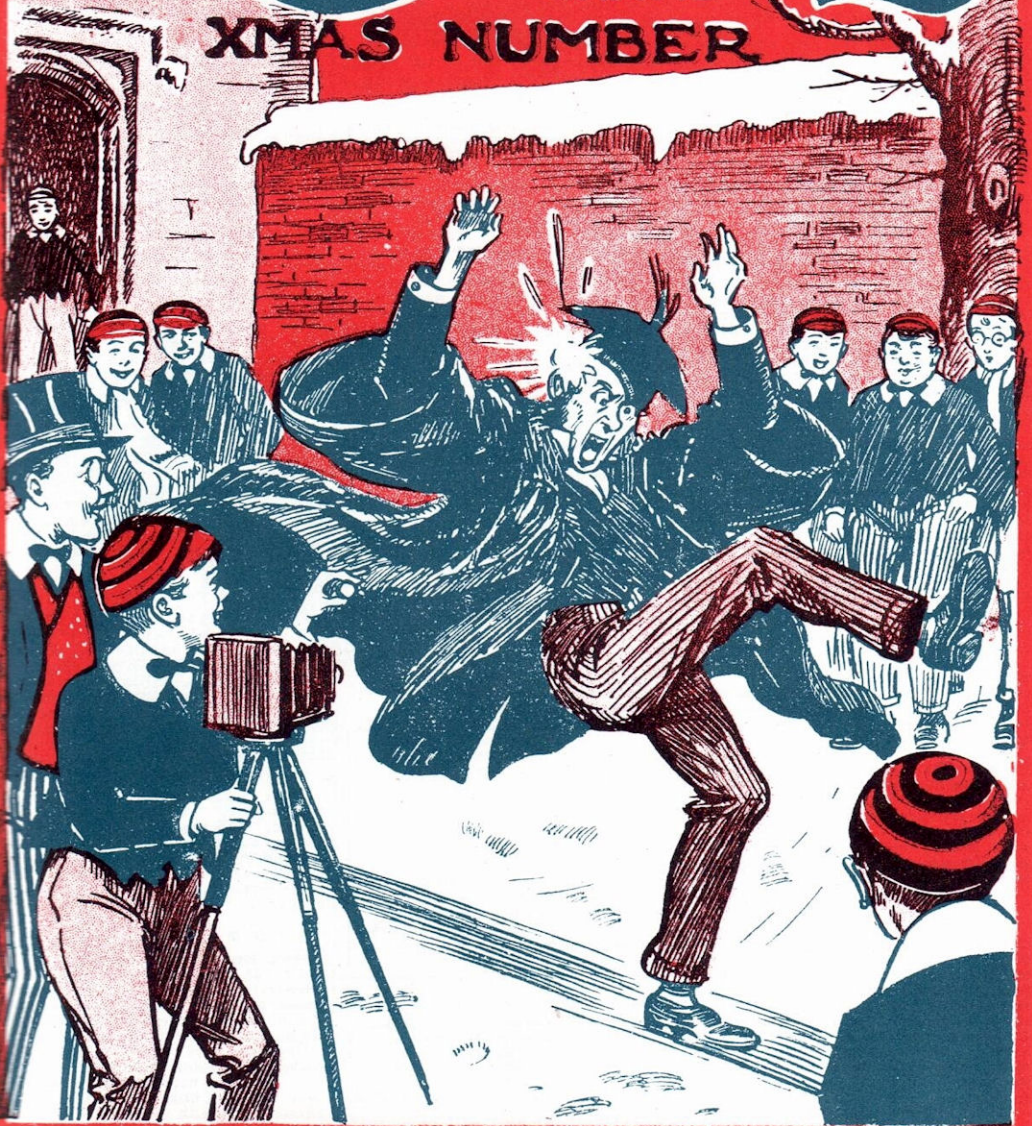
TOM MERRY "SACKED" ON THE EVE OF BREAKING-UP!
(You must not miss this powerful school story inside!)

The

No. 776.
Vol. XXII,
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THE GEM 2

**GRAND
XMAS NUMBER**



A SEASONABLE SNAPSHOT!

The Unpopular Master is "Caught" in an undignified attitude - and trouble results!

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Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

Address all letters: The Editor, "The Gem Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

My dear Chums,—This good old season of Christmas can be celebrated in a score of different ways, but in all the thousands of homes up and down the world where Christmas means so much the one leading idea stands out before everything else, namely, that Christmas is the special time for doing something extra for others—in fact, doing a rare lot for them—and then Christmas will be honoured as it was meant to be.

BUT ONCE A YEAR.

That's just it. Christmas comes but once a year, but the magnificent spirit of the season is carried right through the twelve months. Christmas, too, is the great start for new and better things, fresh ideas, helps more good feeling, boundless generosity, a grand supply of clean slates, with forgetfulness for all old grudges and everything else that happens to be offside.

OUR "GEM" CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

The GEM is out to mark Christmas in a very special way. I am coming to that part in a minute, but first of all I should like to say that my thoughts and wishes are with my readers all the time. My chums have stood by me and the GEM for years and years, and I do not suppose I can possibly beat the age-old method of expressing what I feel towards them all than by wishing them the old wish:

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

There are countless GEM readers who will be spending Christmas in the distant tropics under a blazing sun, with a cloudless blue sky overhead, and one can envy them their good fortune, though, as like as not, they do not know their luck. There are others far away in the great North-West, where the beaver makes his home and the frost king keeps everything under lock and key for months on end. But it is the same old Christmas in any event, bringing the same cheery inspirations, making the settler dream of the old land. Good luck to him, likewise everybody.

THAT CHRISTMAS BARRING-OUT!

It sounds a bit strange if you come to think of it, for Christmas is a time before all others for letting everybody in, giving the whole world a good time as far as lies in human power to manage it. But this special Christmas story has plenty of sound reason behind it. Mr. Martin Clifford has spread himself to win an extra success on this celebrated occasion. You will find St. Jim's maintaining all its grand old traditions, and keeping Christmas in great style.

What is more, the rest of our programme this week is right in accordance with the splendid reputation of the GEM for high-class fiction.

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HOW TO SPEND CHRISTMAS!

We know jolly well how Baggy Trimble spends his. There are as many styles of spending Christmas as there are people. I never did hold with the idea that Christmas was only a season for kids. Young fellows reaching manhood like it every bit as keenly as in the days when they were toddlers. And the fun and spirit of it! The animation in towns and villages, the lively marketing scenes, with people cramming their baskets full of good things, and the Christmas-trees standing in jolly rows waiting for purchasers who will deck the branches out with presents galore, and light up red and yellow candles to show the way. But it is impossible to touch on the subject in a short Chat, for the whole business is too big, and always has been.

JUST THE THING!

That's what people say, of course, whatever the present may turn out to be. One is always polite, naturally. But don't give a racing motor-bike to your timid old aunt aged seventy-five, when you know perfectly well she always takes the air in a bathchair. If you hand a nice packet of fragrant tobacco to an uncle who makes a boast of it that he never smoked, it is ten to one he will turn huffy. It is wise to take thought of these matters and avoid misunderstandings.

"BARRED OUT!"

St. Jim's has risen with a vengeance. The new barring-out series of stories beats anything ever written of a school

"My Readers' Own Corner" is crowded out this week. There will be another list of prizes in our next issue.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER:— NOT THE CULPRIT!

Motor Cyclist: "Do you know anything about an aeroplane which dropped near here?"

Urchin (holding catapult and trembling): "No, sir, I've only been shootin' at sparrers!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to J. Johnston, 133, Comely Park Street, Dennistown, Glasgow.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON

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No attempt will be considered un-
less accompanied by one of these
COUPONS.

Another Tuck Hamper will be awarded next week, also some money prizes. Send in your witty paragraph NOW.

uprising. The coming sensations will fairly leave you gasping, so mind and get your next week's copy of the GEM, for there will be an extra rush. I have no hesitation in saying that Mr. Martin Clifford has scored a triumph. He shows in clear and forcible language the why and wherefore of the rebellion, and the stout resistance put up against an unendurable state of affairs is described in trenchant fashion. Here we have the real thing, fierce feeling, a good cause, all the motive for setting up a state of siege, and—well, you will be watching out with intense eagerness for the fresh developments in the stirring narrative. The good men of St. Jim's don't enter a stern fight of this kind without jolly good reason. They had it here. No turning back. You are swept off your feet with the exciting rush of events and the swift succession of surprises. We owe hearty congratulations to the author on the magnificent way in which he has handled a grand theme.

ALWAYS IN REQUEST!

Barrings out are always wanted. Readers go back in memory to past incidents of this kind. St. Jim's has had its share of rebellions—all in a good and just cause—and Tom Merry has always contrived to hold his own.

The wonder is there was no upheaval when the Borneo boy came to the school, as just recently described in our Companion Paper, the "Popular."

A GRAND DETECTIVE YARN!

There is much to be said of "The Santa Marcian Stamp!" This is the title of a very exciting detective story. You get into the thick of a Governmental intrigue in this tale. Stamps have an immense fascination for collectors, but they have a lot more significance sometimes—as in this case, where we get in touch with mystery and revolution. Look out for a treat next week.

MORE FINE FEATURES!

Our footer yarn next week is called "Rival Centre-Forwards!" It is a real-life drama in addition to being as powerful a story of the great game as I remember. Also, just take note that the magnificent serial, "The Wolves of St. Beowulf's!" carries the interest on in brilliant style. Next week's instalment reveals Duncan Storm at his best.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

Make sure you see our Companion Papers—the "Magnet," the "Boys' Friend," and the "Popular." They are putting out grand programmes, while the "Holiday Annual" is winning new friends every day. No home but what is the better and cheerier for the presence of a copy of this splendid volume.

TO MY "GEM" CHUMS.

Here have I been talking about the GEM. It is time to say something of the unwavering loyalty to the old paper shown by my friends all over the globe. I want to thank them all. I want to tell them that past triumphs will be eclipsed in the good days coming of 1923. And I wish, once again, to wish them all the very jolliest, happiest Christmas that ever was—a Christmas with good hope ahead, and with good luck following them down the road close as a shadow all the way.

YOUR EDITOR.



FOR FRIENDSHIP'S SAKE!

The Dawn of Christmas and Denounced as a Thief! Could any boy be in a more terrible position than Tom Merry? This is a Real Grand Christmas Story.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I. Snapping "Ratty."

"HERE comes Ratty—"
"Bother Ratty" snapped Manners.

Manners of the Shell was busy. His camera was arranged upon a tripod, and Manners was focusing. At such a moment Manners was blind and deaf to all other considerations. And Ratty—otherwise Mr. Horace Ratcliff, Housemaster—didn't matter much anyway—to Manners, at least.

It was freezing hard—iron hard. The old elms at St. Jim's were leafless and rimed with frost. Frost glistened on the gravel paths and the window-panes. It was cold—bitterly cold. But the St. Jim's juniors did not seem to mind the cold. There was a buzz of cheery shouting in the old quadrangle, and a genial whizzing of snowballs. And thirty juniors at least were rushing one after another along a slide.

It was against all rules to make a slide in the quad. But rules sometimes were broken. On this occasion the rule was broken very considerably. Figgins & Co., of the New House, had started the slide—and several other New House fellows had followed on. Then, of course, there had been a rush of School House fellows to shift them and take possession of the slide. School House and New House were always at war, and this was an opportunity not to be lost.

So there was great excitement reigning in the quadrangle. It was close on the date for breaking up for Christmas, and the spirit of Christmas frolic seemed to have descended already upon the St. Jim's juniors.

While the battle raged with snowballs and scuffling and shouting, a crowd of fellows still whizzed along the slide. The scrapping was quite good-humoured on both sides; still, it was scrapping, and when Mr. Ratcliff's eye fell upon it from his study window, Mr. Ratcliff sallied forth from the New House like a lion from his lair, came in hand.

Mr. Ratcliff's orderly soul abhorred the breaking of rules. Mr. Ratcliff lived, and moved, and had his being in rules, and the keeping of them. Mr. Ratcliff never knew when it was judicious to close an eye to the breaking of rules. He never was known to close an eye when there was a chance of catching a fellow out.

And now the rules were being knocked sky high. Not only was there a slide going on, but there was a scrap going on—both forbidden. With a long thin nose blue with cold, and a pair of sharp eyes glittering with wrath, Mr. Ratcliff approached the scene with rapid strides, prepared to act his usual part of a killjoy.

Most of the juniors were too busy to heed him. But Tom Merry and Lowther, who were standing by Manners, spotted the New House master as he came. Manners did not heed. He was going to take a series of snapshots of that exciting scene, and a dozen Ratcliffs would not have deterred him. Besides, there was no rule, anyway, against taking photographs in the quad. Even Horace Ratcliff couldn't have objected to that.

Whiz! Smash!
It was simply unfortunate that a snowball, intended for Figgins, should have passed Figgy's head, and whizzed on till it reached Mr. Ratcliff's sharp nose.

It was unfortunate, but it happened. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had hurled the snowball, ejaculated:

"Bai Jove!"
Mr. Ratcliff, as the missile squashed on his countenance, uttered a much more emphatic ejaculation, which fortunately the juniors did not hear.

"Oh, my hat!" yelled Blake. "You've done it now, Gussy!"

"Poor old Watty!" said Arthur Augustus. "But, weally, you know, what does he want to come buttin' in for?"

Snap!
There was a click from Manners' camera, and Manners grinned. Mr. Ratcliff, staggering and clutching at the squashing snow on his face, came into the picture, and Manners felt that he had scored.

"You ass, Manners!" murmured Tom Merry. "Ratty will be ratty—"

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Lowther chuckled.

"We'll frame that one for the study!" he remarked.

"Boys!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

He came on with a run, gasping for breath, and flourishing the cane. He wanted to find the fellow who had hurled the snowball; and he had not the slightest doubt that he had been snowballed intentionally.

"Look out, sir!" shouted Figgins.

"Oh crumbs!"

Mr. Ratcliff, rushing blindly on, did not look out in time. His rush brought him on the slide.

In an instant his feet were whizzing.

At that moment it seemed to Mr. Ratcliff that the whole universe was turning somersaults.

The firm, solid earth, upon which he was accustomed to walk with confidence, suddenly betrayed his trust.

What was happening he hardly realised. But the juniors realised it, and they stared at him transfixed.

"Great Scott!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Stop him!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Mr. Ratcliff's feet flew along the slide, and he very nearly came down on his back. Rather by luck than intention, he recovered his balance, but he could not control his feet. They whizzed on, and Mr. Ratcliff, naturally, whizzed on with them.

His gown fluttered wildly round him in the winter wind, his cap flew off, his cane whisked away through the air and dropped in the snow. His thin arms thrashed wildly around.

And still he flew!

In a crouching attitude, with thrashing arms and staring, horrified eyes, Mr. Ratcliff whizzed along the slide.

He had come to stop the juniors' sport—not to join in it. Now he was joining in it with a vengeance.

It was only a matter of seconds, for Mr. Ratcliff's speed was great; but it seemed to him ages before he reached the piled-up snow at the end of the slide, and crashed headlong into it.

"Oooh! Groooh! Ooooh! Oooooo!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wuff on Watty, bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"But it is really vewy funnay, you know!"

"Grooooooogh!"

"Got him!" said Manners.

Manners grinned gleefully over his camera. He had snapped Mr. Ratcliff on the slide, and Manners was happy. It was really a triumph for an enthusiastic amateur photographer. That picture, when it came out, would be really a corker.

Figgins and Kerr and Wynn rushed to help their Housemaster from the snow. They were not very sorry for Ratty; the New House master was not popular with his boys. But it was a case of noblesse oblige; Figgins & Co felt bound to help their Housemaster, and they helped him. Mr. Ratcliff was dragged, puffing and blowing, from the snow, and set on his feet. Whereupon he immediately displayed his gratitude for services rendered by boxing Figgy's ears—Figgins being nearest to him at the moment.

"Ow!" gasped Figgins, staggering back. He lost his footing in the snow and sat down. Kerr and Fatty Wynn jumped away.

"Manners!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

Manners had tucked his camera under his arm to retreat. He affected not to hear Mr. Ratcliff's call, and started for the School House.

"Manners!"

"Better stop, old chap!" murmured Tom Merry.

Mr. Ratcliff, carefully avoiding the slide this time, rushed after Manners. His grip fell on the School House junior's shoulder.

"You young rascal! Stop!" he panted.

Manners had to stop, then. He turned round and shook the New House master's hand from his shoulder.

"You want to speak to me, sir?" asked Manners civilly.

Mr. Ratcliff glared at him.

"Manners, you insolent young rascal! You have dared— you have dared to photograph me—"

"I've been taking some photographs of the slide, sir," assented Manners.

"Have you photographed me or not?"

"I suppose you would come into the picture, sir, as you were on the slide," said Manners.

"Give me that camera!"

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Manners' face set doggedly.

That camera was a valuable one, and it had been presented to Manners on a great occasion. It was the apple of Manners' eye; it was popularly supposed that Manners of the Shell would have perished in defence of his camera if need had been.

He held on to it.

Mr. Ratcliff was fairly trembling with rage, and he did not look as if he was to be trusted with a camera at that moment.

"Do you hear me, Manners?" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

"I hear you, sir," answered Manners quietly, though his eyes were gleaming.

"Give me the camera at once!"

"I will take the films from it, sir, and give you the roll, if you like," said Manners. "If you object to the photographs, sir, I will hand the films over to you at once."

"Give me the camera!"

"It's mine, sir!"

"I command you, Manners—"

Manners stood dogged. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther stood by him with troubled faces.

Certainly Manners ought not to have taken those snaps of a Housemaster in an undignified position. He realised that, and he had offered to hand over the films. The films destroyed, the photographs would have ceased to exist, and Mr. Ratcliff could have been satisfied with that. But the Housemaster was in too towering a rage to be so easily satisfied. In his suspicious mind he was already convinced that he was the victim of a plot—he had been enticed on the slide in order to be snapped and made to look ridiculous! He held out a thin, bony hand for the camera.

The juniors gathered round with rather scared faces, wondering how the scene would end.

"Will you give me that camera, Manners?" asked Mr. Ratcliff in a voice that was husky with rage.

"What are you going to do with it, sir?"

"Give it me!"

Manners did not make a move to obey. Mr. Ratcliff made a move. He strode at the Shell fellow, grasped the camera, and tore it from his hands.

The next moment he raised it in the air and dashed it violently to the ground.

Crash!

CHAPTER 2. Plain English!

CRASH!

"Bai Jove!"

"Shame!" yelled Herries.

The crash of the camera on the hard ground was followed by a cry from Manners. He stood staring at his wrecked camera—the crash had fairly smashed it.

There was a deep murmur among the juniors.

"There!" said Mr. Ratcliff bitterly. "There! That will teach you, Manners, to show something like respect to masters in this school!"

Manners did not answer. His face was quite white. In silence he dropped on his knees beside his wrecked camera and examined it. Tom Merry turned his eyes, with a blaze in them, on the New House master.

"You had no right to do that!" he exclaimed.

"Silence, Merry!"

"It's a rotten shame!" shouted Lowther.

"Silence!"

Manners was still silent. A blow in the face could not have hurt Manners so much as that damage to his beloved camera. In silence, but with trembling fingers, Manners gathered it up.

Then he looked at Mr. Ratcliff.

"You rotter!" he said between his teeth.

The Housemaster jumped.

"What? What?" he gasped.

"You rotter!" said Manners.

"Manners! How dare you!"

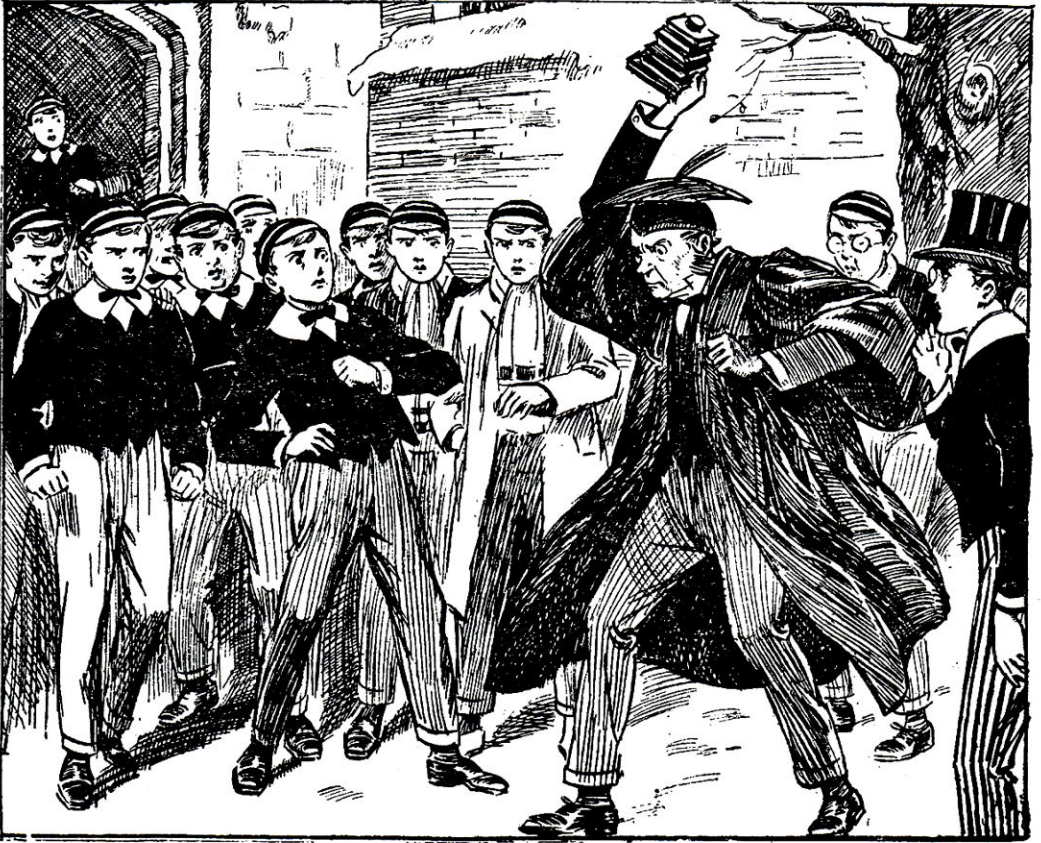
"Oh, shut up!"

With that Manners stalked away with what was left of his camera. He left a deep silence behind him.

Mr. Ratcliff stared after him as if transfixed. Never had he been addressed in that style since he had been a Housemaster at St. Jim's. Never had a junior ventured to tell him to "shut up"—much as many of them had yearned to do so.

It was unheard-of. Only the destruction of his beloved camera could have made Manners forget himself to that extent.

"Upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff at last.



The Fifth Form master strode at Manners of the Shell, grasped the camera, and tore it from his hands. The next moment, he raised it in the air, and dashed it violently to the ground. Crash! (See page 4.)

A snowball whizzed from somewhere—Cardew of the Fourth could have told where—and caught Mr. Ratcliff behind the ear. The New House master sat down suddenly.

The juniors cleared off from the scene while Mr. Ratcliff was picking himself up and breathing fury.

Manners went into the School House with his damaged camera under his arm. His face was white and set.

Tom Merry and Lowther looked the sympathy they felt. Well they knew how their chum prized that camera; they understood his feelings much better than Horace Ratcliff possibly could have understood them.

"It's a rotten shame, old chap!" said Tom Merry. "Bring it up to the study, and we'll see what can be done with it."

"It's done for!" said Manners.

"We'll mend it somehow!" said Lowther encouragingly.

Manners shook his head.

"I may be able to patch it up," he said. "It will take time. I'll take it into the dark-room; I've got all my things there. I'll make Ratty sorry for this somehow!"

"I'm afraid there'll be trouble over your calling him a rotter, old fellow!" said Tom.

Manners' eyes burned.

"I'll call him something more if he speaks to me again, the sneaking cad! Smashing a fellow's camera! I offered him the films! He's taken it out of me because he came a cropper on the slide! I'll make the brute sit up for this somehow!"

Manners went into the dark-room, to which he had a key. Tom and Monty Lowther looked at one another. They were

rather uneasy; Manners' look and tone were a little disturbing. Manners was a very quiet fellow as a rule, and was never known to bear malice. But there was more than malice in his look now; there was bitterness and vengeance.

"Poor old chap!" said Tom in a low voice. "I suppose even Ratty wouldn't have done that if he'd known how much it would hurt Manners."

"Rotten brute!" growled Lowther.

The chums of the Shell went up rather dismally to their study. It was tea-time, and they were hungry, but they knew that it was no use expecting Manners to tea. He was not likely to turn up even for prep. So long as there was a hope of patching up that precious camera, Manners was not likely to leave it. Tom Merry and Lowther had their tea by themselves.

They had finished when there was a footstep outside, and they looked round, expecting to see their chum. But it was Blake of the Fourth who came into Study No. 10, and he was followed by D'Arcy and Herries and Digby.

"Manners not here?" asked Blake.

"He's in the dark-room."

"Camera done for?" asked Herries.

"I'm afraid so."

"It was wotten of Watty!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"At Christmas-time, you know, a chap ought to feel forgiving, but weally it is vewy difficult to feel kind towards old Watty!"

"We've got a wheeze," went on Blake. "Ratty ought to

be made to sit up for this! What price catching him in the quad and snowballing him?"

"Good egg—what?" said Dig.

Tom Merry smiled faintly. Study No. 6 were full of sympathy, and their sympathy took a very practical turn.

"First catch your hare!" remarked Lowther.

"Easy enough!" said Blake. "He's in the School House now, in Railton's study. Come over to complain, I suppose. We'll catch him in the quad in the dark as he goes back—"

"Better not, I think!" said a genial voice in the doorway. Blake spun round. It was Kildare of the Sixth who was looking in the study.

"Oh!" gasped Blake, blinking at the prefect.

"Bai Jove! I'm afraid we shall not be able to snowball old Watty now, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus. "But pewpaws Kildare would keep it dark, like a good chap."

The juniors grinned. A Sixth Form prefect was not likely to enter into a scheme for snowballing a Housemaster.

"You young ass!" said the captain of St. Jim's, laughing.

"Weally, Kildare—"

"If anything happens to Mr. Ratcliff in the quad, there will be trouble in Study No. 6 in the Fourth!" said Kildare significantly. "I advise you kids not to play the goat."

"Yaas; but—"

"That's enough! I came here for Manners," said Kildare, looking round. "Where is he? He's wanted."

"He's in the dark-room with his camera," said Tom Merry. "I dare say you've heard that Mr. Ratcliff smashed it."

Kildare nodded.

"Well, he's wanted," he said.

And the captain of St. Jim's left the study in search of Manners.

"Bai Jove! This looks like more trouble for poor old Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The juniors left the study, and Tom Merry and Lowther followed Kildare. They were anxious about their chum. Evidently Mr. Ratcliff had come over to lay a complaint; and, unpleasant gentleman as he was, it was necessary to walk warily in dealing with him. And Manners, in his present mood, was not likely to be wary. He was much more likely to tell Mr. Ratcliff exactly what he thought of him, and the outcome of that might be extremely serious. Juniors were not supposed to tell Housemasters what they thought of them.

The chums of the Shell overtook Kildare at the door of the dark-room downstairs. The door was locked, and Kildare was rapping on it.

"Are you there, Manners?" he called out.

"Yes. Go away!"

"You're wanted."

"Can't come!"

"What!" roared Kildare.

"I'm looking to my camera," shouted back Manners, in tones of great exasperation. "It's been smashed up by a rotten hooligan!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lowther, with a look of dismay at Tom.

Obviously, Manners was not in a sufficiently wary mood for interviewing Mr. Ratcliff.

Kildare set his lips.

"Manners, you're wanted at once. Mr. Ratcliff—"

"Hang Ratcliff!"

"What!" roared Kildare.

"Don't I speak plain? Hang Ratcliff!"

"Is the kid out of his senses?" exclaimed Kildare, more astonished than angry. "What's come over him?"

He tapped at the door again.

"Manners, Mr. Ratcliff has come to make a complaint about you. Mr. Railton has sent me to fetch you to his study."

"Come out, Manners, old fellow," said Tom Merry. "You don't want to check our own Housemaster."

There was a brief pause.

"I'll come if it's Railton," said Manners at last.

He unlocked the door, turned off the light, and came out. His face was set and grim.

"Come with me," said Kildare curtly.

"I'm coming."

Kildare strode away, and Manners followed him, and Tom and Lowther went with their chum.

"Don't slang Ratty, old fellow," whispered Tom. "It will only make matters worse, you know."

"He's smashed my camera."

"Yes; but—"

"I told him he was a rotter. I'll tell him so again!"

"Manners, old fellow—" murmured Monty Lowther, in dismay.

"He is a rotter, isn't he?" said Manners, without subduing THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 776.

his voice in the least. "Every fellow at St. Jim's knows that Ratty is a rotter. What's the harm of telling a rotter that he's a rotter?"

Tom and Lowther were silent. In this mood, they hardly understood their usually quiet and self-controlled chum. Talking to Manners seemed to do no good, at all events. They followed him in dismayed silence to the door of the Housemaster's study, and entered with him. Kildare withdrew when the juniors were in the study, giving Manners a rather curious glance as he went. And Tom and Monty, standing on either side of their chum, waited for the storm to burst.

CHAPTER 3. Licked!

MR. RAILTON fixed his eyes on Manners. Mr. Railton generally looked genial and good-tempered, but his handsome face was stern now.

Mr. Ratcliff stood beside his table, resting one hand on it. Mr. Ratcliff's look was black and bitter.

Even Ratty, the juniors thought, might have been satisfied with smashing Manners' camera. But Ratty was not satisfied. Mr. Railton's look showed that he had heard a tale of bitter complaint.

"Manners," said the School House master quietly, "a very serious matter has been brought to my notice by my colleague, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Indeed, sir?"

"You applied an epithet to him, in the presence of a large number of boys of both Houses—"

"I called him a rotter, sir?" said Manners, in a clear voice.

Mr. Railton started.

"Manners! How dared you—"

"Because he is a rotter, sir!" said Manners.

"Manners!"

"You asked me, sir," said Manners coolly. "Mr. Ratcliff is a rotter, and I called him one. Is there anything else, sir?"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Railton blankly.

Horace Ratcliff's thin face was crimson. His eyes glittered at Manners of the Shell.

"You—you hear him, Mr. Railton," he said, in a choking voice—"his—his unheard-of insolence!"

"This insolence, sir, will be severely dealt with, you need have no doubt about that," said Mr. Railton grimly. "Unless you are out of your senses, Manners, how dare you use this language in my presence?"

"Let me speak, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Mr. Ratcliff—"

"I did not send for you, Merry. Are you concerned in this matter?"

"We both witnessed what happened, sir!" exclaimed Lowther hotly. "Mr. Ratcliff smashed up Manners' camera."

"Nonsense!"

"It's the truth, sir. Ask him!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton turned a puzzled look on his colleague.

Horace Ratcliff was gnawing his thin lip.

"I was tricked into falling on a slide, Mr. Railton," said the New House master. "Manners photographed me in the act of falling; he was in the plot. For that reason I destroyed the camera, in order to prevent disrespectful and ridiculous photographs being circulated in the school, to the detriment of all discipline."

"You did not tell me this, Mr. Ratcliff."

"I have told you now!" snapped the New House master.

"I offered him the films," said Manners, between his teeth.

"He smashed the camera because he had taken a tumble on the slide. Just his beastly rotten temper!"

"Manners!"

Mr. Railton rose to his feet.

"You should not have taken such photographs, Manners; you are perfectly well aware of that. Mr. Ratcliff certainly appears to have acted very drastically. Certainly, in his place, I should have been satisfied with destroying the films, and reporting you for punishment. Nevertheless, you provoked the action."

Manners did not speak, but his face set sullenly.

"You then applied a disrespectful epithet to Mr. Ratcliff, a Housemaster in this school and the senior member of Dr. Holmes' staff. You have repeated that epithet in my presence. For that, Manners, I have no resource but to punish you severely. I should prefer to deal with you lightly, if you will apologise to Mr. Ratcliff on the spot."

"Apologise to a rotter, sir?" said Manners, very distinctly. "I will be cut in pieces first."

Mr. Railton's brow grew like thunder.

"That is enough, Manners, more than enough. I shall cane you with the utmost severity."





"So you are here then, Manners?" said Mr. Railton, entering the dark-room. "Have you been out of the house at all?" Manners stared. "Out of the house, sir! Of course not!" (See page 12.)

"You can do as you like, sir; I can't prevent you from being unjust," said Manners.

"Manners, old man—" implored Tom Merry.

"Silence!" thundered the School House master. He picked up his cane. "Manners, hold out your hand!"

It was a painful scene that followed; painful to all but Mr. Ratcliff, who smiled serenely. It was seldom that Mr. Railton administered a severe punishment; but he let himself go now.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, as they witnessed it, felt sick at heart; yet they could scarcely blame Mr. Railton. Manners had hardly left him any choice in the matter. But their feeling towards Horace Ratcliff were deep and bitter.

Cut after cut came on Manners' palms, and he uttered no sound. Only his face grew whiter and whiter, and his eyes burned.

Swish! swish! swish! swish!

Mr. Railton laid down the cane at last.

"Go, Manners," he said, quite gently. "I am sorry for this—more sorry perhaps than you can understand. Take him away, Merry."

Manners' eyes were glittering at Mr. Ratcliff; and he was about to speak. But Tom and Lowther grasped him by the arms and fairly hustled him out of the study.

The door closed on the Terrible Three.

Then Mr. Railton fixed a cold glance on his fellow House-master.

"I have punished Manners severely," he said. "I had no choice in the matter; discipline must be maintained—"

"I am very glad you seem aware of that very important fact, Mr. Railton," said the New House master dryly.

"I have not finished, sir. You exceeded your rights very seriously in destroying Manners' camera. The films you had a right to destroy—you had a right to complain of his action. But the destruction of property—especially property so highly prized—was a very unworthy act, Mr. Ratcliff—utterly unworthy of a gentleman in your position."

"Sir!" stammered Mr. Ratcliff.

"I think, sir, that your own conscience will tell you the same, on reflection," said Mr. Railton coldly. "And I sincerely hope that you will replace the article you have so wantonly destroyed."

The New House master burst into an angry laugh.

"That is likely!" he exclaimed. "You forget yourself, Mr. Railton. In my opinion that insolent boy has been far from adequately punished."

"Our opinions differ on that point, Mr. Ratcliff, as upon many others," said Mr. Railton dryly.

Mr. Ratcliff crossed to the door. He left the study and closed the door after him with unnecessary force, and stalked away down the corridor. From somewhere in the distance came a yell:

"New House rotter!"

Mr. Ratcliff spun round, his face flaming. But there was no one to be seen; and the New House master, gritting his teeth, strode out into the quadrangle, and stalked away to his own house.

CHAPTER 4.
Trouble Ahead!

"**U**TTAH wottah!" Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arvy. There was a buzz of talk in the junior Common-room in the School House that evening. And there was only one topic—Mr. Ratcliff, and the sins of that unpleasant gentleman.

Every fellow in the School House agreed that Mr. Ratcliff was not only a rotter, but a rank rotter. But they agreed also that Manners of the Shell was a champion ass to have told him so. Housemasters really couldn't be told things like that.

"Mannahs is a wathah weckless ass!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "But Watty is a wottah. There is no mistake about that."

"Hear, hear!" said Levison of the Fourth.

"He ought to be made to pay for the camera!" growled Clive.

RIOT AND REBELLION NEXT WEEK!



"Yaas, wathah!"

"The Head might make him shell out, if Manners went to Dr. Hohmes about it," remarked Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Mannahs has put himself in the w'ong," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "He should not have slanged Watty. Of course, we all know that Watty is a wank wottah. But he is a Housemastah; and vespect should be shown to his possish, if not to Watty himself."

"You talk like a giddy picture-book, old bean," said Cardew of the Fourth admiringly. "Keep it up! You haven't got to seventhly yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Cardew, you ass—"

"Gussy's right, though," observed Talbot of the Shell thoughtfully. "It would have been better if Manners had kept his temper, and gone to the Head."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Poor old Manners was too wild," said Tom Merry ruefully. "That dashed camera was the apple of his eye."

"Where's Manners now?" asked Blake.

"Mending the blessed thing in the dark-room, I think. He doesn't want us to help," said Monty Lowther.

There was a fat chortle from Baggy Trimble.

"He, he, he! I looked in on him," he said. "Manners was rubbing his paws, and tinkering with the camera, and rubbing his paws, by turns. He, he, he!"

"Is that a laughing matter, you fat dummy?" growled Tom Merry. "Shut up!"

"He, he, he!"

"Kick him, somebody!"

"Yaroooh!" came from Trimble, as two or three fellows obliged at once. And Baggy's fat chortle was heard no more.

"Ratty ought to be made to pay for the thing," said Levison of the Fourth. "But—"

"I fancy that would be a thirteenth job for jolly old Hercules," said Cardew. "And he would find it a heftier one than the other twelve."

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"He ought to be made to pay," he said. "Manners can't afford to buy a new camera. Ratty has plenty of money."

"He doesn't part with much of it," remarked Grundy.

"Yaas, wathah! It is vevy well known that Watty is a misah," said Arthur Augustus. "I have heard a New House fellow describe secin' him countin' ovah money at his desk in his study."

"Quids, too," said Lowther. "I've heard it from New House chaps. Ratty isn't satisfied with paper money, and he keeps quids in his desk—all ready in case the Bank of England goes bust, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a fact," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "Ratty was keeping that dark, but, of course, such things can't really be kept dark. A fellow had to take in lines, and he went into the study and found Ratty counting quids, and Ratty caned him like thunder."

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"I wogard him as an unpatwiotic wottah!" said Arthur Augustus loftily. "Even if Bwitish papah money went the way of German papah money, a chap ought not to hoard up gold. Sink or swim togethah, you know."

"Hear hear!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "What price burghing Ratty's desk, as a warning to him to be patriotic? We could stand Manners a new camera out of the giddy gold, and blow the rest on a big spread—and ask Ratty to it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a general chuckle in the Common-room at the idea. Little did Tom Merry dream, at that moment, how his careless words were to be brought back to his mind.

The talk died away as Manners of the Shell came into the Common-room. It was close on bed-time now.

Tom looked at his chum rather anxiously. Harry Manners' face was pale and harassed.

"How's the camera, old fellow?" asked Tom.

"Rotten!" was Manners' brief reply.

"We're all sayin' that it's a beastly shame. Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus. "We think Watty ought to be made to pay for it."

Manners laughed bitterly.

"Catch him!" he said. "He won't pay for it in money. But he's jolly well going to pay for it another way."

"How's that, old man?" asked Tom, rather anxiously. He did not like the expression on Manners' face, or the look in his eyes.

Manners set his lips.

"He's smashed my camera!" he said savagely. "Even if it can be repaired, I can't afford it. I'm going to take it out of Ratty's hide, somehow. I've been tinkering at the camera for hours now, and there's nothing doing. I'll make Ratty sorry for it."

"Go easy, old man," said Talbot. "Trouble with a House-master may mean a flogging, or the sack."

"I don't care!"

"Your pals care, old man," said Tom Merry quietly.

"I won't drag you into it, or Lowther either."

"I don't mean that. We're with you in making Ratty sit up," said Tom. "But—"

"Cave!" murmured Levison, as Kildare of the Sixth loomed up in the doorway.

"Bed!" said the prefect.

And the juniors moved off to their dormitories. Tom Merry looked at Manners several times uneasily, as the Shell went up.

Manners, evidently, was not quite himself. The destruction of his beloved camera had upset him deeply, and the severe caning in Mr. Raitton's study had been the last straw. Manners was in a state of "nerves" and he was showing a vengeful bitterness that rather surprised his chums. In a day or two, no doubt, Manners would be quite himself again; but just at present he was in a mood that might cause serious trouble, and made it needful for his friends to keep a friendly eye upon him.

That something was working in his excited mind, Tom knew, and he wanted to know what it was. In the dormitory passage he tapped Manners on the arm, and Manners gave him a rather surly look.

"What have you got in your head now, Manners?" Tom asked, in a low voice.

"Nothing!"

"Manners, old chap—"

WHO WILL COME OUT ON TOP, MASTERS OR BOYS?

"Better for you not to know!" grunted Manners.

"I'd rather know."

"Well, that brute smashed my camera!" muttered Manners. "If he can destroy my property, I can destroy his, I suppose? How would he like some of his things smashed up?"

"You awful ass!" exclaimed Tom in alarm. "If you're thinking of raiding Ratty's quarters—"

"It would serve him right!"

"It might," said Tom. "But you can't do it. You'd be known at once to have done it, for one thing; you'd be seen, for—"

"Perhaps not."

"Old fellow, don't be an ass!" said Tom, in great distress. "Leave thinking over it till you're a bit calmer—"

"Oh, rot! There's his giddy desk, where he's jolly well known to hoard up money," said Manners sourly. "If a chap

shoved a chopper into it, he would understand how a fellow feels when his property is smashed up."

"Now, then, into the dorm!" called out Kildare from the dormitory doorway. And the two Shell fellows followed the rest in.

Tom Merry turned in, in a very troubled mood.

Manners avoided catching his eyes, and it was impossible to speak on the subject again without many ears hearing. Manners' face was dark and sulky—quite a new expression for the usually calm, philosophic Shell fellow. Manners had let the sun go down on his wrath. Tom Merry knew that it would pass. Manners was not the fellow to grow bitter, even over a real injury. But just at present he was gravely distressed and uneasy. Until this black and bitter mood had passed, there was no telling what Manners might do. For Mr. Ratcliff, Tom had little concern; but the possibility that his chum might do some action that would lead to his expulsion from the school, was utterly dismaying.

It was a long time before Tom Merry slept that night, and when he slept, his sleep was troubled and uneasy.

CHAPTER 5.
In the Dead of Night!

TOM MERRY awoke. He was sure that he had heard some sound, that had roused him from an uneasy slumber.

He had not been enjoying his usual healthy and sound sleep. His worry about Manners prevented that. And now, when he awoke, his thoughts turned at once to his chum. He sat up in bed.

Round him the Shell fellows were sleeping peacefully; there

was a sound of regular breathing in the silence of the night. Outside, the winter wind wailed softly round the old roofs of the School House. From the high windows came a faint glimmer of starlight and of drifting snowflakes. The snow was still falling lightly, and the sills were thick with white.

A ray of starlight fell on Manners' bed, next to Tom's. Tom Merry looked, and started. He could not see clearly in the dimness, but he had an impression that the bed was empty.

His heart beat harder.

Manners' words came back clearly enough into his mind. Where was Manners, if he was not in bed, at that hour? What wild, vengeful scheme had taken him from the dormitory?

Tom slipped out of the sheets, and bent over Manners' bed. It was empty, and cold to the touch. Manners was gone.

From the wintry night came a chime. It was midnight! Tom Merry stood for some moments, shivering in the cold in his pyjamas. Where was Manners?

Slowly, silently, the captain of the Shell dressed himself. Wherever Manners was, whatever he was doing, he had to be found and brought back. Even leaving the dormitory at that hour of the night was a serious matter. And if he had left it with some wild scheme of vengeance against Mr. Ratcliff in his mind—

It would be utterly unlike Manners, as his friends knew him. But only too well Tom knew that Manners was not himself that night; that he was likely, in his bitter resentment, to be guilty of some reckless act that he would be sorry for when it was too late.

It did not take Tom Merry long to dress and to sort out a pair of rubber shoes from his box. Then he stepped quietly to the door, opened it, and passed into the passage.

He stood in the darkness there, listening. Only the faint moan of the winter wind came to his ears.

Where was Manners?

If it was some scheme of vengeance upon Mr. Ratcliff that

had drawn him forth at that late hour, he was at the New House by this time—long before this, probably.

Tom Merry trod away softly, silent in his rubber shoes, to the box-room at the end of the dormitory passage. If Manners had left the School House, it was doubtless by that way that he had gone—the box-room window had been used before for secret egress from the House.

Tom groped across the box-room, and felt over the window. It was latched on the inside.

He felt relief for a moment. Manners had not gone out that way, at all events.

But his relief was only momentary. There were half a dozen other ways by which Manners might have left the House. For some minutes Tom stood thinking it out, and then he quietly unlatched the window, opened the lower sash, and stepped out on the leads. A few whirling flakes were still coming down, but the snow had almost ceased. He trod deep in a velvety carpet of snow on the leads.

A minute later he had dropped to the ground, and was making his way round the building. In the hope of finding some trace of his chum, he looked for tracks in the snow; but in the dim, faint starlight he could discern nothing. Besides, it was some time, he knew, since Manners had left the dormitory, and there had been a sufficient fall of snow since then to cover any footmarks.

There was nothing for it but to cross over to the New House and ascertain whether his chum was there. There could be little difficulty in ascertaining that, for Manners could scarcely have entered the New House without leaving some sign. Indeed, it was more probable that he could not enter it at all, and that Tom would find him outside, angry and defeated. And yet, in Manners' bitter mood, there was no guessing what steps he might have taken. Tom Merry's

face was shadowed with anxiety as he trod through the snow towards the New House.

He gave a sudden start as he caught sight of traces in the snow close by the House steps.

He stopped and stared at them, his heart beating. Boots had trodden deep there—the marks were unmistakable. The lightly-falling flakes drifted over the indentations, but without quite hiding them.

"The awful ass!" muttered Tom.

There was no further doubt in his mind. Only one thought came to

him now—to find Manners, and save him from his own reckless folly. He hurried on closer to the House, and stood under the window of Mr. Ratcliff's study, which faced the quadrangle.

Under that window the snow had been banked by the wind, and the bank of white was deeply trodden and trampled. On the window-sill the snow had lodged thickly; and it had been displaced. The sill was a high one, on a level with Tom Merry's head; and he could see, even in the dimness, where a knee had rested in the snow. And the window was open.

Tom's heart thumped painfully.

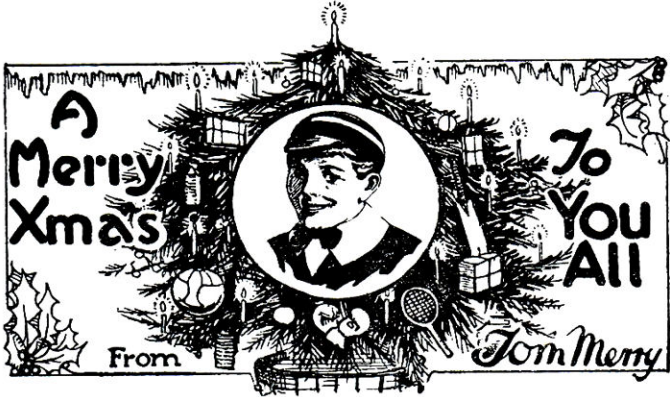
So Manners was inside!

Tom began to think he had been a fool not to have remained awake as long as possible that night. He had heard Manners' threats—he had allowed them to pass unheeded! Now, quite evidently, Manners was carrying out his threats.

How Manners had succeeded in opening the study window from outside was a mystery. It was not likely that the careful and methodical Mr. Ratcliff had left it unlatched. But open it was—the lower sash pushed right up—and Tom, as he stood and listened, heard a sound in the room within.

Tom Merry suppressed a groan.

Such an entrance into Mr. Ratcliff's study, where all the fellows knew there was a desk with money in it, was an act of almost incredible recklessness and folly. Manners had spoken of damaging the desk, as a retaliation for the damage to his camera. If he was found—if he was suspected—Mr. Ratcliff, at least, would have no doubt that he had come there for the money. Manners would be adjudged, not a



headstrong fellow acting under the influence of resentment, but a thief!

"Manners!"
Tom Merry whispered the word at the open window. To get his chum away was his only thought.

His whisper reached ears within; and there was a sudden sound of a movement, and then silence.

"Manners, old man! You're mad to do this!" breathed Tom hoarsely. "Come out, old fellow! Come out at once!" There was no answer. Deathly stillness reigned.

"Manners! You know my voice—it's Tom's. Come out at once!"

Dead silence.
Tom Merry waited. But he waited in vain. There was no movement, no sound from the black interior of the room.

Tom caught at the snowy window-sill, and drew himself up. His knee rested where a knee had rested before, and he stared into the room.

"I know you're there!" he whispered. "Are you mad, old fellow? Come back with me, for heaven's sake!"

Stillness and silence.
Tom set his teeth, and dropped into the room. By force, if need were, his chum should go; matters were had enough already, without leaving Manners to make them worse.

Tom stood and looked about him, striving to penetrate the blackness that surrounded him. He caught a sound of breathing.

"Manners! Why don't you answer! I'm not going back without you! Why don't you speak, you awful ass?"

There was a quick breath, a movement. Then a clink of metal rang on the floor, as if a coin had been dropped. Tom Merry sprang in the direction of the sound.

A grasp closed on him.

"Manners—"

He choked.

Sudden knowledge flashed on his amazed brain. That iron grasp was not the grasp of Manners of the Shell! It was a man's grip that had fastened on him, bearing him backwards.

Crash!
Tom Merry went spinning in the darkness. He crashed against some article of furniture, and rolled dazed on the carpet. A shadow flitted at the open window, and vanished. The snow without deadened the footfalls of one who leaped from the window and ran. Tom Merry sat up with spinning brain. The room still echoed with the crash of a chair he had knocked over in his fall.

"Good heavens!" gasped Tom Merry. "Good heavens!" The truth was clear in his dizzy brain now. It was not Manners—his chum was not there! It was a burglar whom he had surprised, in the very act of burglary, and that momentary flitting shadow at the window showed that the man was gone, perhaps with his plunder.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

Somewhere in the House he heard a door open—a startling voice calling. The crash in the study had rung through the New House; more than one had been awakened.

"Good heavens!" breathed Tom.

Light glimmered under the study door. The electric light on the staircase had been switched on. Two or three voices shouted—footsteps echoed in the House.

Tom Merry ran to the window.

Where was Manners? Was he in the New House at all? That was doubtful now; at all events, Tom could not help him by being discovered there. There was no need to give the alarm; that was given already. In a way, what had happened was all to the good; for certainly Tom Merry's unexpected visit had interrupted the thief, and the man had fled, with his robbery unfinished—perhaps not begun. Tom Merry dropped from the window and ran into the darkness; and a minute later the door of the room he had left was thrown open, and light blazed into the room.

CHAPTER 6. A Night Alarm!

TOM MERRY halted, panting, in the darkness of the quad.

Lights were flashing from a dozen windows of the New House now, though the other House was still dark and silent.

Tom stared back.

The window of Mr. Ratcliff's study blazed with light. A tall, thin form showed up, a black silhouette, at the lighted window, and Tom knew that it was the New House master.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

Where was Manners? Was he in the New House? If he were found there now, what would be thought—with all the signs of a robbery to be seen in Mr. Ratcliff's study?

At least, Tom's evidence would save him from a charge of

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crime. Tom, at least, could prove that there had been an intruder from outside. He had not seen the man—only a flitting shadow at the window as the midnight thief fled; but that was enough. If Mr. Ratcliff, in his bitterness, entertained such a suspicion of Manners, it could be disproved. That was something, and it made Tom thankful that he had sought for his chum.

But where was Manners? If he was in the New House, he was certain to be found now. But was he?

"He went this way!"
Tom heard the voice of Monteith of the Sixth at Mr. Ratcliff's study window. The prefect was staring out into the whirling snowflakes. The snow was coming on again, more heavily than before.

Tom Merry backed away farther into the darkness.

It was certain that now the alarm was given there would be a search for the burglar, and Tom did not want to be caught out of his House. For one thing, he would be questioned as to why he was out of dormitory bounds, and he did not want to mention his chum. He heard the big door of the New House open, and lights flashed out into the shadowy quadrangle. Tom Merry cut away to the School House, and he was glad that the snow was falling thickly now, covering his tracks as he ran.

He could not help his chum by lingering; yet he was loth to go without having seen Manners. If Manners was not in or near the New House, where could he be?

A light glanced in Mr. Railton's window in the School House. The alarm was spreading now.

There was no further time to be lost, if Tom was to get back to his dormitory undiscovered.

He hurried round the building, clambered on the leads, and in at the box-room window. He closed and fastened the window carefully, and slipped off his rubber shoes, and dropped them into an empty box.

Then he tiptoed back to the dormitory.

Voices sounded below as he went; the alarm in the New House had extended to the School House, and voices called, and lights flashed on. Tom Merry heard the deep tones of Mr. Railton as he reached his dormitory door. He slipped into the dormitory.

Three or four fellows in the Shell were awake now. Tom Merry heard Lowther's voice as he stepped in.

"What on earth's the row?"

"Can't be a fire, surely!" said Talbot.

"There's something up."

"Burglars!" said Racke.

"There's somebody coming in!" shouted Croke. "I heard the door open. Look out, you fellows!"

"Get a light, somebody."

"It's all right!" exclaimed Tom Merry hastily. "Only little me."

"You, Tom!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yes; don't make a row."

"You've been out of bounds, Tom Merry!" exclaimed Croke.

"Only out of the House."

"What on earth for?" asked Gore.

Tom Merry did not answer that question. He crossed over to Manners' bed. He had a faint hope that Manners might have returned during his absence; an utterly unaccountable absence if Manners had not been to the New House.

"What's the row going on?" called out Kangaroo.

"There's an alarm of some sort, Tom."

"Something in the New House," said Tom. "It's all right."

"But what is it?" demanded Croke.

"You've been raiding Figgins & Co. on your lonely own?" asked Gore.

"No, no!"

"Then what's on?"

Tom Merry did not answer. He was staring at Manners' bed. It was still empty. Where was Manners?

There was a scratch of a match, and Racke lighted a candle-end. The light glimmered in the long, lofty room.

Half a dozen fellows were out of bed now, and Kangaroo went to the door and opened it, and looked out and listened.

"I can hear Railton," he said. "He's calling the prefects. I say, they're going out into the quad! What the thump can it be? It's not fire."

"Where's Manners?" called out Gore suddenly.

"Manners! He's here, of course," said Monty Lowther.

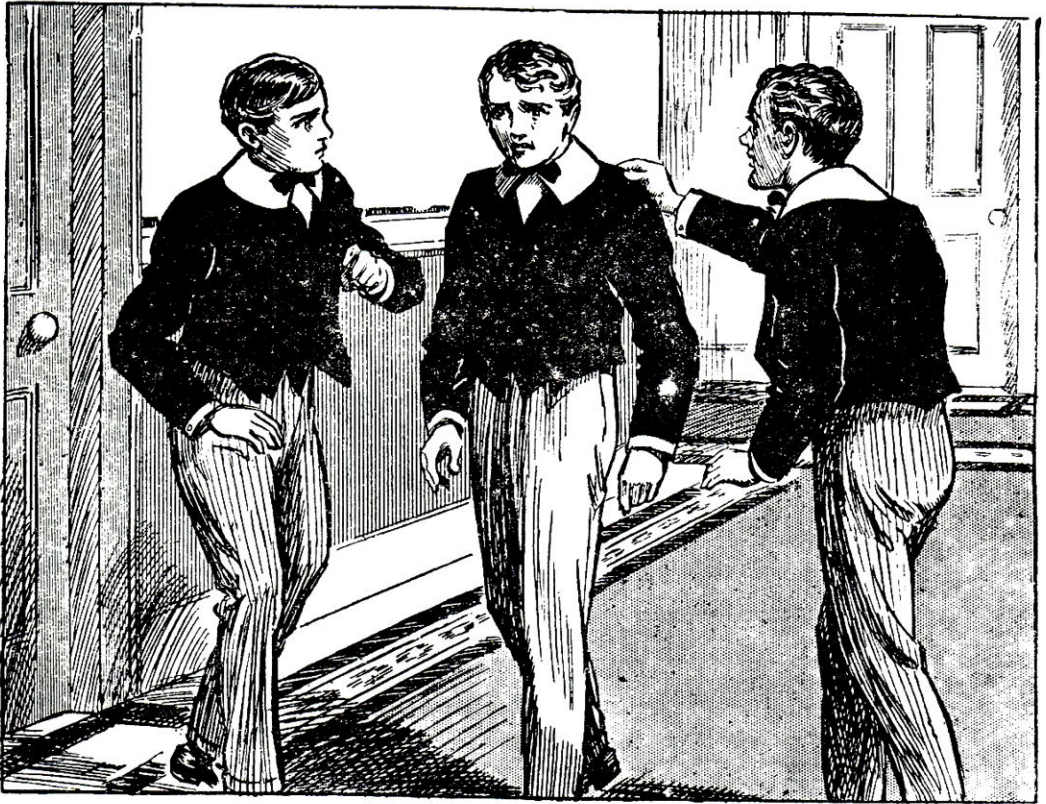
"Ho jolly well isn't."

Tom Merry's heart sank. Wherever Manners was, whatsoever his mysterious reason for leaving the dormitory in the middle of the night, his absence was not likely to remain a secret now. Three or four candles were glimmering, and all the Shell fellows stared at Manners' empty bed.

"Was he out with you, Tom?" asked Lowther.

"No."

"Where the thump has he gone, then?"



With dragging steps, and his head bent low, Tom Merry left the Head's study. Monty Lowther caught him by the arm. "Tom! Why are you looking like that?" he asked. (See page 18.)

"Goodness knows!"

"Here comes Linton!" said Kangaroo at the doorway. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came hurrying up in his dressing-gown, switching on the electric light in the corridor as he came. He looked into the excited dormitory. "You need not be alarmed, my boys," he called in. "There has been a burglary in the New House; but there is nothing to be alarmed about. Calm yourselves."

"A burglary!" repeated a dozen voices.

"Great Scott!"

"Yes; Mr. Ratcliff's study has been broken into, and I fear that some money has been taken. Little is known, so far; but the burglar is certainly gone, and there is no cause for alarm."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lowther.

"Every boy is to remain in his dormitory," said Mr. Linton sharply. "Go back to bed at once. Is anyone out of this dormitory?"

No answer.

Mr. Linton stepped inside, and switched on the light. He glanced up and down the long room.

"Where is Manners?" he asked.

The question was not answered. Nobody could answer it. Mr. Linton's eyes fell on Tom Merry, with a troubled look.

"Merry, you have been out of the House!"

Tom breathed hard. The trouble of that unfortunate night was evidently not ended yet.

Mr. Linton came nearer to the junior, scanning him with sharp and angry eyes.

"You are fully dressed; there is snow on your jacket!"

he exclaimed. "You have been out of House bounds, at this hour, Merry!"

It was impossible to deny it, even if Tom Merry had thought of denying the truth, which certainly he did not.

"Yes, sir," he said reluctantly.

"For what reason, Merry? Answer me at once!"

Tom Merry glanced at Manners' empty bed. The absence of his chum was known now; there could be no harm in giving his reason for leaving the dormitory.

"I—I woke up, sir—"

"Well?" snapped Mr. Linton.

"I missed Manners, sir, and—went to look for him," said Tom. "That's all, sir."

"You missed Manners from his bed, and went out of the House to look for him at midnight!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. "You had reason to suppose that Manners was breaking bounds at such an hour?"

"I—I—"

"Did you find Manners?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, sir."

"This is extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. "I must ascertain at once where Manners is. Certainly he is not a boy whom I should suspect of breaking bounds at night; but his absence is most extraordinary. Does any boy present know where Manners is?"

There was no answer.

"You will all remain here," said Mr. Linton. "I forbid any boy to leave the dormitory!"

He hurried out, leaving the electric light burning. He left the Shell dormitory in an excited buzz behind him.

CHAPTER 7.
Found at Last!

"WEMARKABLE!"

That observation was made by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The light was on in the Fourth Form dormitory, as in every other occupied room at St. Jim's now. The Fourth were all wide awake and excited. Mr. Lathom, their Form master, had looked in to command them not to leave the dormitory, and the juniors knew that there had been a burglary in the New House, and that was all.

"I should not like to speak disrespectfully of my Form master," Arthur Augustus continued, sorting out his celebrated eyeglass and adjusting it in his noble eye. "But I must remark that I consider his conduct remarkable. If there has been a burglary, surely it would be a wealthy good ideal for us to turn out and look for the mewy old burglar."

"Topping!" yawned Blake. "Bed for me, though! Hunting burglars in the snow isn't good enough—"

"Weally, Blake—"
"Hallo! Here's old Linton!" murmured Baggy Trimble. The master of the Shell looked in. His keen eyes scanned the crowd of excited Fourth-Formers.

"Is Manners of the Shell here?" he asked.
"Bai Jove! Mannahs is certainly not heah, sir."
"Does any boy know where Manners is?"

"No, sir."
Mr. Linton turned away, with a troubled and anxious brow. Manners' absence was inexplicable, and it was his Form master's duty to find him without delay. The master of the Shell hurried downstairs, and met Mr. Railton coming into the School House.

Mr. Railton was looking very grave.
"We must let the boys know there is no cause for alarm, Mr. Linton," he said. "I am afraid there is a great deal of excitement. It is a very extraordinary occurrence."
"The man has not been seen?" asked Mr. Linton.

"No; and Mr. Ratcliff's statement is really amazing. It seems that the alarm was given by a loud noise in his study; and a chair was found overturned, and a screen knocked over. The burglar must have fled immediately after thus inadvertently giving the alarm; but he had already broken open Mr. Ratcliff's desk and stolen a sum of money."

"Surely Mr. Ratcliff did not keep a large sum of money in a desk," said Mr. Linton. "It would have been safer in the bank."

Mr. Railton coughed.
"It seems, from what Mr. Ratcliff says, that a part of the money was in gold," he said. "Mr. Ratcliff, for reasons best known to himself, was keeping a sum in gold in his own possession. The money is gone, excepting a few sovereigns found scattered about the room, apparently dropped by the burglar in his hurry."
"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"But that is not all," said the Housemaster. "The prefects of the New House searched the quadrangle at once for the escaping thief, and one of them—Baker—makes the statement that he caught sight of a boy running. It is amazing. I cannot believe that a burglary can have been committed by a boy—yet Baker is positive in his statement. He states that the figure he saw was running towards the School House."

Mr. Linton became quite pale.
"Good heavens!" he exclaimed.
"What—"

"Manners is missing from the Shell dormitory, sir!" said Mr. Linton. "I am even now searching for him."

Mr. Railton started.
"I have found that Merry has been out of the House, and has obviously only just returned," said the master of the Shell. "He stated that he missed Manners, and went out to look for him."

The Housemaster pursed his lips.
"This must be looked into," he said briefly. "In the first place, Manners must be found. I will speak to the prefects. If he is in the House, it should not take long to discover him."

No time was lost. Kildare and the rest of the prefects, coming in from the quad after the search for the escaped

crackman, set to work at once to search the House for Manners. It seemed improbable enough that the missing junior was in the House, yet it was inexplicable that he should be out of his House at such an hour of the night, and in a snow-storm. The studies and the Form-room were looked into, and it was almost by chance that Manners was discovered at last. Darrell of the Sixth was passing the door of the dark-room downstairs, when he heard a sound within. Darrell stopped at once, and tried the door of the dark-room.

It opened to his hand. The light was burning there—not the red light for developing, but a clear white light. Manners of the Shell was standing at a bench, with his famous camera, taken to pieces, before him.

Darrell stared at him.
"Manners!" he exclaimed.
The Shell fellow started, and looked round. He had been so intent on his task that he had not even noted the opening of the door.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.
"You young ass!" exclaimed Darrell, half-laughing. The explanation of Harry Manners' mysterious absence was almost ludicrously simple.

Darrell looked round, and called along the passage.
"Manners is here, Mr. Railton!"
"Here! Where?"
"In the dark-room, sir."
"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Railton hurried along the passage. Manners coloured as his Housemaster's eyes fixed on him sternly.

"What are you doing here, Manners?"
"Mending my camera, sir."
"Mending your camera!" repeated the School House

master blankly.
"Yes, sir," said Manners, with a touch of defiance. "I suppose you haven't forgotten that Mr. Ratcliff smashed my camera to-day? I couldn't get to sleep, so I came down to have another go at it. No harm done, that I know of."

"You utterly foolish boy!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.
"Have you been in this room ever since you left the dormitory?"

"Yes."
"You have not been out of the House?"
Manners started.

"Out of the House? Of course not!"
The Housemaster scanned him. Manners was dressed, save for his collar and tie; but he had only felt slippers on his feet, and there was no trace of snow or wet on him. It was pretty clear that he had not been out of the House; and his well-known concern for his beloved camera was quite a sufficient explanation of his conduct. Probably Mr. Railton would have dismissed him with a hundred lines, and smiled when he was gone, on any other occasion. But the present occasion was too serious for that.

"You are unaware, then, Manners, that you were missed from your dormitory?"
"Eh? Was I missed?" said Manners. "I don't see how. I never thought about it, anyhow."

"You have heard nothing of the commotion in the House during the past quarter of an hour?"
"I—I don't understand. Has anything happened?" asked Manners blankly.

"There has been a burglary in Mr. Ratcliff's House," said Mr. Railton sternly. "The whole school has been alarmed."
"Phew!"

"You heard nothing, Manners?"
"Well, I was busy, sir," said Manners. "Besides, the door was shut, and you don't hear much in this room. It doesn't matter, I suppose?"

"I shall deal with you to-morrow, Manners, for having left your dormitory at night for this ridiculous purpose."

"It wasn't my fault that Mr. Ratcliff smashed my camera, sir," said the Shell fellow sulkily. "I didn't ask him to."

"That will do, Manners. Go back to bed at once."
"Very well, sir."

Manners turned out the light in the dark-room, and departed. He knew that he was booked for lines, if not for a caning; but he was looking satisfied. He had satisfied himself at last that his beloved camera was susceptible to repair—it was a question of replacing some parts with new parts; and with a couple of pounds and a considerable amount of industry, Manners hoped to turn out his camera as good as new. So he was feeling much more at peace with himself and with the world generally as he returned to the Shell dormitory. The chief thought in his mind, in fact, was, whether it would be feasible to extract the necessary couple of pounds from Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Railton, with a grave face, rejoined Mr. Linton in the hall.



"It is fairly clear that Manners has not been out of the House," he said. "But he was assuredly absent from his dormitory, and that bears out Merry's statement that he missed him and went to look for him."

Mr. Linton nodded slowly. "I fail to see why Merry should have supposed him to be out of the House," he said. "It is a very odd coincidence, at least, that Merry went out of House bounds to look for Manners, at the very time—"

He paused. "The police will be called in," said Mr. Railton. "I hope they may discover that the robbery in the New House was the work of some professional burglar. I hope they may find the man. Mr. Ratcliff has already telephoned to Inspector Skeat."

The two masters exchanged a glance. "It is quite impossible that Merry—" Mr. Railton paused again.

"Quite!" said Mr. Linton. "After all, his statement is reasonable enough, as Manners was missing; and there is no reason to suppose that he went anywhere near the New House, while he was out of his own House."

"None."

"It is odd that, from what I saw in Mr. Ratcliff's study, it appears that the breaking of the desk was the work of an amateur hand," said Mr. Railton. "The lock was not picked—the lid was wedged open with some instrument, such as a chisel."

He paused, with a troubled look.

"Are you aware, Mr. Linton, whether it was known among the boys that Mr. Ratcliff had a sum of money in his desk?"

"I do not know, but it will be easy to ascertain by inquiry."

"Quite so. Tomorrow—"

The two masters returned to their rooms, both troubled in their minds. Meanwhile, the juniors had turned in again, though excited discussion was still going on in all the dormitories.

In the Shell dormitory, Manners was greeted by a hurricane of inquiry as he came in, and went coolly to bed. Tom Merry eyed him anxiously.

"Where have you been, Manners?" he asked.

"In the dark-room."

"What!" yelled Tom.

"Mending my camera."

"Oh! You—you ass! You've been caught—"

"Darrell spotted me there. It doesn't matter. It only means lines," said Manners. "I fancy I shall be able to get the thing to rights after all."

"You howling chump!" said Lowther, in measured tones.

"And Tom's been out of House bounds, looking for you."

"What rot!" said Manners. "If you missed me, Tom, you might have guessed that I should be looking after my camera."

"How should I?" said Tom warmly. "I thought—"

He broke off. All the Shell were in hearing, and he did not want to state his dark and uneasy suspicions to the whole form.

"You thought what?" asked Manners.

"Oh, nothing! Let's turn in!" said Tom gruffly.

And the Shell went back to bed, though it was a long time before they slept.

CHAPTER 8.
Accused!

TOM MERRY was in a slightly uneasy mood when he came down on the following morning.

He was relieved in his mind about Manners, though somewhat exasperated, too, with his chum. After all the anxiety Manners had caused him, it turned out that he had only been in the dark-room repairing his damaged camera—a natural enough proceeding from Manners' point of view, and an act approaching idiocy from the point of view of every other fellow in the School. Still, it was something to know that Manners had not been "playing the goat" and getting himself into serious trouble. Tom's mind was relieved on that subject, at least.

Indeed, now that Manners had come to the conclusion that his precious camera was not beyond possible repair, and now that the effect of the cleaning had worn off, he was feeling much less bitter and looking more his old quiet and philosophical self.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that the camera had claimed Manners' attention during the sleepless hours; otherwise, certainly he had been in the mood for a rash and reckless act. On that score Tom's anxiety was now at an end.

But his anxiety for Manners was replaced by a deep uneasiness for himself.

He had been out of House bounds at night—a serious matter, much more serious than Manners' conduct in going down to the dark-room to tinker with his camera. There was only his word that he had gone out to look for his missing chum—and without betraying Manners' angry threats against the New House master, his explanation sounded very inadequate. True, Tom's word was as good as gold. In ordinary circumstances his Housemaster would have accepted it without question. But it unfortunately happened that the circumstances were not ordinary.

If Tom was questioned—as was certain to occur—he could not deny that he had entered Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House. Unless he told that he had suspected Manners of going there with revengeful intent, he would certainly be supposed to have gone there to play some trick himself on the New House master. And Mr. Ratcliff was certain to show the greatest bitterness when he heard of that, and to appeal to the Head for an exemplary punishment. The fact that Tom's arrival had interrupted the thief might tell in his favour; but as the thief had apparently escaped with his plunder, that could not weigh very much.

So the captain of the Shell came down with a thoughtful brow that morning, with a feeling that he was destined to "go through it" before very long.

At breakfast he noticed that Mr. Linton looked at him long and hard, and averted his eyes suddenly as Tom met them. There was an expression on the Shell master's face that Tom could not quite fathom, but he guessed that it boded trouble.

Tom's uneasiness intensified; he hardly knew why. Trouble was in the air, and he could feel it. He noticed, too, that

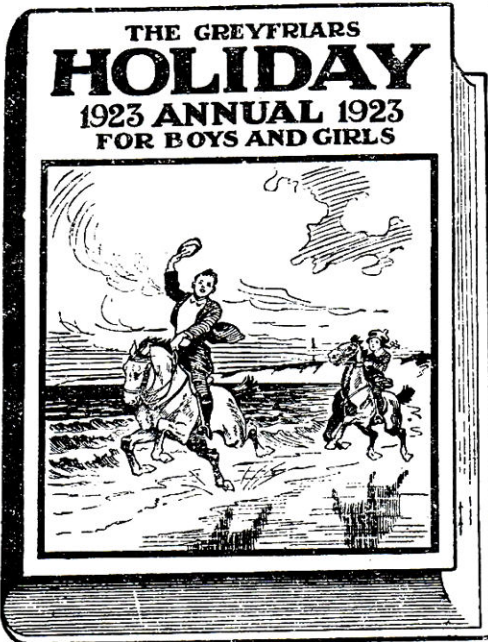
(Continued on page 15.)

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GRAND XMAS ISSUE

The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited by TOM MERRY.

EDITORIAL.

By Tom Merry.

This being our Christmas Number, I take this opportunity to hold out the hand imaginary, and wish you all a merry Christmas and a bumper time on your holidays!

Already the festive season has brought me a fine crop of Christmas-cards from chums in all quarters. Even some of my critics have caught the goodwill spirit, and sent along a greeting. It would be too great a task for me to send cards to all my chums, so I must ask you to take the will for the deed. The spirit is willing, but—ahem!—the funds are weak!

You and I have grown out of the childhood belief in Santa Claus, and most of us haven't hung up a stocking for many a festive season (even if we had stockings to hang up; socks don't hold much, anyway). But that Father Christmas really lives in the spirit, none will deny. It's the spirit that prompts us to good-fellowship and the forgetting of quarrels, to the giving of presents and cards as tokens of it, to the gay decorations, the holding of parties, and the merry round of eating, drinking, and laughter-making. May you all have these in full measure—and feel no bad after-effects!

So I raise on high the foaming ginger-pop, and again here's to a happy Christmas to you all!

Well, it looks as though we've got a high old time before us this Christmas. Not the happy guests of Lord Eastwood as of old. Oh, no; "Ratty" Rateliff has put the damper on all that for us. He always has caused trouble, and I suppose he always will—it's the nature of the beast. But you can take it from me he's making a rod for his own back this time. Fancy getting on the "high horse" simply because Manners snapped him doing the Highland fling on a sate! He even went the whole hog and smashed up Manners' precious camera for him, instead of accepting the roll of films to destroy if he willed it. Ugh! I'd make a doormat of him if I only could!

He'll rue the day, though, you can bet your sweet life on that score. He's starting a ball rolling that will take more than a goalkeeper to stop. Can you wonder at anyone being up in arms at such a tyrant as this?

Now he's even got suspicions that I've stolen the rotten gold he's been hoarding up. He can't even stop to think. Blames the very first one that crosses his path. Of course, Manners is to blame for the jolly old rumpus from the very beginning. If he hadn't let his tongue run loose all this bother wouldn't have come about. But it's no good crying over spilt milk now. The job's done, and now comes the rub. But who will feel it? You just wait; there's some stirring times ahead.

The cry is now:
"Up, Guards, and at 'em!"
TOM MERRY.

THE GUY LEMMONS, No. 226

Christmas Crackers

By Monty Lowther

The St. Jim's Nurth Merchant.

Yule-tide over the festive season if you take things easy.

Mince-pies, chunks of pudding, etc., are usually taken easy—if there's nobody looking!

At the Rylcombe Christmas Ball Fatty Wynn had to refuse several dances. No doubt because he was already full up!

Gussy has been caught several times kissing the school maids under the mistletoe. Funny, but every miss'll toe the line for our old Gussy!

BAGGY'S LAMENT

(after having gorged himself with Christmas-pudding).

Oh, Pudding, delightful delirium!
My jaws champed you—I gloried to wearium!
I must say "Au revoir,"
As I write on the floor,
With pains jabbing through my interium!

The suggestion to run a school pantomime for the fags has been abandoned, owing to the likelihood of there being such a severe crush of seniors.

Racke's Christmas motto: "Drawing-room games—nap-oo!"

Motto of Piggins' Christmas Glee Quartette: "Everything comes to those who wait."

Everything handy in Study No. 10 did come to Figgy's Quartette when they sang carols outside the window. Figgy, indeed, got the "coaled shoulder"!

The Ghost of St. Jim's walks abroad at this time of the year, and it has already been seen by many. That it was Taggles, walking in his nightshirt whilst under the influence of the "spirit" of Christmas, is a possible explanation.

If George Grundy's face was his fortune, he wouldn't be worth the snuff of a Christmas candle.

GOOD KING WENCESLAS

(Modern Version)

BY ROBERT ARTHUR DIGBY.

Good King Wenceslas looked out,
The frost was really cruel;
He'd got another turn of gout,
And had to live on gruel.
Suddenly his hands clenched tight,
He gave a joyful chortle;
A chestnut seller hove in sight,
And stopped outside the portal.

He called his page: "Now get me, Steve,
Baked chestnuts from your barrow;
Know'st thou this Christmas Eve
I'm frozen to the marrow!"
The page thought "Wency's off his dot,
He's crazy as a hatter,"
But the chestnuts for his master got,
And brought them on a platter.

King Wenceslas, he wofed three score,
Till he could get no more in,
Then laid him down upon the floor,
And soon was loudly snoring.
He dreamed a dream of awful strife,
A nightmare quite nerve-racking!
The red-hot chestnuts came to life,
And at him came attacking!

He rolled about in terror's throes,
Till he reached the fender;
Against the bars he jabbed his nose—
His yell it was a render!
He rose, flames lapping at his beard,
And dashed out for a cooler;
Came back, his gout had disappeared—
Now he's a happy ruler!

A Few Riddles for You.

By CURLY GIBSON.

- Q: Why did the lobster turn red?
A: Because it saw the salad dressing.
- Q: Why is a goat nearly?
A: Because it is all but(t).
- Q: What two countries are apart all the year, but come together at Christmas?
A: Turkey and Greece (grease).
- Q: Why is the nose in the middle of the face?
A: Because it's the scenter (centre).
- Q: Which tree is always nearest the sea?
A: The beech.
- Q: What three letters of the alphabet are most necessary in business?
A: A Y Z. (A wise head).
- Q: What can pass through a thick forest without fear of touching a twig?
A: An echo.
- Q: What is the difference between Mr. Railton and an engine-driver?
A: Mr. Railton trains the mind, whilst the engine-driver minds the train.

Grubgold's Ghost.

BY WALLY D'ARCY.

IT was Xmas Eve at Tiddermister, and old Simon Grubgold sat in his kottidge kounting out his gold.

Sno was falling outside, and stranes of mewis wofled in throo the cracked window. The lokal karol singers were singing there sweet refranes.

"Go away!" crokeled old Grubgold, as the munney kollektor nooked at the dore. "You'll ware the nocker out! Happy Kriss-mass, indeed! I hav no munney!"

The karol singers departed, and Simon slaved his gold up the chimney, and hobbled up to bed. He didn't notiss the face at the window!

The wind wisled and the sno fell as Grubgold, fully drest, lay on the bed, lulled to sleep by the nocking of his own nees and the hreeking of the bed.

The kathedral klock chimed midnite. Grubgold awoke as sumthing kold and klammy pulled his nose and whiskers. A wite-cad figur stood by his side!

"Hoo—hoo are y-y-you?" he stutered, with chattering teeth.

"I am Grubgold's Ghost!" replide the spekter in deep tones. "Come, Simon, and you shall see a few things. Follo me!"

Grubgold arose and follode the apparishon in terror. It led him throo the sno-clad back-streets to the kathedral. Grubgold's gost flung open the graveyard gate and beckoned him to enter.

Simon entered, and immediately weerd voices, kuming it seemed from nowhere asid his ears, in a moaning and growning in agony. And abuv the orful wales he herd these weerd charnting:

"Give up yer gold! Give up yer gold!"

"List to the kries of departed mizers!" rumbled the spook. "Heer them rithing in torment! They are worning you to give up yer gold air they drag you down beneeth the grave-does, and mak you suffer with them! Will you give up yer gold?"

"I will! I will!" moaned Simon, dredding the orful kries.

"Then sine this!" said the ghost, handing him a paper and a fountain-pen.

"Sine! Sine! Sine!" waled the unseen voices.

Simon sined.

Immediately the voices seered. A number of dark figurs arose and grabbed old Grubgold. The spekter took off its wite shroud and slung it round Simon. He found his feet tide up with rattling chains and tin boxes.

Simon Grubgold kride out in terror, not knowing wot to make of it all. But all he herd woz a koruss of mocking larfter, the slanning of the graveyard gate, and then—silense!

Simon dashed hither and thither, till at last the gate opened, and a berly konstable grabbed him.

"Ho! So you're the chap wot's been playing ghost—hey!" roared the policeman. "Old Grubgold, too! Ill teech you to skare the town wot!" This way to the stasion!"

In vane did Simon pled. He woz run in for playing ghost!

Meenwhile, harf a dozen boys from the lokal Grammar Skool broke into Simon's kottage, pulled his gold down from the chimney, and made off with it.

"It's all seeran, boys!" chukled the leeder. "We've got old Grubgold's sined orders to take his gold and give the pore people of Tiddermister an Xmas treat! We'll hav everything redy by the time he kums out of the stone jug in the morning!"

And wen Simon Grubgold did get free, after telling his story of the ghost and getting an extra five bob fine for being drunk, he found the pore people of Tiddermister enjoyng a fine Xmas dinner in the town hall. They haled him as there henefakter and toasted him in wine borth with his own gold. Simon raved at first, but wen he saw the happy, smiling faces, and found himself looked upon as a hero, his hart woz tutched.

HERR SCHNEIDER'S XMAS BOX.

By Clifton Dane.



"I THINK it's a ripping wheeze!" said Tom Merry to his chums gathered round the Common-room fire. "We've given Herr Schneider a high old time this term. We don't like German, and lessons with old Schneider are always the most—ahem!—unruly of the lot!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!" "Herr Schneider behaves like a Hun sometimes, but he's really not a bad old stick" went on the Shell captain. "It's not his fault that he's a German, so, kids, I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to give him a little token of our regard in the form of a small Christmas box from the Lower School."

"Yaas, wathah!" Racker, Crooke, Mellish, and a few fellows of their kidney held aloof.

"What! Subscribe to giving old Schneider a Christmas present?" sneered Racker. "Not much! Try elsewhere!"

When Tom Merry and Blake had slammed the study door behind them in contempt, Racker gave a chuckle.

"Chaps, I've got a fine idea!" said the dinky young dog of the Shell. "They've decided that the present shall take the form of a rosewood tobacco cabinet, filled with that fearful black shag that Schneider smokes. They're going to put it on his dressing-table during the night, so that he'll find it in the morning—Christmas Eve to-morrow, you know. Well, during the night we can get in and do a few things to that box. We'll take the slag out and put in one of those firework Jack-in-the-boxes you can buy in the village for a couple of bob. As soon as the lid is opened out flies a fearful demon with a regular volcano of squibs and sparks. I reckon old Schneider won't be so pleased with his present as Tom Merry & Co. imagine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Thus, whilst Tom Merry & Co. were in the Rylecombe tobacconist's buying the large, handsome rosewood tobacco cabinet for Herr Schneider, Racker & Co., at a shop higher up the road, were purchasing a splendid large firework Jack-in-the-box—also for Herr Schneider.

At eleven o'clock that night, when the moon was bathing the snow-clad roofs of St. Jim's with mystic light, the Terrible Three crept from the Shell dormitory with the tobacco cabinet. Loud snores were reverberating in Herr Schneider's bed-room when they arrived. They opened the door quietly, and placed the cabinet on the dressing-table, with a nicely written card: "With Best Wishes for a Merry Christmas from your Pupils."

Satisfied that they had planned a pleasant surprise for Herr Schneider on the morrow, they returned to their beds and went to sleep.

When the coast was clear, Aubrey Racker sat up and called to Crooke and Serone. The three young rascals put on some slippers and stole away from the dormitory, taking with them the firework Jack-in-the-box.

"He's asleep!" chuckled Racker, as they halted outside the German master's room.

"Good even!" It was the work of a few minutes to empty the tobacco from the cabinet, and put in its place the deadly Jack-in-the-box. Racker & Co. returned to bed, chuckling gleefully.

Mid-night tolled from the old clock-tower at St. Jim's as a shadowy figure crept along the corridor, and gave a low grunt of satisfaction at the sound of Herr Schneider's snoring.

The marauder opened the bedroom door quietly, and slipped in.

The intruder's eyes glamed when he saw

the rosewood cabinet on the dressing-table. He went over to it with eager hands outstretched. Barely had he touched it than the lid flew up and something luminous came out swiftly and hit him in the face to the accompaniment of a terrific bang.

"Yarooooooh!" roared the intruder, falling back on the bed, and knocking Herr Schneider's head a crack against the wall.

Bang! BANG! Whirr-rrrrr! Pizz-z-zzzzzz! The fireworks were going it. The darkness became brilliant with streaming cascades of sparks and flashes of light, whilst terrified exclamations were going on incessantly.

"Himmel!" howled Herr Schneider, started out of his wits, and rolling out of the bed with his arms clasped like a lampet round the marauder. "Mein Gott, vat iss dat? Der earthquake, it was habben! Yarooooooh!"

A large jumping jack came hopping out of the box, cracking loudly and jumping merrily. Herr Schneider and his captive raised their voices in a loud, united howl of terror. The bed gave way with a terrific crash, and buried the two men underneath a pile of bedclothes and ironmongery.

Bedlam seemed to have broken loose in Herr Schneider's bed-room. He hung on to the floor in very terror, and despite terrific onslaughts from that worthy, would not let him go.

In that state of affairs Kildare, Mr. Railton, and a whole host of seniors discovered when they burst in a minute later, roused from their beds by the din.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Railton, lighting the gas. "What ever is the matter in here?"

"Gerrugh! Yerrugh! Gug, gug!" came from underneath the heap on the floor.

"Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Railton, when a strange, burly looking man rolled out, and Herr Schneider crawled out after him.

The stranger made a break for the window, but Kildare, Darrell, and North seized him and brought him back.

"It's a burglar, sir!" cried the St. Jim's captain. "There's his bag—and it's half full of loot! My hat! Where on earth did the fireworks come from?"

"Probably a joke of some of the juniors!" said Mr. Railton, with a wry smile. "But I dare say those fireworks played a vital part in the apprehension of this rascal. Compose yourself, my dear Herr Schneider."

It took St. Jim's some time to recover from the midnight excitement. Herr Schneider had to have his bed re-erected before he again sought repose. He was pleased with the rosewood cabinet, however, and proud that he had caught the burglar. So all was well that ended well—except for Racker & Co., who got bumped in the snow next day.



"Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Railton, as Herr Schneider crawled out from underneath the heap on the floor.

"What ever is the matter?" "THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 775.

"FOR FRIENDSHIP'S SAKE!"

(Continued from page 13.)

some of the Sixth Form prefects glanced at him with unusual interest. He noticed that Knox of the Sixth grinned as he looked at him, and whispered to Cutts of the Fifth, who grinned too. Tom had a vague uneasy feeling that something was "on," something more serious than he could yet fathom.

He expected to be called over the coals after breakfast; but the call did not come, and he went into the Shell Form room with the rest of the Form. Mr. Linton was very unusually grave, and he passed over Tom in first lesson.

The Juniors were aware that Inspector Skeat, of Wayland, was with the Head, undoubtedly discussing the robbery; and Mr. Ratcliff, who was the master of the Fifth, was kept away from his Form for some time while the police-inspector was at the school.

Fellows who saw "Ratty" that morning announced that he looked more like a Hun than ever, and that his temper was the worst on record, which was saying a great deal. New House fellows were heard to wonder whether they could stand Ratty till the school broke up for Christmas. Fortunately breaking-up was near at hand.

All the Shell fellows knew that something very serious was in the air, and guessed that it was in connection with the robbery in the New House; but what precisely was in the air they did not know. But it was said up and down the Forms that the prefects had been making inquiries among the juniors on a very unexpected and surprising subject. They wanted to know whether there was general knowledge of the fact that Mr. Ratcliff kept a sum of ready money in the desk in his study.

It was easy enough for the prefects to get information. All the fellows knew about Ratty's hoard, and had made many jokes about it and the hoarder. It had been the talk of the junior Common-room the previous evening, and the subject was fresh in most minds. Knox of the Sixth, indeed, drew from Baggy a full tale of that talk in the Common-room, with details that astonished Knox.

A message came for Mr. Linton during morning lessons in the Shell. And when the Shell were dismissed the Form master called to Tom.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You will go to the Head's study immediately on leaving the Form-room."

"Very well, sir!" said Tom quietly.

It had come at last! Why his questioning had been postponed till after morning lessons Tom could not guess, for certainly Mr. Linton must have reported his escapade to the Housemaster earlier. Manners and Lowther left the Form-room with their chum, both looking serious and sympathetic.

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap," said Manners remorsefully. "Of course, I couldn't guess that you'd wake up and miss me from the dorm last night."

"All serene," said Tom. "Can't be helped."

"It's frightfully unlucky," said Lowther. "I'm afraid it's a licking for breaking House bounds at night, Tom."

Tom Merry nodded. He expected that.

"But why the thump did you go out of the House after Manners?" asked Monty. "Of course, you couldn't guess that the howling ass was mucking about with a silly busted camera. But why—"

"Yes, I don't quite see that," said Manners. "Why the merry thump did you think I was out of the House, Tom?"

Tom Merry coloured.

"I thought you'd gone over to the New House," he answered.

"Oh, my hat!"

"You surely remember what you said," exclaimed Tom. "Some potty rot about smashing Ratty's things, in return for his smashing your camera. I thought—"

Manners whistled softly.

"Poor old man," he said. "I was awfully wild, and I suppose I talked out of my hat. Fact is, if I hadn't found the camera wasn't past praying for, I should have done something of the kind, I think. But, dash it all, Tom, you might have known I wouldn't be likely to break into the New House at night! Dash it all—"

"All very well now," said Tom rather bitterly. "It didn't

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seem so certain last night. I thought you were making a fool of yourself, and earning the sack, and I came to stop you."

Monty Lowther uttered a startled exclamation.

"Tom, you went over to the New House?"

"Yes," said Tom.

"Then you must have been there about the same time as the giddy burglar. You came back while the alarm was on."

"Just the same time," said Tom.

The Terrible Three had reached the door of the Head's study. There was no time for more talk; but Manners and Lowther were looking very startled as Tom tapped at the Head's door and went in. They walked away with very serious faces, and waited at the corner of the corridor for their chum to rejoin them.

Tom Merry entered the presence of Dr. Holmes with his head erect, though his heart was heavy. Somewhat to his surprise he found both the Housemasters of St. Jim's in the room. Apparently he was to be tried in state, as it were. Mr. Ralton was looking deeply grave, and on the face of Mr. Horace Ratcliff was a hard and bitter look—a relentless look. Why the New House master was there was a mystery to Tom; he was not concerned in any delinquency of a School House fellow. And why Mr. Ratcliff looked at him so grimly and bitterly was another mystery. No doubt Ratty was very much embittered by his loss in the robbery, but that had nothing to do with Tom Merry. But there was an atmosphere in the study that weighed on the junior's spirits. Instinctively he felt that there was trouble coming—blacker trouble than he had expected or could understand. The faces of all three of the masters told him as much.

"You sent for me, sir," said Tom as calmly as he could, fixing his eyes upon Dr. Holmes.

"Yes, Merry. I have to put you to a very searching examination," said the Head. "I hope—I trust that you will come through it with your honour unstained."

Tom gave a start.

"I don't understand, sir. I haven't denied that I was out of my House last night. I told Mr. Linton the reason."

"You gave him the true reason?"

"Certainly, sir. But even if I had not done so, I don't see—" Tom Merry broke off. What did the Head mean by that reference to his "honour"? A flash came into his eyes. "Surely, sir, you, or my Housemaster, or Mr. Linton cannot think that I went out for any dishonourable reason?"

"I hope not—I trust not," said the Head. "You do not deny that you left your dormitory about midnight?"

"I admitted it to Mr. Linton. It is true. I should not be likely to tell a lie, I hope," said Tom proudly.

"You declared to Mr. Linton that you missed Manners from the dormitory, and went to look for him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Manners, it seems, was in a room downstairs, foolishly engaged upon mending a camera. You did not know that?"

"I had no idea of it."

"You supposed that he was out of the House?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

Tom was silent. All three masters looked at him, and his colour deepened. A satirical smile curved Mr. Ratcliff's thin lips for a moment.

"I think Merry will find it difficult to answer that question, sir," he said.

"Kindly leave this in my hands, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, with some asperity. "I am questioning Merry."

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip and was silent. That unusual sharpness on the part of the Head surprised Tom, and again he realised that something serious—something terribly serious—must be in the balance, though he could not guess what it was. It was obvious that Dr. Holmes was very deeply moved.

"If you had any good reason to suppose that Manners had left the School House at night, Merry, it will help you," said the Head. "My boy, a great deal depends on your answer. I treat you, as well as command you, to answer me with perfect frankness."

Tom Merry felt a sinking at the heart.

"Answer me, Merry, for your own sake."

"Very well, sir," said Tom steadily. "I was afraid that Manners might be going to do something foolish."

"In what way?"

"Mr. Ratcliff smashed his camera yesterday, and Manners was very much cut up about it. He took it very seriously," said Tom. "When I missed him from the dormitory, I—I was afraid he had gone to the New House to play some—some trick on Mr. Ratcliff."

The Head gave him a searching glance.

"It seems, however, that this fear on your part was unfounded, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. I am very glad of it."

The Head coughed.



"Looking for Manners, as you say, did you go to the New House?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you enter the House?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are aware, Merry, that at the time you were out of your House a robbery was perpetrated in Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House?"

"I am aware of that, sir."

"According to your own statement, you must have been there at the same time that the thief was there."

"That is correct, sir."

"If you entered the House, how did you obtain an entrance?"

"Mr. Ratcliff's study window was open, sir. I—I thought Manners had got it open somehow, and I called to him. I thought he was there, playing some jape on Mr. Ratcliff. Nobody answered, and I climbed in. Then I was collared—"

"Bless my soul!"

"The thief was there, sir," said Tom. "He collared me; and then I knew it was a thief, and not Manners at all. He pitched me over, and jumped out of the window and ran."

"And why, Merry, did you not give the alarm, if your statement is correct?" exclaimed the Head.

"The alarm was given, sir. I knocked over some furniture when I was pitched over, and I heard people moving and calling in the House. So I cut—I mean I left."

"The three masters exchanged looks. Mr. Ratcliff's thin face grew blacker and more bitter.

"You have told no one of this, Merry?" asked the Head, after a long pause.

"No one, sir, yet."

"You intended to keep the matter secret?"

"Naturally, sir. I knew it was a licking for being out of House bounds at night, whatever my reason. Naturally, I did not intend to give myself away. But for the burglary it would not have been known, of course."

There was another long pause.

All through this strange interview, this mesh of close and searching questioning, Tom had felt that there was something behind—something dark and threatening that he could not grasp.

But he had not dreamed of this.

That he—Tom Merry—could be suspected of this had not even entered his imagination, uneasy and disquieted as he was.

He could not speak.

He could only stare at the Head, white and dumb, almost stunned by the terrible accusation.

There was a heavy silence in the study. It lasted a full minute. Mr. Raitlon turned his face away. The Head made restless movements with his long, white fingers. Only Mr. Ratcliff stared grimly at the junior—grimly, with pitiless, glittering eyes. From Mr. Ratcliff, at least, the accused boy had no pity, no consideration to expect.

It was the Head who broke the terrible silence at last.

"I am waiting for your answer, Merry."

Tom found his voice. It was husky, unnatural, when he spoke; he hardly knew his own tones.

"I—a hand in the robbery! You—you ask me that—me?"

"I ask you, Merry, and I am waiting for your reply."

"Speak up, Merry!" said Mr. Raitlon, in his deep, kind voice, with a compassionate look at the white-faced junior.

Tom pulled himself together. A crimson flush came into his pale face, and spread till his cheeks were burning.

"Dr. Holmes, you suspect me of robbing Mr. Ratcliff?"

"That is not an answer to my question, Merry."

"I never thought you would ask me such a question, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry passionately. "No one has a right to ask a decent fellow whether he is a thief."

"Moderate your words, please," said the Head sharply.

"It is my duty, Merry, to sift this matter to the bottom. Answer my question—yes or no. Did you, or did you not, force an entrance into the New House last night and break

Read About

THE REBELLION AT ST. JIM'S!

in Next Week's Gem.

"Merry," said the Head at last, "Heaven knows I desire to be just, to give you every chance. The robbery in Mr. Ratcliff's study was not, in Inspector Skeat's opinion, the work of a practised burglar. The window was forced open in a clumsy manner, with some such instrument as a chisel; the desk was wrenched open in the same way. The act might have been done by anyone, except a professional cracksmen. One of the New House prefects saw a boy running in the direction of the School House. That boy was yourself!"

"I did not know I was seen, sir; but I suppose it must have been I," said Tom.

"Were you aware of the fact that Mr. Ratcliff kept a considerable sum in his desk?"

"Everyone knows that, sir."

"Some inquiries have been made," said the Head. "It appears that the fact was widely known, owing to some New House boy having made the discovery. In the Commou-room in this House, last evening, Merry, were you discussing the circumstance with other boys?"

"There was talk about it, sir."

"Did you make some remark to the effect that somebody might burgle Mr. Ratcliff's desk, and buy Manners a new camera with the money that was supposed to be there?"

Tom gave quite a jump. His car-less, jesting words came back into his mind at once. He flushed deeply.

"I did make some joke to that effect, sir. Of course, it was only a joke. We all thought that Mr. Ratcliff ought to pay for Manners' camera, after breaking it, so—"

"Merry, answer me directly! Had you a hand in the robbery of a sum of fifty pounds from Mr. Ratcliff's desk last night?"

CHAPTER 9.
Guilty!

TOM MERRY did not answer.

He could not.

He stared at the headmaster with starting eyes, with a face from which every vestige of colour had absolutely fled.

open Mr. Ratcliff's desk and take out the money you knew to be there?"

Tom panted.

"I did not."

"Reflect, Merry!" said the Head quietly. "You have given some sort of explanation of your actions last night. You have stated that you left your House to look for a schoolfellow, who was indoors at the time. You have stated that you entered Mr. Ratcliff's study at the time the theft was taking place, and escaped again, intending to keep your knowledge a secret. But the facts of the matter are these. Mr. Ratcliff has been robbed by a person who obviously had no skill in housebreaking. You were on the spot at the time surreptitiously, and no one else was seen—no trace has been found of a burglar. You know there was a sum of money in the desk, and you had spoken—however jestingly—of burbling the desk and robbing Mr. Ratcliff. Merry, you can see what the evidence implies!"

Tom caught his breath.

He could see it now—see it only too clearly. The falling snow had hidden the footprints of the escaping thief, he knew that. He had taken it for granted that it was a cracksmen whom he had interrupted in his work, yet the inspector's official opinion on that subject could not be doubted. It was no cracksmen who had robbed Mr. Ratcliff; it was some bungler at the work—a boy, as likely as a man.

Tom Merry felt the study whirling round him, he saw the three grim faces in a mist.

What would the fellows believe? What could anybody believe? Men had been sent to prison on less clear evidence than this.

What stood against the evidence? Only the character of the accused junior—the fact that Tom Merry of St. Jim's was known—known to be incapable of a deed of dishonour. His friends would believe in him, at least. But in the Head's study there was grim condemnation. Obviously, not one of the masters believed that there had been a burglar at all. That had been the first supposition, until Tom Merry's connection with the affair became known. And now—

The silence was terrible. Tom tried to clear his dizzy brain, but he was shaken to his very soul.

Dr. Holmes spoke again at last.

"If you have anything to say, Merry, I am waiting to hear it."

Tom gasped for breath.

"Only that I am innocent, sir! Only that I would have my hand cut off rather than steal! And every fellow that knows me knows that!"

"Can you give any information with regard to the thief whom, you allege, you found in Mr. Ratcliff's study?"

"Collect yourself, Merry," said Mr. Railton. "If a man was there, as you state, surely—"

"A man was there," said Tom huskily. "He threw me over, as I've told you. Then he jumped from the window and ran. All I saw was a sort of shadow at the window."

"You can give no description of this supposed person that would help the police in seeking him?"

"No, sir," said Tom. "I saw him only for an instant in the dark. He did not even speak a word. I thought it was some burglar; it was a thief, anyhow. If it wasn't a professional burglar, I—I suppose it was some sneaking thief of some sort."

"And how would such a thief know anything of the money in Mr. Ratcliff's desk?" said the Head.

"I—I don't know! There has been a burglary at this school before," said Tom. "Last term—"

"Quite so! An attempt was made upon the safe," said the Head. "But no one outside the school could possibly know that there was money in a desk in a study in the New House. It appears somehow to have leaked out in the school; outside the school it cannot possibly have been known."

Tom Merry tried to speak, but his tongue clove to his mouth. He realised dazedly that what the Head said was true—horribly true and certain. How could some loafing footpad or sneak-thief have known anything about Mr. Ratcliff's hoard? How could any stranger to the school have known even that the study was a Housemaster's study at all? Why, with valuable plunder to be found in more likely parts of the building, should a midnight thief have concentrated his attention upon an ordinary writing-desk in a study?

Tom Merry's brain whirled as he tried to think of it. There had been a thief—he knew that! He had seen him—touched him. He remembered still the fearful thrill of that sudden clutch in the darkness. Yet even to Tom it was a puzzle, unless—unless the thief, after all, was a St. Jim's fellow—not an outsider, as he had supposed. But that theory only blackened what was already dark; for if the thief belonged to St. Jim's, all the evidence was against Tom Merry himself.

"I think we have gone far enough," said the Head. "This is a terrible discovery—"

"I suspected Merry from the moment I heard that he had been out of his House at the time of the theft, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff sourly. "The whole thing was clear enough to my mind!"

The Head did not look at him. He looked at Mr. Railton. Slowly the School House master nodded his head.

Tom felt as if a hand of iron had gripped his heart. He was adjudged guilty—guilty! He wondered dizzily whether this was some horrible dream from which he would presently awaken, to find himself in bed in the Shell dormitory.

"Dr. Holmes"—Tom's voice was a husky whisper—"I—I—"

"You have said enough, Merry!" The Head's voice was like steel now. "There was no burglar—the fact is perfectly clear. No one from outside entered the school last night. This base robbery was committed by a person belonging to the school—and that person was yourself. It remains for you to make restitution—"

"Restitution!" Tom Merry almost laughed. How was he to restore what he had not taken?

"Fifty pounds were taken from Mr. Ratcliff's desk," said the Head sternly. "Of this sum several coins were dropped by the thief in his haste. The total sum now missing is forty-six pounds. This is in your possession, and must be restored. For the sake of your relations, upon whom this disgrace will fall heavily, you will not be handed over to the law. You will leave the school—"

"Leave the school?"

"A thief cannot remain here, Merry, as you know very well. Mr. Ratcliff will consent to let the matter drop if the money is restored. This day you will leave the school. But restitution must be made first. Where is the money?"

Tom's eyes blazed.

"I don't know where the money is, as I have not taken it," he said. "I know nothing about it. There was a thief in the room when I entered it, and it was not a boy, but a man—at least, somebody much stronger than I. That is all I know."

The Head made a gesture.

"Cannot you see, unhappy boy, that falsehoods will not serve you now?" he exclaimed.

"If they would serve me, I would not speak them," said Tom Merry hotly. "I have told the truth!"

"In a word, Merry, will you restore the money you have taken?"

"I have taken nothing!"

"Your belongings will be searched," said the Head. "No doubt the money will be found, unless you have hidden it in some secret place outside the House. If it is found, well and good. If not, your relatives will be called upon to make the loss good. The alternative will be prosecution. For the honour of the school, I shall be as merciful as I can, but the stolen money must be restored. You may go for the present."

Tom Merry turned to the door.

His hand was upon it when he turned. He looked at the Head, at Mr. Railton; Mr. Ratcliff he did not heed.

Was this some hideous dream, or was he in reality judged a thief—condemned to utter disgrace and ignominy? The grim, condemning faces met his gaze. The Head made a gesture of dismissal.

"Dr. Holmes—"

"Go!"

"Upon my word of honour, sir—" said Tom Merry huskily.

"Go!"

And Tom Merry went. With dragging steps, his head bowed down, he left the Head's study. The familiar old corridor seemed to be reeling about him, as he almost staggered away. Manners and Lowther, at the corner, waiting for their chum, raced towards him. Their faces suddenly paled as they saw the face of Tom Merry.

"Tom!"

"What's happened?"

Monty Lowther caught him by the arm.

"Tom, why are you looking like that? What—"

Tom looked at him dully.

"They say I'm a thief. They say I robbed Ratty last night. I'm to be kicked out of the school—" He choked.

"Tom!"

Tom Merry went on, his face white as chalk, his eyes almost wild. His chums, in utter dismay and misery, followed him.

THE END.

(Can it be true that Tom Merry is a Thief? You will all look forward with interest to next week's splendid story by Martin Clifford, entitled: "A CHRISTMAS BARRING-OUT!" Read how the chums of St. Jim's stand up for their leader and chum.)

