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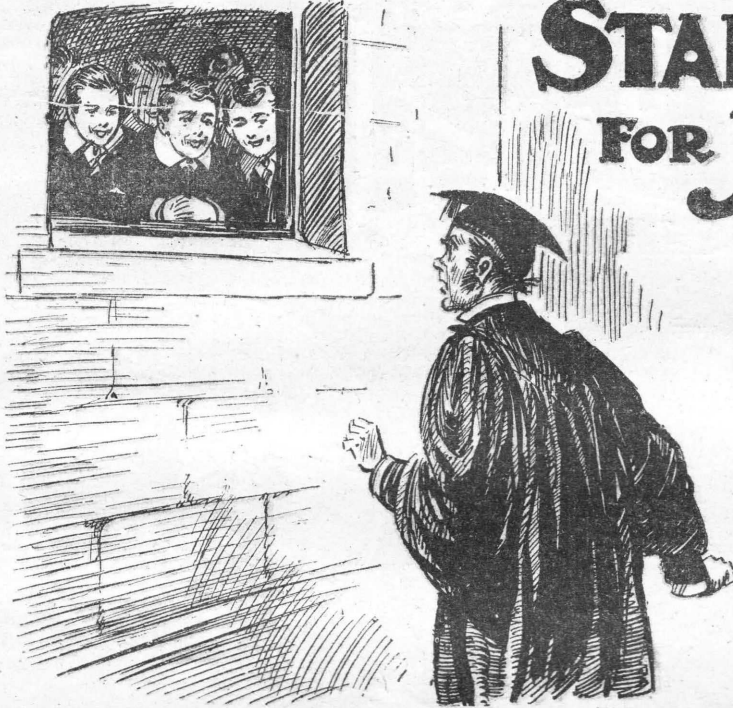
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TAGGLES IN A TANTRUM!

(A diverting incident in this week's grand school story of Tom Merry & Co.)

A SHOCK FOR "RATTY"! When Mr. Ratcliff, temporarily in charge of St. Jim's, tries to indulge his petty spite against Talbot of the Shell, he finds that Tom Merry & Co. insist on having something to say in the matter. Not even threats of expulsion and floggings subdue the riot that spreads through the Lower School when it becomes known that "Ratty" is on the warpath!



STANDING UP FOR JUSTICE!

A Magnificent New
Long Complete Story
of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Trimble Causes Trouble!

"I SAY, Talbot!"

Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, blinked into the study occupied by Talbot of the Shell, and coughed.

He had a letter in his podgy palm, and he wore his most ingratiating smile. Any fellow at St. Jim's would not have needed telling that the fat junior wanted something, and that something was most likely to be cash. The letter indicated that he had been raiding the rack in Hall, and hoped, by delivering the missive in person, to draw a little loan from the recipient—always supposing that a remittance was enclosed, and Baggy had an infallible eye for a "likely" envelope.

Talbot looked up as he heard the cough, and pointed automatically to the open door.

"Scat!" he observed, lacing his football boot.

"But, I say—"

"Cut off, Trimble! In other words, make yourself scarce, old man! Can't you see I'm just going down to the footer?"

"Yes, but look here—"

"Travel!" roared Talbot, jumping to his feet. "If you've got anything to say, say it as we go down to Little Side. The match starts in a minute or two!"

"But, I say—" He barred Talbot's way determinedly, and held out the envelope. "This has just come, old man!" he said, in a wheedling tone. "I expect there's a postal-order inside, and I was wondering—"

"Hallo! From my Uncle Lyndon!" ejaculated Talbot, tearing open the flap.

"It's been delayed in the post, too," said Trimble, peering inquisitively over Talbot's shoulder—rather a difficult task, considering the difference in height between the two. "The postmark shows it was posted early yesterday morning."

"My hat! The three o'clock at Wayland!" murmured Talbot, staring at the sheet he had withdrawn. "I shall have to scorch like the wind! Out of the way, Baggy!"

"Is there a remittance?" asked Trimble excitedly.

His anxiety on that important point was great. If it was nothing but an ordinary letter, he might just as well have left it in the rack for Talbot to fetch himself.

Talbot glanced at the clock, and headed for the doorway. A less considerate fellow might have barged Trimble out of the way, for he barred direct egress from the study. But Talbot had slipped round the Fourth-Former and was in the passage before Baggy had finished his speech.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 979.

"Talbot! Talbot, you rotter! Where are you going?"

Talbot's footsteps died away along the corridor, and Baggy fairly flew in his wake. He puffed up the stairs leading to the Shell dormitory, and found his quarry sitting on a bed and changing swiftly from his footer togs into Etons again.

"Oh, you rotter! After all my trouble fagging your letters up and down stairs, you beast!" gasped Trimble, eyeing Talbot with a hungry gleam in his greedy little eyes. "I say, you know—halves! I reckon I'm entitled to that, after all the time and—energy I've expended on your account. How much was it, Talbot, old man?"

Talbot fastened his tie and slipped on his jacket, grinning. The tenacity of the fat junior was rather amusing, but he had no time to waste. That letter should have arrived by the first post that morning, instead of at dinner-time. Had it done so he would have known in plenty of time that his Uncle Lyndon, Talbot's guardian, was passing through Wayland at three o'clock that afternoon, and desired to see his nephew for a few minutes while the train waited. Colonel Lyndon was going abroad, and would remain away for some time—and he regretted that he had not been able to come down to St. Jim's for a farewell visit.

Hence Talbot had no precious minutes to waste on Baggy Trimble—he would have to scorch to Wayland on his bike, as it was.

"Nothing doing, old fat bean," he remarked, brushing his hair. "There wasn't a postal-order, if that's what you're after. And I've nothing to lend. Roll away, and don't hinder a fellow—there's a good chap!"

"Not a bean?" queried Baggy, in dismay. "Oh, what a sell! Blessed if I'd have fagged all over the House if I'd known! I think your uncle is a measly old curmudgeon, Talbot—and you can tell him so from me when you see him! Yah!"

And with that elegant speech Trimble made a dart for the dormitory door—just in time to escape a lunge from Talbot's boot.

Baggy grunted as he came down into the Hall, and he rolled instinctively towards the letter-rack for another glance. But there was nothing for him—and what was perhaps more to the point—nothing worth the trouble of taking to the owner in the hope of "raising the wind." Most of the fellows were playing in or watching the House match, too. Trimble's luck seemed to be right out.

His eyes lit up, however, as he paused outside the cloak-room. In a few moments Talbot would want his coat and cap—he had obviously been preparing to go out. Into Baggy's mean little mind came a scheme—he would "bag" the cap and coat, and land Talbot in for a search. Possibly

it would make him late for his appointment, if that was it; anyway, he deserved it, argued Trimble, for not having had a remittance.

It was the work of a moment to slip into the cloak-room and abstract the articles in question—but at that point Trimble's star once again deserted him. He emerged from the cloak-room just as Talbot came down the stairs, three at a time—and the Shell fellow gave a roar as he spotted Baggy.

"You fat bouncer! What are you up to with my coat?" "Oh! What rotten luck!" gasped Trimble. "Yah! I—Keep off, you beast! Help!"

With Talbot only a few yards distant, Trimble spun round and took to his heels. He had no definite idea as to what he was going to do next—the pressing need of the moment was to put as great a distance as possible between Talbot and himself.

"You fat idiot! Stop!" shouted Talbot, putting on speed. "Yaroooh! Fire! Murder! Keepinoff!"

Fear lending him wings, Trimble sped like a deer through the Hall, and he came to the head of the School House steps like a whirlwind. A figure loomed up ahead, and Baggy swerved desperately to escape a collision—throwing Talbot's cap and coat from him wildly.

"Why—what—bless my soul!"

"Look out, Talbot!" yelled Trimble.

He was too late.

The Shell fellow swerved, but not enough. Before he knew what was happening, he had collided with a tall figure in a gown, and was rolling down the School House steps, bumping painfully on each one, till he arrived at the bottom. "Oh, lor! You've done it now!" gasped Trimble.

"Yow-wow-wow! I've jolly well busted my napper!" groaned Talbot, sitting up, dazedly. Then his gaze fell on a rumped gown, and he found himself staring into the face of a master—the face of Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House!

Mr. Ratcliff's features were crimson with rage, and he glared at Talbot as if he would have liked to eat him.

"Boy!" The Housemaster's voice was choking. "Boy! You had the unparalleled audacity to—to upset a master—to precipitate him down a flight of steps! Do you know that a serious injury might have resulted from this—this escapade, Talbot?"

"I'm—I'm sorry, sir!" gasped Talbot. "I didn't see you coming! Let me give you a hand, sir!"

With Talbot's aid, Mr. Ratcliff regained his feet, and while he set his mortar-board straight, Talbot dusted him down.

Baggy Trimble, during these operations, tactfully slipped away, leaving Talbot to face the wrath which was to come alone. And, judging by the concentrated expression on Mr. Ratcliff's face, he did not appear likely to take a lenient view of the matter.

When Talbot had finished dusting, the Housemaster turned a grim glance upon him.

"I am going to the library, and shall return to my study in a few minutes. You will remain there until I come, when I shall deal with you very severely. If your own Housemaster cannot keep you young ruffians in order, I will see what can be done myself. You may go to my study at once, Talbot!"

Talbot's lips set a little, but he answered respectfully enough.

"Cannot I be taken before my own Housemaster, sir?"

Mr. Ratcliff glared, and his angry flush heightened.

The unpopular New House master knew as well as Talbot that in giving orders to a School House fellow he was exceeding his rights—but he did not intend to hand Talbot over to Mr. Railton to be dealt with. Mr. Railton's methods were far too lenient for Mr. Ratcliff's taste, and in this particular instance he felt that nothing but the most severe caning he could administer would meet the case.

"No. This matter concerns me personally, Talbot. I command you to go to my study at once, and stay there until I return. Go!"

"But I have to meet my uncle at the station—" began Talbot, in dismay.

"I cannot help that!" responded Mr. Ratcliff icily. "You heard my command. If any of your arrangements are put out, you have only your own recklessness to thank!"

Talbot bit his lip hard to keep back the angry retort that sprang to his lips.

He had a perfect right to answer to Mr. Railton for the offence; and from his own Housemaster he would be assured of justice—and what was more important at the moment—his liberty. If his start was delayed much longer, the train would have left Wayland by the time he arrived, and he would miss Colonel Lyndon. It was just like Mr. Ratcliff to take matters into his own hands, regardless of whether he usurped Mr. Railton's authority or not. Talbot's face was very grim as the Housemaster swept on up the steps.

"He, he, he! The old bouncer didn't spot me!"

Talbot glanced round at the sound of a fat chuckle, and glared at Trimble, who had emerged from hiding now that the danger was over. Trimble appeared to find something highly amusing in the affair.

"Ahoy, there! Talbot!"

A shout from Little Side caused Talbot to spin round.

"Talbot! Waiting for you! Put a jerk into it!"

With a glance towards the School House, into which Mr. Ratcliff had disappeared, Talbot trotted off to Little Side, met by surprised glances as it was seen that he was not changed for the practice.

"Tom—"

"What the thump—" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Not turning out, Talbot?" asked Blake, in astonishment.

"I'm sorry, Tom Merry," said Talbot quietly. "I was just coming down to the footer when Trimble brought me a letter from my Uncle Lyndon. He wants me to meet him at Wayland at three—he's going abroad, it appears. I shall have to drop out this afternoon, I'm afraid."

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "You'd better get a move on."

Talbot trotted off to the bike-shed. He ran out his bike and sped out of gates en route for Wayland Junction—in spite of Mr. Ratcliff's command.

CHAPTER 2.

A Startling Development!

"GOOD-BYE, uncle!"

"Good-bye, my boy! Keep out of mischief!" Talbot grinned, and waved his hand in farewell to the old military gentleman till a bend in the line hid the train from sight.

Colonel Lyndon, bound for the Continent, and after that to travel still further afield, had enjoyed the brief chat with his nephew on the platform at Wayland Junction. And Talbot had been pleased to see his guardian again—some months would pass, at least, before he returned.

The junior was free to return to St. Jim's now, and as he swung his leg over his machine, he could not help wondering what kind of a reception awaited him at the hands of Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Ratcliff had been angry—very angry indeed. He would probably be enraged still more when he discovered that his command had not been obeyed—if he had not already made that discovery.

When Talbot arrived back at the school there would be a reckoning, but as he thought of it the junior did not flinch.

He would not have minded facing Mr. Railton, his own Housemaster, in the least. Mr. Railton, although severe if the occasion warranted it, was just and considerate towards his pupils. When he learned the reason for Talbot's disobedience, he would probably view the matter with a lenient eye.

But there was a strong likelihood that Mr. Ratcliff—his anger having, like wine, improved with keeping—would prefer to deal with the junior himself. In that event, unless Talbot chose to appeal expressly to the Head, he would have to take whatever punishment the New House master meted out to him.

If it was an ordinary licking, Talbot was prepared to go through with it smilingly. But if Mr. Ratcliff exceeded the limit—as he was quite likely to do, out of savage temper and spite—an appeal to the Head would be the only course left open.

The ride through the lanes with the sinking sun was very pleasant, however, and Talbot soon set his mind to rest, and revelled in the keen, fresh air.

He was gliding down a long slope near Rylcombe when the figure of another cyclist attracted his attention suddenly. The cyclist—a youth about his own age—had shot ahead, and was speeding down the slope at an alarming rate.

For a moment Talbot stared in doubt, but a glance was enough to tell him what had happened.

At the foot of the incline there was a sharp turn, with a high brick wall just beyond the roadside. A cyclist losing control of his machine on the slope was bound to crash into the wall, unless he could steer round the corner, a difficult undertaking, as the turn was abrupt.

The youth ahead was going faster than ever now, and there was little doubt that his brakes had given out, and that he was unable to stop without risking a nasty spill.

As he watched, Talbot drove hard at the pedals, though what he could do was something of a puzzle.

The cyclist sped on, and it happened all in a flash.

Nearing the bottom of the hill the youth attempted to swerve, going at high speed.

The result was disastrous.

The wall loomed directly in front, and the machine swayed dangerously. In another second the youth had

leaped from it, and rolled in the grass by the wall, while the cycle careered onwards and crashed over in the middle of the roadway.

The youth lay where he had fallen; he appeared to have crashed down with terrific force, and if he had not broken any bones he had been lucky.

With a rush, Talbot came up with him, and jammed on his brakes just in time to escape a similar fate. He ran his machine into a ditch, and came over to where the youth lay.

"Hurt, old chap?"

The youth groaned. Talbot raised him a little, and noted that there was a thin trickle of blood from under his cap. Then the stranger found his voice.

He was a good-looking lad, wearing a school cap which Talbot did not recognise, and clad in a cycling suit. The Shell fellow could not help chuckling at his first words.

"How many pieces have you picked up?"

"Only one so far, old man!" said Talbot, smiling. "I think you're all present and correct. Pinch yourself and see!"

"Ow! I feel as if I'd been under a giddy steamroller!"

With Talbot's aid, the stranger rose to his feet, and felt himself all over, while Talbot brushed some of the dust from his suit—and he had collected plenty.

"Yow! Much obliged to you, whoever you are!" said the youth, smiling. "My name's Montague. I'm cycling back to school after a mid-term visit to a sick relative."

"I'm Talbot of the St. Jim's Shell," said Talbot. "If you're going towards the school, we may as well keep each other company. But wait a minute. You've cut your head, I think."

"Only a scratch," said Montague, running his hand through his hair. "Yow! I think I may as well bathe it if there's any water handy, though!"

"This way," said Talbot, giving Montague his arm. The junior, though he would not admit it, was shaken, and he was glad of the support.

A short distance from the lane there ran a small stream, and, with Talbot's aid, Montague bathed his cut. By that time he had recovered, and was eager to resume his journey.

"I'm due back at Lynchester," he explained. "As I told you, I've been to visit a sick relation, and, being rather keen on cycling, I decided to bike back to school. I haven't got so far as I expected, though. I shall take the train at Rylcombe."

"Lynchester is at the end of a small branch line, isn't it?" asked Talbot.

"That's it. But it's a cut above most of the schools in the south of England!" grinned Montague.

"Bow-wow!" said Talbot.

"I dare say you've heard of that American boy boxing wonder who's touring the country—fellow of the name of Kid Morgan?"

"We've been hearing rather a lot about him lately," said Talbot, smiling. "He's giving St. Jim's a look-in shortly, and he's in for his first licking, if Tom Merry can manage it!"

"I'm meeting him in Lynchester in a day or two!" said Montague modestly. "I suppose he will come on to St. Jim's after that. But he will have lost his unbeaten record by then!"

"Perhaps!" chuckled Talbot. "Let's get the bikes."

Fortunately, the machines were not seriously damaged, and the juniors rode on together to the village of Rylcombe, where Montague had to catch the train for Lynchester.

"Leave a little bit of Morgan for us to see!" grinned Talbot, as he bade farewell to Montague.

And the Lynchester fellow chuckled and waved cheerily as the train drew out of the station.

The sun was sinking low, and Talbot rode hard to reach St. Jim's in time for calling-over. Disobeying Mr. Ratcliff's orders was bad enough, and he did not want to aggravate his offence by being absent when the roll was called in Hall.

As he rode, he had plenty of food for conjecture on the subject of the American boxing wonder, Kid Morgan. All St. Jim's had heard of Morgan's remarkable success since he began to tour the public schools, taking on the junior champions and defeating them with comparative ease.

Morgan's visit to St. Jim's was anticipated with great eagerness on all sides, and though Tom Merry, or Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had recently come to the fore as a mighty man with his mitts in the Public Schools' Tournament, was expected to represent the old school, it had been decided to hold a series of preliminary contests, with the object of testing current form.

Talbot was among the entrants, and hoped, like the rest, to secure the honour of representing his school against the American.

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He reached the gates just as Taggles came down to lock them for the night, and wheeled his machine towards the cycle-shed. The old porter stared after him in the gloom, and then called out:

"Master Talbot! Which you're wanted——"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Talbot under his breath. "Ratty's waiting for me like a giddy lion for his prey, I suppose! I'm in for it!"

"Which Mr. Ratcliff left orders that you was to go straight to the 'Ead's study as soon as you came in, Master Talbot. He looked fair wild, too!"

"Great Jupiter! He's reported it to Dr. Holmes, then!" whistled Talbot.

"Fair ragin', he was!" said Taggles, apparently in the role of a Job's comforter.

"Oh dear! I suppose I'd better get it over," said Talbot resignedly.

He realised now that an appeal to Mr. Railton might have simplified matters considerably, and it was highly improbable that the School House master would have stood in his way when he read Colonel Lyndon's letter. But in the heat of the moment, with time getting short, Talbot had not regarded his action from all its aspects, and now he saw that a serious view might be taken of it.

Still, it could not be helped.

The bell for calling-over rang as he entered the House, and Talbot crowded into Hall with the rest. He noticed with surprise that a good many curious glances came in his direction.

"Hallo, Talbot! Seen Ratty yet?"

Baggy Trimble, a grin on his fat features, rolled along at the Shell fellow's side, and asked that question with a barely suppressed chuckle.

Talbot stared at him, and his look was more than puzzled. It seemed as if the knowledge of his act of defiance was common property, but the interest of the juniors was too deep for that. Fellows had broken detention with not half so much fuss as this. There must be something else—but what? Talbot's surprise increased as Tom Merry accosted him with a very serious expression on his usually sunny face.

"You haven't seen Ratty yet, old man?" asked the Shell captain.

"No. I've been told to go to the Head's study immediately after calling-over," said Talbot, frowning. "I shall capture a licking, I suppose. What is there to stare at a fellow for? Look! There's Racke & Co. grinning and chuckling as if they'd just had a fortune left them!"

"I'm afraid there's trouble brewing," said Tom Merry.

"There's more in it than going out of gates against Ratty's commands. Trimble told us all about that, and I don't blame you, for one. But the fat cad has got hold of another yarn—says his shoelace came undone just outside the Head's door——"

"I know," assented Trimble.

"And from what he professes to have heard, Ratty's in a terrific fever over the loss of a scarab, or something."

"A whatter?" ejaculated Trimble.

"It appears, from Trimble's yarn, that Ratty has either lost or mislaid a valuable Egyptian scarab, and——"

"What the merry thump has that got to do with me?" inquired Talbot, in amazement.

"Talbot!" called Mr. Lathom, who was taking the roll.

Juniors and seniors turned their heads to see the Shell fellow as he replied:

"Adsum!"

Mr. Lathom gave Talbot a very peculiar glance over the tops of his glasses and coughed.

"You will go to the Head's study as soon as the roll is called, Talbot," said Mr. Lathom.

"Yes, sir."

There was a general murmur as Mr. Lathom continued the roll, and Talbot's look of puzzlement grew.

"You were saying something about an Egyptian scarab, Merry," he said quietly. "Go on."

"We've bumped Trimble for telling such a rotten yarn," grunted Tom Merry, colouring painfully. "You see, Ratty thinks the rotten thing has been pinched—just what the old rotter would think! And—and as you were the only fellow who went to his study this afternoon—when he missed the scarab—he thinks——"

Talbot's look of amazement changed to a flush of anger and his fists clenched. He controlled himself, however, with an effort.

"You mean, I'm suspected of theft!" he observed coolly.

"It's all rot——" began Tom Merry.

There was a movement among the juniors, and Kildare came forward, laying a hand on Talbot's shoulder.

"This way, young 'un!" he said, not unkindly. "The Head wants you at once!"

Talbot bit his lip hard, and nodded without speaking.



Reginald Talbot jammed on his brakes and dismounted. Then he ran his machine into a ditch, and came over to where the youth lay. "Hurt, old chap?" he asked kindly. The youth groaned. (See Chapter 2.)

The secret was out now; he was accused of theft! He followed the St. Jim's captain, leaving the Hall in a buzz.

CHAPTER 3. The Accusation!

"YOU are perfectly sure that the scarab is not—ahem! mislaid—Mr. Ratcliff?"
"Perfectly, sir!"
There was a pause.

The Head, his kindly old face expressing worry and doubt, drummed nervously with a paper-knife on his desk. Mr. Ratcliff, his face set like a hawk's, watched him.

When the New House master had come to him with his accusation Dr. Holmes had been astonished, if not astounded. Theft was a highly uncommon occurrence at St. Jim's. The occasions when any instance had occurred in all its history could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Certainly, there were one or two "black sheep" at the school whose ideas on the subject of "meum" and "tuum" were a little hazy, but this was not the escapade of a youth of Reginald Talbot's calibre. If Mr. Ratcliff's accusation was true—and he was grimly certain that it was—the culprit deserved to be handed over to the police.

Mr. Ratcliff's lean face was set as he waited for the arrival of Talbot. It was past calling-over now, and he had given strict orders that the junior was to be sent to the Head's study immediately he came in.

"You searched your study yourself, I believe?" asked the Head.

"The whole search was conducted under my personal supervision," said Mr. Ratcliff icily. "In my mind, there is no room for doubt—no room whatever. You will remember the boy Talbot collided with me in the quadrangle just after dinner?"

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"I commanded him to go to my study and await me," said Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "I was absent from the room for perhaps half an hour."

"And you returned to find the scarab gone," said the Head.

"It was a valuable curio sent to me by a cousin of mine who is a collector. It is worth well over a hundred pounds. I had been keeping it in my desk, intending to ask you to put it in your safe, sir. I left the study, foolishly omitting to lock the desk, and then, as I have said, I commanded Talbot to go to my room and await me. During the half-hour that I was absent the boy had ample time to abstract the scarab and conceal it. He was not there, naturally, when I returned."

"But another boy might just as easily have entered the study, either before or after Talbot," suggested Dr. Holmes.

"I have thought of that, sir. My first action was to call together in the dining-room all the boys who remained in the New House this afternoon. Being Wednesday, a half-holiday, there were only a few."

"Could all of them establish an alibi?" asked the Head.

"The juniors were mostly together in the Common-room," said Mr. Ratcliff. "They could vouch for each other. Three boys had remained in the study, and affirmed that they had not left it since dinner. The seniors, without exception, were out of the House."

"Hum!"

"We are forced to the conclusion that Talbot is the culprit!" said Mr. Ratcliff, his eyes gleaming.

The New House master did not like Talbot, any more than he liked any of the cheery juniors who were Talbot's chums. And after the little accident in the quad, which had shaken the Housemaster considerably, his mean soul yearned for vengeance. In a sense, Mr. Ratcliff was experiencing some satisfaction in finding a scapegoat for his wrath. Talbot was guilty. There was no doubt about that in Mr.

Ratcliff's mind. And in his present mood he found it a consolation.

"I am loth to agree with you," said Dr. Holmes. "A thorough investigation must take place before we can form any definite opinion. I admit the circumstances are black against the lad; but we must not lose sight of the fact that any other junior could have slipped into the New House and taken the scarab, provided he knew that it was there."

"That is just my point," said the Housemaster. "No-body—"

He broke off as there sounded a tap at the door.

"Come in!" said Dr. Holmes.

The door opened to admit Kildare with Talbot, the latter looking quiet and self-possessed, though a little pale.

Mr. Ratcliff had fixed his gaze on Talbot's face, and he was regarding him almost hungrily, like a wolf. The New House master read evidence of guilt in almost every movement of the suspected junior, though Talbot met his gaze unflinchingly.

The Head coughed and wiped his glasses.

He knew and liked Talbot, as did most of the masters with whom he came in contact. Dr. Holmes was fully conversant with Talbot's early life among terrible surroundings, when he had belonged to a notorious gang of crooks, and passed under the nickname of the "Toff." In those days the Toff had been a skilled hand at opening a safe, and the lock that could resist him had not existed. All that had been thrown aside long ago, and Talbot's record at St. Jim's was one of which any fellow might well have been proud. But now he stood up, accused of theft, the Head could not help recollecting the early training of the lad before him—and wondering if old instinct had proved too much for him.

"You sent for me, sir?"

It was Talbot himself who broke the silence.

"Yes, my boy. I have to say something rather serious to you, I am afraid. Please do not think we are condemning you unheard—but I am bound to state that at present you are under suspicion. Were you aware that Mr. Ratcliff had received a valuable Egyptian scarab recently?"

Talbot nodded, and smiled slightly.

"Some of the fellows told me as I came in, sir," he said calmly. "That was the first I had heard of it!"

"This supports my contention that any other junior could have taken the scarab, Mr. Ratcliff!" said Dr. Holmes, glancing round.

The New House master's eyes narrowed, and they fairly burned at Talbot.

"If he is speaking the truth!" he retorted sourly.

Talbot coloured, but did not speak.

"I accept your word, Talbot," said the Head calmly.

"You must not object to answering my next question. Did you abstract an Egyptian scarab from Mr. Ratcliff's desk when he ordered you to his study this afternoon?"

There was a slight silence after the Head had finished speaking. Mr. Ratcliff leaned forward in his seat, and Talbot met the gaze of both masters coolly.

"I did not go to Mr. Ratcliff's study this afternoon, sir!" said Talbot calmly. "I was commanded to do so, but I did not go. I received a letter from my Uncle Lyndon by the afternoon post, asking me to meet his train at Wayland at three. If I had waited in Mr. Ratcliff's study, I should have missed the train—it stopped only a few minutes."

"You mean—you disobeyed my express command?" ejaculated the New House master, his lips setting.

"The lad had some excuse, Mr. Ratcliff!" said Dr. Holmes. "I cannot uphold his action, of course, but if Colonel Lyndon can furnish us with confirmation of this—"

Talbot stared, and then coloured. He realised that, unless he had proof to offer, he would be disbelieved—and suspicion would settle more heavily upon him as well. In this unlooked for contingency Talbot could not even name the porter at the railway-station as one capable of bearing out what he had said, for the porter had not been at his post when Talbot had met his uncle. And the colonel, being himself uncertain of his movements during the next few weeks, had given no address to which to write. He had no means of convincing the Head that the whole story was not just a trumped-up tale to save him.

Mr. Ratcliff, watching his face keenly, was not slow to observe the change in the junior's demeanour.

"Have you any objection to Colonel Lyndon being telephoned to for confirmation of your story, Talbot?" he asked.

Talbot looked back at him steadily.

"You will be unable to secure confirmation from my uncle," he said quietly. "He is leaving England for some weeks—and he gave me no idea where to write. I know it sounds as if I've made the story up, Dr. Holmes—but I assure you that it is the truth!"

The Head gave Talbot a very peculiar glance before replacing his glasses.

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"The boy is guilty!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, his lip curling. If there had been any doubt at all in the New House master's mind before, there was none whatever now. To him the Wayland story was a futile fiction, designed solely to escape punishment.

"Certainly it is unfortunate that you cannot prove an alibi, Talbot!" said the Head. "Think, my boy. Did you encounter any reliable witness who could confirm that you were out of gates at the time when the theft was committed?"

"Take your time!" said Mr. Ratcliff sarcastically.

"I met a fellow—" began Talbot slowly.

"Yes? Go on!"

"He was cycling outside Rylcombe, and had a spill," said Talbot, a gleam of hope coming into his eyes. Out of the dark cloud which was closing round him, the encounter with Montague beamed like a ray of sunlight. "The fellow's name was Montague—and he belongs to Lynchester School, sir. What time exactly was Mr. Ratcliff's scarab stolen, sir?"

"Between two-thirty and a quarter past three, at the very outside!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I was beyond Rylcombe when I met Montague," said Talbot coolly. "That was about four, I should think. If he is asked to corroborate me, sir, I think my name will be cleared!"

The Head's face brightened, but Mr. Ratcliff's took on a corresponding scowl.

"I do not believe a word of it!" he said harshly. "It has no more truth in it than the fabrication regarding his uncle!"

It was on the tip of Talbot's tongue to offer to produce the letter from his uncle, but that moment he could not remember what he had done with it.

"It will put the matter beyond doubt if we communicate with the headmaster of Lynchester!" said Dr. Holmes calmly. "And I believe Talbot's story—improbable though you may think it, Mr. Ratcliff! You will consider yourself exonerated unless the boy, Montague, fails to substantiate your statement, which I have no doubt that he will. As it is a trunk call, I will write instead, and secure a full description of the incident—"

"And Talbot is to be dismissed?" hooted Mr. Ratcliff, almost beside himself at the turn of events. "Dr. Holmes, I demand—"

"You will kindly allow me to conduct the matter in my own way, Mr. Ratcliff!" said the Head coolly.

Mr. Ratcliff coughed and spluttered, and seemed almost about to lay hands on Talbot himself. But if he thought of that drastic course, he thought better of it, and drew a deep breath instead.

"I must insist on a most thorough sifting of the matter, Dr. Holmes!" he ejaculated at last. "The scarab is worth a great deal of money, and it must be found!"

"Do not distress yourself unduly, sir!" retorted the Head, his own anger rising a little. He did not appreciate being bullied in his own study. "If Talbot is guilty, he will be punished. But I do not consider we have sufficient evidence to base any opinion upon at present. Inquiries will proceed, but I have every confidence that Talbot's story will be substantiated by the boy at Lynchester. For the present, then, the affair must be held over. I am sorry to have suspected you, Talbot. As you will realise, the whole matter is very distasteful to me. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Talbot turned and left the study, grinning a little. He could not help it as he recollected the baffled look on Mr. Ratcliff's face—as the Housemaster saw his scapegoat slipping away from him. Talbot had no fear for himself—he could rely on Montague's evidence, and in a day or two he would be cleared of the slightest vestige of suspicion.

CHAPTER 4.

Condemned by Mr. Ratcliff

"ANY news?"

"Yes!" said Talbot.

Tom Merry & Co. looked anxious at once. Two days had elapsed since Mr. Ratcliff had levelled his accusation against the Shell junior, and this morning a reply from the headmaster of Lynchester had been anticipated—a reply which would put the matter beyond doubt once and for all.

Talbot was coming away from the Head's study, having been called there before breakfast, and his expression did not suggest that his innocence had been proved.

"What's happened, old man?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"Not—" Manners broke off.

Talbot shook his head, and smiled.

"The post hasn't come yet!" he answered. "It's never very early here, as you fellows know. But the Head's just told me that he has been called to attend a board meeting

of the governors to-day, and as he has several other matters to attend to in London he will probably be absent for a week or so!"

"Then your fate will be hanging over your head like a giddy sword of Damocles!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"I don't think so!" responded Talbot. "Ratty is taking charge while Dr. Holmes is away—he will get the letter from Lynchester, and I shall be cleared as soon as it comes!"

"But—Ratty!" repeated Tom Merry. "What about old Railton—why couldn't the Head leave him in charge?"

"Railton is accompanying the Head it appears!" said Talbot rather ruefully. "I jolly well wish he could have Ratty with him! We know his style of old. When I'm proved innocent—"

"He will take it out of you some other way!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Just like the old rotter!" growled Manners.

"Oh, it may turn out all right!" said Tom Merry hopefully. "There goes the breakfast bell!"

As Talbot took his place at the long table he was the cynosure of a good many glances. It was common knowledge that Talbot's innocence, or his guilt, would be definitely established that morning, but the Shell fellow looked cool enough. His chums were looking far more anxious than he was.

After breakfast, Tom Merry & Co. surrounded him and marched him off for a stroll in the quad, awaiting the time of the Head's departure—and, more important still, the post.

They had not long to wait to see the Head off. His car was already at the gates, and in a few minutes Dr. Holmes emerged from his House, and, accompanied by Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, entered the car. Mr. Ratcliff was there, smiling rather grimly. The New House master was not at all displeased at being left to deal with Talbot on his own, so to speak, though he endeavoured to conceal that fact from Dr. Holmes.

"Ah, Mr. Ratcliff!" said the Head, as he took his seat. "You will doubtless hear from Lynchester to-day, and I should be glad if you would inform Talbot when you do so. In the event of the news being unfavourable to the boy, you had better communicate with me at once. I hope you will experience no difficulty with the boys during my absence."

"I shall do my best, sir!" retorted Mr. Ratcliff, his colour heightening a little. On the few occasions when he had been left in command of the school in the past, affairs had not always pursued the even tenor of their way, chiefly owing to the Housemaster's tyrannical methods of dealing with the juniors. Mr. Ratcliff compressed his thin lips as the Head's car rolled away down the drive, a cheer from the juniors present following it.

"Three cheers for Dr. Holmes!"

"And three for Railton!"

"Hip, hip—"

"Hurrah!"

As the Head's car rolled out of gates, Mr. Ratcliff swung round on the cheering juniors, his eyes gleaming angrily at them. Mr. Ratcliff did not like unruliness—and he was pleased to regard most harmless expressions of high spirits as examples of unruliness.

"Silence! All of you boys go to your Form-rooms at once!" he rapped.

"Hip, hip—eh? Why the thump don't you cheer, Wilkins, you idiot?" bawled Grundy.

"Grundy!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Grundy, realising suddenly that the cheering had subsided.

"Did you not hear my command, Grundy?" rasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Grundy.

"I can quite credit that statement. When you give way to your hooligan instincts, Grundy, your noise is abominable! You will write me five hundred lines from Virgil, and hand them in to me by five o'clock to-morrow! Now go to your Forms, all of you!"

There was no reply to Mr. Ratcliff's command. The juniors, with set faces, turned and walked quietly towards the House. The general verdict, unspoken though it was, conformed to the opinion that Mr. Ratcliff had broken out again—and that his short tenure of the seat of office was likely to be an extremely stormy one.

"We shall have to mind our giddy p's and q's now!" murmured Monty Lowther, as he entered the Shell Form-room. "Never mind; it won't last long!"

"Poor old Grundy!" chortled Manners.

George Alfred Grundy passed into the Form-room with an expression of deep resentment on his rugged features, but he did not heed the chipping to which he was subjected. Mysterious thoughts appeared to be working in Grundy's mind, for he incurred Mr. Linton's displeasure several times

during the morning; and captured the pointer once. To all of which he remained as a being in the clouds, oblivious.

Several times Talbot's glance strayed to the door, hoping to see Toby enter with a summons for him. Mr. Ratcliff was bound to inform him when the letter arrived, galled as the Housemaster would be at having to climb down.

There was a knock mid-way through the last lesson, and Mr. Linton called: "Come in!"

Toby, the page, entered, and his glance went to Talbot at once.

"Well, Toby?" asked Mr. Linton.

"Mr. Ratcliff would like to see Master Talbot in the Head's study, sir. Which he said he wanted to see him at once!"

Talbot's face lit up, and Tom Merry & Co.'s reflected his relief. Mr. Linton nodded, and Talbot left his place and followed Toby from the Form-room.

He left the class in a buzz of excited comment, which ceased only on a sharp command from Mr. Linton. Even then, the juniors conversed in whispers when they were not observed.


"It's come at last!" breathed Manners, who sat next to Tom Merry.

"I'm glad!" said Tom. "Ratty will have to admit he was in the wrong; though where the scarab actually did go is rather a poser!"

"He may report it to the police!" suggested Manners.

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"The Head wouldn't have let him make the affair public, but he can't stop Ratty now if he wants to."

"I don't believe it's been pinched at all!" said Tom Merry. "What fellow would be fool enough, even if he were big enough rogue, to take a thing like that? He couldn't dispose of it without getting nabbed! More likely Ratty's mislaid it all the time—it could hardly have been hidden for a joke, I suppose!"

"Precious poor idea of a joke, if anybody has hidden it!" grunted Manners. "It will probably turn up in some odd corner, when the maid sweeps the study."

"Were you talking to Merry, Manners?" inquired Mr. Linton grimly.

"Ahem! Yes, sir!"

"Kindly reserve your conversation until after dismissal!" said Mr. Linton. "And take a hundred lines. The next boy whom I detect talking will be caned!"

After that, there was a comparative silence in the Form-room. But even morning classes come to an end, and as they swarmed out into the corridor, the juniors broke into a buzz of excitement again, and speculation on Talbot's fate was rife.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry. "We'll hang about near the Head's study until Talbot comes out."

"Good egg! He's been gone long enough!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Old Ratty must be handing out a handsome apology. I hope he doesn't burst a blood vessel over it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three led quite a crowd of fellows, both Shell

and Fourth, along to the corridor in which was the Head's study, now occupied by Mr. Ratcliff.

Arrived outside the Head's study, the procession halted and prepared to wait. There was no sound of voices from the study, but, as Monty Lowther remarked, doubtless Ratty would not shout his apology from the roof-tops.

"He's a jolly long time!" said Tom Merry uneasily.

"The bell's gone!" said Blake. "Dash it all, Talbot ought to be out by now!"

The door of the Head's study opened, and every eye in the passage was fixed eagerly upon it.

It was not Talbot who emerged. It was the spare form of Mr. Ratcliff, and there appeared to be a slight smile about his thin lips.

"What do you boys want here?" he asked. His voice was as harsh as ever, but there was a triumphant note in it that could not be mistaken. His glance was almost gloating as it rested on the faces of the juniors.

"We—we—" began Tom Merry. "We came to congratulate Talbot, sir!" he finished coolly. It was useless to conceal the motive for the delegation.

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sourly.

"You will be interested to hear that Talbot's story of meeting a cyclist beyond Rylcombe is nothing but a pure fabrication!" he observed bitingly. "I do not doubt that Talbot was acquainted with a boy of the name of Montague, and thought to make use of him as an alibi. By a singular chance he knew that Montague was returning to school yesterday after visiting a sick relative—he probably received a communication from the boy himself, and thus had him in mind when he was accused. But Talbot's story fails in a vital point. Montague did not cycle to Lynchester. He arrived by train, as the headmaster has just written to inform me, and was called away again almost immediately by telegram, as his relative had had a relapse. Talbot's story was very plausible but for that palpable flaw. I am pleased to say that I was not deceived by his falsehoods. He is now in the punishment-room, under sentence of expulsion. As soon as I discover the scarab, I shall send him away. The boy will be flogged to-morrow morning in the hope of making him reveal the hiding-place in which he has concealed it. Disperse!"

"Oh!"

"Guilty!"

"It's all rot!" shouted Tom Merry, his face crimson with anger. The evidence appeared to him to be of the very flimsiest, and only Mr. Ratcliff's prejudiced mind could have regarded it as conclusive.

"Do you dare to criticise my decision, boy?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Come away, Tom! Keep your temper!" gasped Lowther, dragging at the Shell captain's arm.

"Let go! That rotter is condemning old Talbot on evidence that wouldn't hang a dog, I tell you!"

"Merry! Come here!"

Mr. Ratcliff's face was livid with rage. He had not expected open defiance, but he was more than prepared to deal with it.

For a moment Tom Merry set his lips and paused irresolute. Then he walked forward quietly enough, and the Housemaster swished a cane through the air.

"Hold out your hand, Merry!" he rasped.

The Shell captain received the first cut without a sign, but the second made him wince. Mr. Ratcliff was in his most savage mood, and was not sparing the rod.

The cane swished through the air again and again, and Tom Merry's face was white when it was over.

"You may go! Disperse, all of you!" panted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Lean on my arm, old chap!" murmured Manners.

Tom Merry was glad of the support, and his step was a little unsteady as he walked between his chums.

"Disperse!" repeated Mr. Ratcliff, nonplussed, as the juniors made no move.

Then, slowly, the crowd turned and followed Tom Merry and his chums. There was a hiss, and it was immediately taken up by a score of fellows.

Mr. Ratcliff started with anger, but he made no move to follow with his cane. He felt, rightly enough, that the juniors were in no mood to stand a wholesale castigation at that moment.

With a livid face he re-entered the Head's study and slammed the door.

CHAPTER 5. Rebellion!

"I TELL you—"

"Shut up!"

"You dummies! Shut up a minute and give a fellow a chance!"

"Good old Grundy!"

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"Look here! Listen to me, you blithering fatheads!"

"Stick it, Grundy!"

George Alfred Grundy was waxing vociferous.

Afternoon classes were over; Talbot was, as all the school knew now, still in the punishment room, awaiting a flogging in Hall on the morrow, and subsequent expulsion.

Immediately after dismissal, Grundy had called a meeting in the junior Common room—by the simple expedient of putting a notice in his original orthography on the notice-board and trusting to the juniors' curiosity to bring him an audience.

The audience was of unusual numbers—and not all the fellows had come to shout down the speaker. Wild as Grundy's oratorical methods were, he had many sympathisers on this occasion. But the malcontents, as was natural, were making most noise.

"We're not going to stand it!" bawled Grundy, his face red with excitement. "It's up to us, as Talbot's pals, to stand by him against the myrmidons of the enemy—old Ratcliff!"

"Bai Jove! Have you seen any of Watty's myrmidons, Blake?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a grin.

"We jolly soon shall if Grundy goes on shouting at that rate!" said Blake. "The prefects will be down on us like a ton of bricks soon!"

"I ask you, does any fellow think Ratty has good and sufficient evidence to condemn poor old Talbot like this—without even consulting the Head, either? Ratty says that fellow Montague arrived at Lynchester by train—Talbot says he was cycling! There may easily have been some silly, potty mistake somewhere—anybody but Ratty would try and discover it, instead of wreaking his rotten temper on an innocent chap! It's up to us to show our disapproval of Ratty's rotten methods—by refusing to see Talbot flogged and expelled!"

"Good egg!"

"Let's flog Ratty instead!"

"How are we going to do it, Grundy?"

"Follow my lead!" roared Grundy, feeling that he had gained the undivided attention of his audience at last.

"I'm willing to take the lead in a campaign against Ratty—here and now, if you like!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rally round the banner, boys!"

"There's poor old Talbot languishing—"

"That's a good word, by gad!" murmured Cardew.

"Languishing in a prison cell—"

"Stick to the facts, Grundy, old bean!" protested Cardew.

"Moping in Nobody's Study—that's nearer the mark!"

"Don't interrupt!" hooted Grundy angrily. "What I want from you fellows is support—and plenty of it! There's only one way of crushing the tyrant for ever—"

"Pushing him under a steam roller?" suggested Cardew irrepressibly.

"Chuck it, Cardew!" grinned Blake. "Give Grundy a chance—he's fighting in a good cause!"

"There's only one way of downing old Ratty—and that's by holding a barring-out!" finished Grundy.

"A which?"

"A barring-out!" roared Grundy.

He glared round at the crowd of juniors in the Common room, and a gleam of exultation appeared in his eyes. He had made an impression at last. There was a lull in the hum of conversation.

"Think of it!" thundered Grundy victoriously. "Think of fighting in the cause of freedom—standing by Talbot through thick and thin—I tell you it's our bounden duty! We don't believe he's guilty—nobody does but Ratty! When the Head comes back, he will be the first to take Ratty to task for exceeding his powers! Talbot hasn't got the scarab, and yet he's to be flogged in the morning until he reveals where he has hidden it. It's rot—and I call upon all you chaps to rally round me and start a barring-out—till Ratty climbs down or Dr. Holmes comes back from London!"

"By Jove! There's something in what Grundy says!" said Blake, his eyes gleaming. "I don't feel like standing by and seeing Talbot hoofed out of the school without lifting a hand—and Ratty certainly is exceeding his powers in expelling a chap off his own bat! Tom Merry ought to be asked about this!"

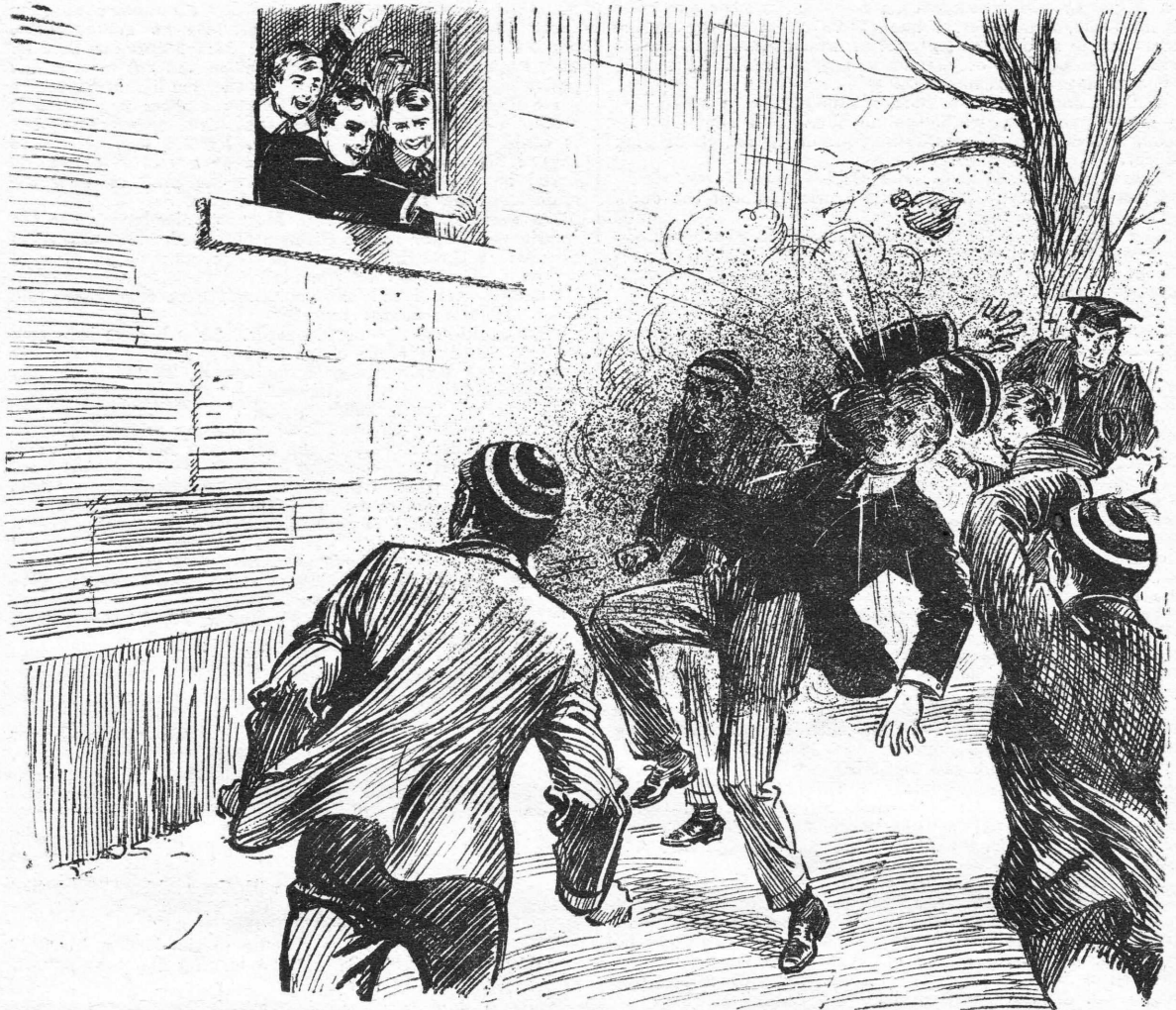
"Who's with me?" shouted Grundy. "Back up, St. Jim's!"

Blake shoved his way forward, and leaped on the table from which Grundy was addressing the meeting. George Alfred gave a roar as his domain was invaded, but Blake soothed him with a wave of his hand.

"Keep your wool on, Grundy, old man!" he grinned. "You're stirring up no end of a spirit among these chaps—I'm only going to help you in the campaign!"

"You'll join my barring-out?" asked Grundy eagerly.

"It's a jolly good wheeze!" said Blake. "Though I hardly think the fellows would consent to your leadership,



Monteith gave a gasp as a bag of flour caught him right in the eye, blinding him for the moment; and there was a sharp yell from Knox as a bag of soot burst on his sharp features. The rest of the prefects were thrown into confusion by the sooty, floury cloud—and for a few seconds it appeared as if that gallant rush would terminate in an ignominious retreat. (See Chapter 7.)

old chap. Be quiet a minute and let me have a few words with them."

The juniors listened keenly as Blake came to the edge of the table and held up his hand. Grundy's wild talk had fired them with enthusiasm, but they looked for practical common sense from the Yorkshire junior.

"Grundy suggests a barring-out as a means of saving Talbot from expulsion!" said Blake coolly. "I admit the idea bristles with difficulties, but in the main I think we could carry on successfully. The question I want to put to the meeting is, firstly, are we all willing to stand together against the tyrant till Dr. Holmes comes back or Ratty caves in? If we don't, Talbot will be flogged to-morrow morning."

"Down with Ratty!"

"Let's all sing the 'Red Flag'!" sang out Cardew.

"Where are we going to entrench ourselves?" shouted Gore.

"That's the second question!" said Blake. "Then we're all agreed? Hands up for a barring-out!"

A forest of hands shot into the air. There was no doubt that the great majority of the junior school were determined not to submit to Mr. Ratchiff's tyranny. If Talbot could have seen that overwhelming vote on his side, the sight would have cheered him.

"Next question—where are we going to hold the barring-out?" asked Blake. "Has anybody any suggestions to make?"

There was silence for a moment; and, in that time, Grundy strode forward again, a smile of superiority on his face.

"You fellows can leave all the arrangements to me!" he announced coolly. "I've thought of all that's necessary—trust me! We shall bar out in the dorm—tons of room if we shove the beds outside!"

"I suggest the gym!" said Blake. "The gym will hold a crowd of fellows in comfort—and it's easy to defend, having only two doors and high windows. We shall have something to while away our time, too—we can put in some boxing practice, ready for Kid Morgan!"

"If the barring-out isn't over by Saturday, he won't be able to come here!" put in Julian.

"Can't be helped!" said Blake. "Then that's settled. Now how about a leader?"

"I'm leader!" roared Grundy. "Didn't I tell you it's my barring-out, and I'm jolly well not seeing any other fellow bag my idea! You can all look to me for guidance—"

"Talk sense, Grundy!" said Herries. "If we followed you you'd only lead us up the garden!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you fathead!" spluttered Grundy, at a loss for words.

"I'm quite willing to take command, of course!" said Blake modestly. "But I think Tom Merry ought to be told about this, and if he agrees, he can boss the show, as usual. After what Ratty gave him this morning—"

"Rot! It's my barring-out, and I'm leader!" said Grundy obstinately.

"You can bar-out in the dorm, if you like, while we hold the gym!" grinned Blake unsympathetically. "Holding the fort on your lonely own would call all your powers of leadership into play—and that's where you come out strong, isn't it, Grundy?"

"You—funny idiot!" gasped Grundy. "I suppose you think that's clever? Well, I can tell you it's—Yaroooop!"

Grundy had not intended to make that rather remarkable statement, but force of circumstances proved too strong

for him. In his excitement he stepped too near the edge of the table, and the next moment saw him rolling on the floor among a forest of legs, all of which seemed to collide with some portion of Grundy's anatomy, till he rolled, gasping and roaring, under the table.

Wilkins and Gunn, his faithful study-mates, rescued him from that position, while the meeting, with Blake at its head, swarmed out of the Common-room in search of Tom Merry.

There was a shout as Herries sighted Tom Merry, strolling with his chums, Manners and Lowther, under the elms.

"Tommy! We want you!"

The captain of the Shell glanced round in great surprise as the crowd—composed of practically all the fellows in the Shell and Fourth—approached. Blake, acting as spokesman, proceeded to lay the matter before him.

"It's a barring-out!" he announced seriously. "We're fed-up with Ratty, and we've decided not to stand feebly by while old Talbot is kicked out to-morrow. The only course of action I can see, is a barring-out. If you like to take command, Merry, the leadership is yours. If not, there's plenty of fellows eager for it—Grundy, for one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Merry! You're the man!"

"Good old Shellfish!"

"Remember what Ratty gave you this morning!"

Tom Merry rubbed his palms reminiscently. He had been discussing ways and means of aiding Talbot with his chums, and something of the same idea as Grundy's had struck him. Now that the chance was presented, he did not feel inclined to hesitate. Hesitation now meant inevitably the expulsion and disgrace of a fellow whom the Lower School to a man believed innocent of the charge laid against him. Talbot's record was not to be cast down by the first rumour which was circulated, and it was easy to see how anger and malicious delight in cruelty had determined Mr. Ratcliff on his course.

Tom Merry's mind was made up. He could not desert his chum, and he was glad to find such unanimous feeling among the rest of the juniors.

"Rely on me!" he said quietly. "We'd best form a committee to discuss the details of the barring-out. Blake, Figgins, Kangaroo, Redfern—that will be enough. We'll take up our position to-night, when we've decided where it's to be! Let's get up to the study now and go into it!"

"I'm with you!" said Figgins.

And Kangaroo and Redfern nodded agreement.

The prisoner in Nobody's Study—that dismal apartment reserved for the use of expelled juniors on their last night at St. Jim's—was destined to be released sooner than he expected; his career at the old school was not to be terminated as Mr. Ratcliff intended. Mr. Ratcliff, in fact, was booked for the shock of his life!

CHAPTER 6.

Under Cover of Darkness!

"**T**ALBOT!"

It was a whisper in the darkness.

Talbot, stretched fully dressed on his bed in the punishment-room, half raised himself. Had he been mistaken? Or had there been a voice from the corridor calling his name? It could not be release; he knew that. As the mists of sleep cleared away he realised that it was probably a friend, come to cheer him on his last night at St. Jim's, and, in spite of the fate hanging over him, he smiled.

"Talbot, old man, are you awake?"

There was no mistaking it this time. And Talbot, with a thrill of pleasure, recognised the voice. It was Tom Merry who was calling to him. He whispered back, feeling strangely cheerful.

The day of his imprisonment had seemed never-ending to the condemned junior. A strict watch had been kept at the head of the little passage leading to Nobody's Study, and Talbot had remained as cut off from his friends as if he had been on a desert island.

He knew that Tom Merry and his chums would stand by him. Talbot trusted his chums implicitly, and knew that they had similar confidence in him. And the evidence on which Mr. Ratcliff had convicted him was far from conclusive—only rage and malice could have blinded the House-master to that.

The Egyptian scarab was gone—that much was indubitable. And Mr. Ratcliff, naturally enough, was determined to recover it. He believed that Talbot had taken it, and nothing could shake him in that conviction. Certainly, Talbot had had more opportunity of stealing the scarab than any other fellow—that was Mr. Ratcliff's point of view. But Mr. Ratcliff did not believe that Talbot had

gone out of gates on that Wednesday afternoon; and, by sheer ill-fortune, Talbot could produce no actual proof, beyond the story of his encounter with Montague that he had, for even the porter at the station had not been at his post when Talbot had met and parted from his uncle.

He had screwed up Colonel Lyndon's letter and tossed it aside. That would have shown that his story was true, but it could not be found. And Mr. Ratcliff had chosen to regard his reference to Montague as a clever fabrication based on an earlier acquaintance—the kind of view the suspicious New House master would take.

No wonder, then, that Tom Merry's voice, coming to the imprisoned junior in the stillness of the night, sent a thrill of pleasure through him, though there could be no hope of a rescue. His own voice trembled a little as he responded.

"Is that you, Tom? You shouldn't have come down, old chap. If Ratty caught you—"

"Bosh, old man!" came the reply. "I'm here to help you, with a crowd of other chaps as well. There's been great doings since Ratty shut you up in here, Talbot. Grundy started the idea of a barring-out—"

"What rot!" said Talbot quickly.

"And the idea has caught on. You are now speaking to the commander-in-chief of the St. Jim's rebels, and we're on the war-path. Our first act will be to release you, Talbot. After that, we make ourselves comfy in the gym until Ratty agrees to call off with honours on our side!"

"You silly asses!" ejaculated Talbot ungratefully.

"Serious as a judge!" said Tom Merry. "We're not letting you leave St. Jim's to-morrow just to satisfy Ratty, old man. And he's not going to flog you to make you give up the scarab that you haven't got!"

"I'm glad you believe I didn't take it, Tom!" said Talbot, in a low voice.

"Of course you didn't, you chump! More likely some New House rotter, if anybody! But I think Ratty has mislaid it—or one of the maids has knocked it into some obscure corner."

"Much more likely, I think!" came a sulphurous whisper from Figgins. "If I hear you accuse any of our fellows, Tom Merry—"

"Peace, my infant!" said the Shell captain soothingly. "I was only thinking of Clampe and Chowle and fellows of their kidney. They're a heap more likely to pinch the thing than old Talbot. But the scarab probably isn't pinched at all!"

"Are we ever going to get on with the washing?" breathed Blake, who had come, armed with his tool-chest. "If we stand here much longer we shall take root!"

"Yes; cut the cackle and come to the hoses, Merry!" remarked Grundy. "If I were leading the barring-out, as I ought to be by rights—"

"Sit on him, somebody!" gasped Tom Merry. "Go ahead, Blake!"

Jack Blake paused before the lock of the punishment-room door, and extracted a screwdriver from his chest. Very quietly, while the juniors watched with bated breath, he proceeded to take out the screws which held the lock in place.

The work was done swiftly, and there was a gasp as the lock came off in Blake's hands. Nobody's Study, a grim prison to many an expelled junior in its time, was a prison no longer.

Blake swung open the door, and Talbot, his eyes bright, emerged.

"This is ripping of you fellows—" he began.

"No time for jaw now!" interrupted Tom Merry crisply. "The next move is to the tuckshop. Figgys, will you take a few fellows and raid the larders? You ought to make a good haul there. Meanwhile, we'll wake up Dame Taggles and clear out her stock!"

"Right you are!" said Figgins.

"I say, you fellows, you can leave this to me! I'll raid the grub for you! Figgins will only muck it up; you know what these New House bounders are! Yarooogh!"

"Shut up, Trimble, you fat idiot!" grunted Figgins. "And follow on! You've raided the kitchen before, and you can show us where everything is kept!"

Sniff from Trimble.

"Get a move on, you fat worm!" growled Figgins.

"Yow-wow! I'm getting on, ain't I?" wailed Baggy, as a finger and thumb were compressed on his ear. He led the raiders into the lower regions without further objection. A junior of Figgins' calibre was not to be trifled with.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry and a crowd of fellows crossed the quad in the moonlight, and halted before the school tuckshop, over which slept Dame Taggles. The whole of the Shell and Fourth, School House and New House, were standing together in the barring-out, and plenty of provisions would be needed in case they were forced to sustain a long siege. Securing supplies after the rebellion had started was likely to be a hazardous undertaking, and, like

a good general, Tom Merry was determined to lay in an adequate stock beforehand.

The Shell captain took a handful of pebbles, and tossed them against the panes of Dame Taggles' bed-room.

The rebels had not long to wait. The window was thrown up, and the old lady's head appeared, framed in it. Her expression, as far as could be observed in the moonlight, suggested that she did not appreciate being dragged from her bed in the dead of night.

Tom Merry's voice reassured her somewhat, but did not allay her wrath.

"We've come for supplies, ma'am!" said the captain of the Shell calmly. "Would you mind coming down and opening the door, please? We shall want rather a lot of stuff, but we'll pay for it cash down!"

"Well, I never!" gasped the old dame, in amazement. "And what, if I may ask, do you want with supplies in the middle of the night, Master Merry?"

"It's a barring-out, ma'am!" said Tom, grinning. "We must have the stuff. And we don't want to break the lock getting in!"

"Lor' a mussy!" The old dame disappeared from the window, and in a few moments bolts were drawn, and the door of the tuckshop stood open to the rebels.

A whip-round had been made, and while his followers carted the tuck away in sacks which they had brought for the purpose, Tom Merry settled up for the amount—which was considerable.

Dame Taggles kept account on a scrap of paper—possibly adding something as compensation for her rude awakening—and she looked very satisfied as she took the money.

Practically the whole stock of the little shop was exhausted, and it was rare indeed that Dame Taggles did such a roaring trade.

"Nice goings on!" she murmured, as she bolted and locked the door again. "Still, it's Mr. Ratcliff's look-out, not mine!"

In the school kitchen, under the leadership of Baggy Trimble, whose peculiar knowledge of the culinary department came in very handy, Figgins and his men had made a good haul, and the two parties met outside the gym in the deep shadow of a wall.

"Any luck, Figgy?"

"Tons! Trimble was quite useful, for once!" answered Figgins.

"We've done well!" said Tom Merry. "This is our second journey; the tuckshop is pretty well cleared out now, I think. Let's get into the gym!"

The door of the gymnasium was locked at night, but it could easily be forced.

Blake came forward and did yeoman service with his screwdriver, and in a few minutes the juniors were stacking the fruits of their raid in a corner of the gym.

Tom Merry glanced round, considering the next move. "Yaw-aw-aw! I'm jolly tired!" remarked Manners. "Is there anything else to do, Tom?"

"Lots!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "We've got to get the bedding down here, yet, unless we fancy camping-out on the floor for a few nights!"

"Grooh! Not for me, thanks!" said Manners. "We shall have to buckle to again, that's all!"

"You can lead a party to collar all the bedding, Kangy!" said Tom Merry. "Some of us will have to stay here and get things into shape—otherwise we shall be in such a muddle we sha'n't be able to find anything for a month!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about ammunition, too?" mused the captain of the Shell. "No good setting up in defiance of law and order if we haven't got any weapons—what? Brooms—"

"I laid my hands on all I could find!" said Figgins modestly.

"Good man! Then we shall want buckets, to fill with water—"

"And soot!" grinned Figgins. "There's plenty of soot in the chimney here!"

"I collared a good many buckets, too!" chuckled Figgins calmly. "You have to get up very early in the morning to steal a march on the New House, you know, Merry!"

"And bags of flour!" continued Tom Merry. "There should be plenty of them in the kitchen—bags of self-raising flour will make handy bombs! How many of those did you bring, Figgy?"

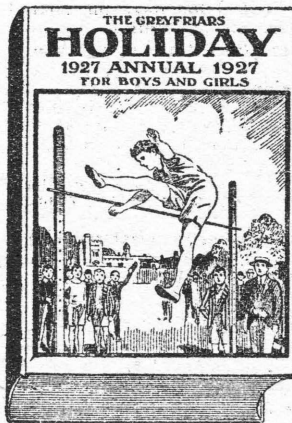
"Ahem! I never thought of that!" admitted Figgins.

"School House for brains!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Chuck ragging," said Tom Merry crisply, "and do something useful! We want a wink of sleep before morning, but we don't look like getting it at this rate!"

"I've got an idea," said Glyn. "If one or two chaps will come with me to the chemistry lab, I'd like one or two boxes of stuff to experiment with. Dane and Julian will do."

"Carry on, Glyn!" said Tom Merry. "I think that's



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BEST
SIX-
SHILLING
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about all we shall want. Here, come and help Kangy with the blankets!"

Tom Merry & Co. lent a hand with the heaps of bedding, stowing them out of the way as much as possible, and Figgins led a small expedition incorporating Trimble, in search of bags of flour and other likely missiles.

By the time the expedition returned, laden with spoils, the gym had been rendered very ship-shape, and the first watch, consisting of Lowther and Redfern, was on duty.

The rest of the rebels snatched a few hours' slumber while they could, for it was probable that they would have to be early astir to defend their citadel against Mr. Ratcliff.

Under Blake's direction four huge bolts had been screwed in position on the big oak door, and it was certain that only an axe, or a number of axes, would have any effect upon it. And, as there was a window directly above the door, accessible from the inside by a ladder, it was equally certain that anybody wielding an axe would become the object of a devastating fire from the defenders.

Figgins and his men turned in cheerily, and Lowther and Redfern kept watch for the enemy from the windows.

Levison and Herries relieved them, and so the watch was kept till the first gleam of dawn came in at the high windows.

CHAPTER 7.

Defying "Ratty!"

TOM MERRY yawned, and rolled over. He felt stiff, and wondered at the tangle of bed-clothes around him. Then he remembered.

It was the familiar sound of the rising-bell that had awakened him.

On the floor of the gym, practically all the juniors in the Shell and Fourth Forms lay asleep. There were one or two exceptions, such as Clampe and Chowle, Racke, Mellish, and one or two others, who had preferred to remain quietly in their dormitories rather than risk the wrath of Mr. Ratcliff.

But in the main the junior school was solid behind Talbot, and it was cheering to the suspected junior to feel it.

When the Head returned to the school he was confident that his innocence would be established by a close inquiry; and until then the fort was going to be held against the New House master at all costs.

"Any sign of the enemy, Clive?" asked Tom Merry, spotting the South African junior at the window.

"We haven't seen a soul!" answered Clive. "Have we, Gunn?"

"Well, one!" said Gunn, grinning. "Taggles hobbled across the quad just now to ring the bell. Hardly worth while giving the alarm for, though!"

"Not exactly!" agreed Tom Merry, laughing. "Now for brekker. Sound the reveille, Gunn!"

Gunn chuckled, and picked up a tin tray. He gripped a cricket-stump—part of the rebels' armaments—and commenced.

Bang, bang, bang!

"What the giddy thump!"

"Man the ship! Ware boarders!" sang out Monty Lowther, leaping to his feet.

"Where are they?"

"I say, you fellows, is it old Ratty? I say, I had nothing to do with it all, you know! You fellows make a screen round me, and—and then he won't see me!" gasped Trimble, in great alarm.

Bang, bang, bang!

Gunn continued to belabour his tin tray with tremendous vim, and if his object was to startle every fellow there into the widest wakefulness, he certainly succeeded.

The whole garrison was on its feet, and Gunn at last desisted.

"That was the reveille," he remarked coolly. "You'll get used to it after a morning or two."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"You silly ass!"

"Thanks!"

"You—your burbling jabberwock, Gunn!"

"Keep it up, if it's any relief to you!"

"Keep cool!" warned Tom Merry, grinning still. "All hands on deck now to prepare brekker. Fatty Wynn is master of the commissariat; Trimble can help. We can all open tins, and cut bread-and-butter. Get down to it, you chaps!"

"Right-ho, Tom Merry!"

Once awakened, the rebels buckled to cheerily enough to prepare their morning meal, and Fatty Wynn soon had bacon sizzling appetisingly in a frying-pan on a small spirit-stove. Baggy Trimble, deputed to help, entered into the thing with enthusiasm, though a keen eye had to be kept upon him to prevent him taking more than his share.

At present the fare was of the best, and, though they were on rations, the rebels ate their fill of bacon and eggs. If the barring-out continued long, however, they would be reduced to non-perishable food, such as tinned meat. The supply of tinned stuff was abundant, and on that diet the rebels were prepared to hold out for a long time.

"Ratty will be along soon," remarked Manners, over breakfast. "He will discover that the dormitories are empty any minute now."

"Monteith will tell him we've disappeared," grinned Figgins. "I can see dear old Ratty chasing all over the school in search of the missing Forms. Quite a Sherlock Holmes touch about it, isn't there?"

"Hallo! Talk of angels! Here he comes, by gad!" ejaculated Cardew, who was standing at a window. "Fairly ragin', too!"

"What?"

"Here comes Ratty, you fellows!" shouted Grundy, leaning out of another window. "Get ready to send the old rotter home with his tail between his legs!"

There was a rush for the windows, and many fellows

became wedged in their efforts to see the approach of the New House master. The windows of the gym were high but narrow, and therefore easier to defend.

"Bai Jove! Wattay weally looks in a feahful tantwum, deah boys!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's was right.

Mr. Ratcliff was looking as angry as it was possible for him to look. He had, since rising-bell, walked nearly all over the school in the search of the missing juniors, and the gymnasium had occurred to him last of all. As his search was now ended, he really ought to have looked a little more satisfied. But, judging by his expression, he was anything but satisfied.

The New House master paused under the windows of the gym, and fixed Tom Merry with an eye that fairly glittered with wrath. His voice, when he spoke, trembled with anger. And the grins of the rebels, which they did not trouble to restrain, did not have a soothing effect upon him.

"Merry, what is the meaning of this—this unexampled escapade?"

Tom Merry met the Housemaster's glance steadily.

"It's a protest, sir," he said calmly. "We are protesting against the sentence of expulsion which you have passed on Talbot. We believe him to be innocent, sir, and we cannot allow him to leave the school, believing that. So we are holding a barring-out."

"A what?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff faintly.

"A barring-out," continued Tom Merry coolly. "We do not intend to return to work until Talbot is proved innocent—"

"He is guilty!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, his face livid. "How dare you bandy words with me, boy!"

"Just as you wish, sir," said Tom Merry. "We are holding the fort until you promise that Talbot will not be expelled, and that no punishment will be meted out to us for sticking up for him. Those are our terms, Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Terms!" stuttered the Housemaster, hardly able to believe his ears. "Terms! Do you not realise that I am your headmaster during Dr. Holmes' absence, Merry? I can expel you, too; and if this tomfoolery does not cease this instant I will most certainly do so! You have one minute in which to decide. If you still persist in this defiance, you may consider yourself under sentence of expulsion with Talbot, Merry! Think, before you reply. You will not have a second chance!"

"Why not make a clean sweep an' expel the whole lot of us, sir?" asked Cardew urbanely, and there was a chuckle.

Mr. Ratcliff's expression was, at that moment, worth "a guinea a box."

For a few seconds the Housemaster eyed the rebels in silence, and then his thin lips set in a straight line.

"Very well," he said, between his teeth. "Merry, you are expelled! Cardew, I shall flog you with exemplary severity! Since you will not voluntarily surrender, force will be used. You have only yourselves to blame if any boy is hurt!"

With that Parthian shot Mr. Ratcliff turned his back on the juniors and strode off across the quad, his gown flying in the wind. He left the rebels seething with excitement.

"Ratty's lost his hair properly!" grinned Cardew, in high amusement. "We're in for a gay time, I'm thinkin'!"

"I'm keeping Talbot company now!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We shall all be in the same boat soon!"

"You ought not to take the risk, old fellow," said Talbot, looking very serious.

"Yes. I say, don't you think Tom Merry and Talbot ought to—give themselves up, you fellows?" quavered Baggy Trimble. "Old Ratty could flog Cardew, too, and then perhaps he'll let the rest of us off! What do you fellows think?"

"I think you're a miserable fat traitor, for one!" grunted Figgins. "We're all standing together in this, Trimble. Ratty will probably expel you next, you know!"

"Oh dear! I—I wish I hadn't joined up now!" gasped Baggy.

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry politely. "We're not dead yet! Ratty won't dislodge us in a thousand years! Keep your nerve, old fat tulip!"

"He's coming back," called Clive suddenly, "with half a dozen prefects!"

The rebels rushed back to the windows, and a roar of defiance went up as Mr. Ratcliff was seen approaching, accompanied by several prefects, with Taggles, the school porter, bringing up the rear.

Mr. Ratcliff halted at a safe distance from the windows and pointed.

"Dislodge those young ruffians!" he commanded. "Use such force as you find necessary! If any boy is hurt, it will be entirely his own fault!"

"Yes, sir. We will do our best!"

Monteith, together with the other prefects, eyed each other rather doubtfully. Kildare was not among them,

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having curtly refused to have a hand in the matter. His sympathies were strongly with Talbot. The remainder obeyed orders, but they did not feel very optimistic over their chances.

"Come on, Knox!" shouted Monty Lowther. "I've got a lovely bucketful of soot especially reserved for you!"

"Anybody like flour?" grinned Tom Merry, brandishing a bag of self-raising flour commandeered from the kitchen. "Flour or soot? Take your choice!"

"We shall get in an awful mess!" muttered Baker.

"Why do you dally?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff impatiently. As he was not leading the expedition personally, he saw no reason to be afraid. Not that the prefects were afraid; they merely had a natural disinclination to ask for trouble.

But Mr. Ratcliff's lashing tongue was not to be stood for long, and, led by Monteith, they made a sudden rush.

If they hoped to take the rebels by surprise by that sudden rush they were mistaken. As the prefects advanced at the double, bags of soot and flour intermingled in the air until there was hardly a cubic foot of atmosphere which did not contain a flying missile.

Monteith gave a gasp as a bag of flour caught him right in the eye, blinding him for the moment; and there was a yell from Knox as a bag of soot burst on his sharp features. The rest of the prefects were thrown into confusion by the sooty, floury cloud, and for a few seconds it appeared as if that gallant rush would terminate in an ignominious retreat.

But as his men wavered, Mr. Ratcliff's voice made itself heard, urging them on in bitter accents. Taggles, much against his will, dashed into the fray, but was put out of action almost at once by a bag of soot which almost choked him.

But the prefects, sorely smitten as they were, rallied desperately and came on to the windows.

"Stand by and let 'em have the brooms!" shouted Tom Merry, ceasing fire suddenly.

As if by magic, the air became clear, and the prefects reeled up to the windows and clambered determinedly on to the sills. But then the second line of defence came into action.

The windows were thrown up suddenly, and for a moment there was a clear means of ingress afforded the attackers. Monteith, on the sill, made a dive for the interior, and stopped suddenly. A broom, shoved hard in his face, sent the prefect rolling helplessly in the quad again, while a yell went up from the rebels.

"Come on, Knox! There's one for you!" grinned Lowther.

Knox came on; but only for a moment. A broom, wielded by the irrepressible Monty, took him squarely in the face, and he followed his comrades into the quad with a bump.

"Whoop! Yow-wow!"

Mr. Ratcliff, staring at the Sixth-Formers, stared still more as they picked themselves up and retreated out of range, followed by a stream of missiles. He almost choked as they came up with him.

"Monteith—Knox—why did you give up after such a feeble attempt to force your way in? Do you call yourselves prefects? To be defeated by a few unruly juniors—"

"The little demons are safe as houses in there!" ground Knox, with very little respect in his voice. "You won't get me to help you again!"

"What? Knox, you dare—"

But Knox was gone. Knox was fed-up.

And, as Mr. Ratcliff turned to the others, they filed past him and followed Knox—not even offering a word of explanation. Mr. Ratcliff stared after them, and drew a deep breath. The prefects had deserted him—there was no doubt about that. But Taggles, at any rate, was bound to obey his orders. Mr. Ratcliff turned his gleaming eyes on Taggles.

"Taggles, have you an axe?"

"I have, sir!"

"Pray fetch it, and batter down the gymnasium door!" snapped the Housemaster.

Taggles hobbled away, to return a few moments later bearing an axe. He looked with some apprehension at the door he was to batter down, however.

"There is nothing to fear, Taggles!" said Mr. Ratcliff icily. "Pray make haste with the task."

"Yes, sir. Which I'll do my best, sir," said Taggles solidly.

He walked to the door without molestation, and gave the juniors almost a beseeching glance.

"You've got to give in, young gents!" he said. "So you can keep your tricks for those as likes 'em."

Tom Merry and Figgins were leaning out of the window directly above the door, and they grinned.

"Take my advice, Taggy, old man, and clear while you're

safe!" said Tom coolly. "We're not standing on ceremony, you know!"

"Which I've got my dooty to do!" said Taggles grimly.

The old porter lifted his axe and crashed it against the tough oak of the door. The door shook, but gave no sign of splitting. It was likely to be a long and strenuous task to batter it down.

But Taggles nerved himself valiantly for it. He swung the axe again, and it crashed on the door and stuck there. At the same moment Taggles emitted a terrific roar, which ended in an inarticulate gurgle as a mass of sooty, sticky fluid streamed down from the window and flowed over his head and shoulders.

In a couple of seconds Taggles was converted into a good imitation of a wild and woolly nigger—only Taggles' wool, what little there was of it, was matted together with soot.

"Ow! Grooogh! Gerrugh!" spluttered Taggles.

Taggles was spluttering wildly, endeavoring to get the sticky fluid out of his eyes, and his ears, and his mouth. When he could speak at last, he shook a furious fist at the laughing rebels:

"Which you all ought to 'ave been drowned at birth—the whole lot of ye! A-pourin' of a lot of—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go home, Taggy!"

Taggles glared and shouted; but the rest of his remarks were drowned in a roar of merriment.

The old porter tramped away at last, without troubling even to speak to Mr. Ratcliff. Perhaps he felt he might have said more than was judicious.

As for the Housemaster, he eyed the cheering rebels for a little, and then turned abruptly on his heel and hurried in Taggles' wake. A flour bag whizzed, and Mr. Ratcliff ducked just in time. With a face the hue of a beetroot he beat a retreat at an increased pace to his House, and a storm of hisses followed him.

CHAPTER 8.

In the Hands of the Enemy!

"**H**A, ha, ha!"
"Our win!"
"Licked to the wide!" roared Grundy in great exultation.

"No doubt about that!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

The rebels were in a state of jubilation, and they had good cause.

There really was no doubt that Mr. Ratcliff and his forces had suffered a complete and crushing defeat; no possible or probable shadow of a doubt whatever.

The enraged Housemaster had retreated almost at the double, leaving the juniors to chuckle at his discomfort unmoled. And chuckle they did.

"We did jolly well!" said Tom Merry, with satisfaction. "I think the brooms were the deciding argument. Knox didn't seem to like the feel of mine in his chivvy!"

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"We've not finished with Ratty yet, though!" said Cardew sagely. "This is only the first round, Merry. When Ratty brings the whole Fifth and Sixth down on us—"

"Let 'em all come!" interrupted Monty Lowther truculently.

"Plenty more soot!" grinned Figgins. "And lots of flour still. And then there's the hose, in case of emergency."

"We'll use it, whether there's an emergency or not!" said Lowther. "It's war to the knife now. I'd like to knock old Ratty's mortar-board flying with the giddy fire-hose!"

"Rather!"

"Brekker!" said Tom Merry. "Let's get it finished as soon as possible. Ratty may be back any minute with reinforcements."

"Oh, my hat! Yes!"

The rebels set to hastily to finish their morning meal, while Clive and Cardew kept watch at the windows.

But breakfast was cleared away, and there was no sign of the enemy returning. Perhaps Mr. Ratcliff had had enough for the time being. Or, more probably, he was experiencing some difficulty in getting together a strong enough attacking force.

"This is Saturday," said Talbot suddenly.

"Go hon! Who told you, old chap?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Kid Morgan is coming here next Monday," said Talbot. "I'd forgotten it till now."

"By Jove, yes!"

"But will Ratty let him come?"

In the general excitement most of the rebels had completely forgotten that the American boy boxing wonder, Kid Morgan, was due at St. Jim's on Monday. But Talbot had jogged their memories.

"Ratty will send him a telegram, I expect," said Tom Merry. "Dash it all, we wanted to see the chap, and lick him, if possible!"

"And Ratty will tell him to keep clear," said Blake gloomily.

"My hat! I've got a wheeze!" ejaculated Figgins.

"I don't think much of New House wheezes," said Blake candidly.

"My dear chap, you can't think—why try?" retorted Figgins coolly. "Just lend me your ears a minute, and I'll unfold the scheme. It'll make you School House duffers jump."

"New House fathead!"

"Stop ragging!" rapped Tom Merry. In the ranks of the rebels House rags were strictly taboo.

"Let a chap speak!" grunted Figgins. "Why shouldn't Kid Morgan come here, just as if nothing out of the way was happening?"

"Wandering in your mind, Figgy?" inquired Blake sarcastically. "I can see Ratty letting him walk in as if nothing were happening, I don't think! He'd tear his hair if an outsider saw the state of affairs he has brought about, dear man."

"Exactly!" agreed Figgins patiently. "And he's certain to telegraph to Morgan and put off the visit on some excuse or other. That's where we come in. If we can spot when he goes out—"

"Or sends a messenger," put in Tom Merry.

"That's more likely," admitted Figgins. "But if we can find out somehow when the telegram is sent, one of us could easily slip out and cancel it—say it was sent by mistake. Ten to one Morgan would swallow it, and come along as arranged."

"And what do we do with him when we've got him here?" asked Blake, attracted by Figgins' idea.

"You fellows know that the gym roof is flat," said Figgins with great enjoyment. "What's to prevent us rigging up a ring on it, and holding the scrap in full view of St. Jim's?"

"But it will be after dark," objected Blake.

"Glyn can fix up some arc lamps—those we're using in here will do. Could you manage it, Glyn?"

"Easily," said Glyn. "Leave it to me."

"Something in Figgy's wheeze, Tommy, old man," grinned Monty Lowther. "I believe it could be worked. If Morgan is anything of a sport, he'll raise no objections. A little band of us could meet him outside the gates and smuggle him in."

"I put it to the vote!" said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "If we've got a majority, we'll do as Figgy suggests. Show up, everybody!"

There was no hesitation among the rebels. To a man they were keen to pit the St. Jim's champion against the boy from America, and the risk entailed did not deter them.

"Right, then!" said Tom Merry. "We'll keep a close watch on the gates to see if Ratty goes out, either to-day or Monday. I think our best course would be to enlist the services of some of the fags for us—there's some from your House across the quad now, Figgins."

Figgins went to the window and shouted to the New House fags, who were engaging in a game of leap-frog before morning lessons. The youngsters came across to the gym, and Figgins spoke to them. He tossed a shining half-crown out of the window, and it was deftly caught.

"Mind you earn it!" warned Figgins, as the fags scuttled away.

A few minutes later the bell for morning classes sounded, but for the rebels there were no classes. They amused themselves on the vaulting-horse, on the bars, and in sparring contests till dinner-time, while Patty Wynn and his assistants prepared the midday meal.

"Ratty's thinking it over," grinned Lowther, as the afternoon wore on. "He doesn't seem in a hurry to renew hostilities."

"Wish he'd make a move. This is jolly boring," said Grundy.

"Figgins!"

It was Jameson of the Third—one of the rebels' spies—and at the sight of his chubby face Tom Merry leaped to his feet, followed by a score of fellows.

"What luck, Jammy?" asked Figgins eagerly.

"I just heard Ratty ask Monteith to go down to the post-office and cancel Kid Morgan's visit!" gasped the fag. "Can't stop—I'm due for chemmy lesson!"

And, before he could be questioned further, Jameson was running swiftly across the quad. He had earned his share of the half-crown, and he did not want to be late for "chemmy" with Mr. Racliff in his present mood.

But the fag's information was enough.

"Watch the gates!" said Tom Merry. "As soon as Monteith goes out one of us can follow. I'll go—"

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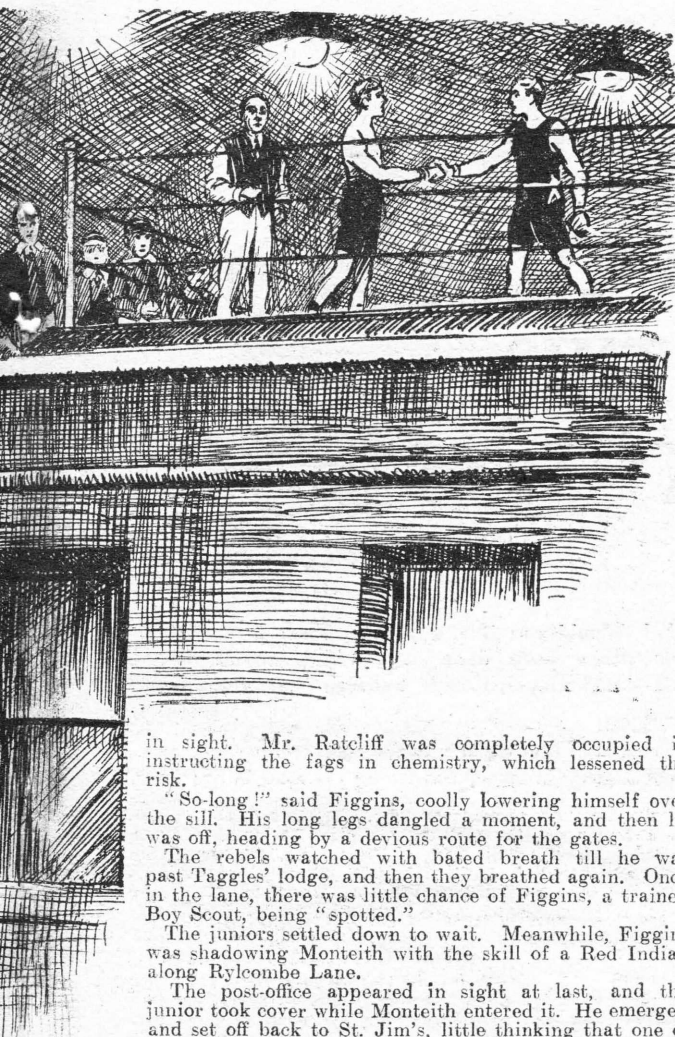
To discover the roof of the gym turned into a ring—with huge electric arc lamps illuminating the scene as bright as day—was the last thing the fags of the Third expected. They stared at the figures of Kid Morgan and Talbot as they shook hands; but the moment the fight began, Wally found his breath. "Look, chaps!" he cried. His shrill shout brought a crowd of fellows to the scene. (See Chapter 13.)



"Rot!" interrupted Figgins. "It's my wheeze, isn't it? Besides, you're leader, and we don't want anything to happen to you, old chap. Leave it to me. By Jove, there's Monteith!"

Sure enough, the head prefect of the New House came down the steps and passed out of the gates, en route, as the rebels knew now, for the post-office at Rylcombe.

Figgins took a quick glance round, but there was nobody



in sight. Mr. Ratcliff was completely occupied in instructing the fags in chemistry, which lessened the risk.

"So-long!" said Figgins, coolly lowering himself over the sill. His long legs dangled a moment, and then he was off, heading by a devious route for the gates.

The rebels watched with bated breath till he was past Taggles' lodge, and then they breathed again. Once in the lane, there was little chance of Figgins, a trained Boy Scout, being "spotted."

The juniors settled down to wait. Meanwhile, Figgins was shadowing Monteith with the skill of a Red Indian along Rylcombe Lane.

The post-office appeared in sight at last, and the junior took cover while Monteith entered it. He emerged and set off back to St. Jim's, little thinking that one of the ringleaders of the rebellion lay in hiding only a few yards from him.

Figgins' task, after the prefect had disappeared, was simple. He walked calmly into the little post-office, and took a telegraph-form. He chewed the pencil for a second, and then scribbled:

"Regret previous telegram sent in error. Will meet Rylcombe Station seven Monday.—MERRY."

Kid Morgan's secretary had written to Tom Merry concerning the arrangements, and he would be bound to accept that explanation. Figgins paid the charge, and left the post-office, whistling cheerily.

He walked back to the school, keeping a wary eye open for the enemy, though he was unlikely to meet them in Rylcombe Lane. Arrived at St. Jim's, however, the need for exceeding caution was imminent.

Figgins glanced round, and made silently for the twisted oak which overhung the school wall at a convenient point. With the aid of the oak he hoped to gain ingress unobserved, and so back to his comrades in the gym.

He was over the wall and shinning down the trunk, when a voice fell on his ears, and caused his heart to sink to his boots.

"Got you, you young scoundrel!"

Figgins span round, but he was not quite quick enough to evade the hand which fastened on his shoulder. He found himself staring into the face of Monteith of the Sixth, with Mr. Ratcliff, his face curved in a grim smile, just behind him.

"Got you!" repeated Monteith, grinning at the expression on Figgins' face. "Rather unexpected, what?"

"Do not let him slip free, Monteith!" urged Mr. Ratcliff. "I think now I have a means of dealing with these reckless young rascals, Figgins!"

"Oh dear!" mumbled Figgins. His venture had ended in disaster, but he had one consolation. Mr. Ratcliff could not know the reason for his expedition, and he would never suspect. Even that, however, was not a very consoling thought, now that he was actually in the enemy's hands.

"Doubtless you were unaware that I observed you leaving the school premises, Figgins?" rasped Mr. Ratcliff. "I was surprised that Monteith had not seen you. But you will not escape now. You are one of the prime movers in this reckless insubordination, and you will be made to suffer for it. Bring the boy this way, Monteith."

"This way, young shaver!" growled Monteith, dragging Figgins by the collar.

The New House junior did not offer resistance. He knew that it was useless now. Whatever Mr. Ratcliff had in store for him he must go through with a stiff upper lip. And Figgins was not the fellow to flinch.

He followed Mr. Ratcliff, with the prefect's grasp tight on his collar, and a little bunch of Sixth-Formers following; and a flush came to his face as he was led before the windows of the gym in full view of Tom Merry & Co.

The rebels were crowding at the windows, and there were encouraging cries for Figgins. Whether he had failed or not, Figgins was sure of the spiritual support of his comrades. But he had an uneasy feeling that he would require something besides spiritual support in the near future.

Mr. Ratcliff halted, just out of range of the rebels' marksmen. His eyes glittered at them, but there was a triumphant glint in them now. He motioned towards Figgins.

"Boys! You see that Figgins has been caught—"

The Housemaster got no further.

He had halted just out of range; or thought he had.

But he had not allowed room for miscalculation.

A bag of soot, with all the force of a rebel's arm behind it, flew through the air and burst in a cloud of jet on Mr. Ratcliff's rather prominent nose.

There was a yell of delight from Tom Merry & Co., and Figgins broke into a chuckle. Mr. Ratcliff, spluttering frantically and gouging soot from his eyes, was a sight for sore eyes.

"Oh, good shot, Kangy!"

"Look at Ratty!"

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheerio, Figg!" roared Monty Lowther.

Mr. Ratcliff glared.

CHAPTER 9.

Glyn to the Rescue!

MR. RATCLIFF'S glare might fairly have been likened to that of the famed basilisk of old for sheer ferocity.

Soot was streaked over his face; it filled his hair, and when he opened his mouth he choked for some minutes before he could speak.

His voice trembled with rage as he addressed the grinning rebels, having first retreated to a safe—a quite safe—distance.

"You young scoundrels—"

"Can it, Ratty!"

"Cheese it, old fruit!" shouted Cardew. "You bore us, you know!"

"You young rascals—"

"Shut up!"

"Go home!"

Mr. Ratcliff seemed unable to speak without breaking into a string of abuse, and the rebels did not appear disposed to listen to that. But the Housemaster calmed himself with an effort, and shook a trembling hand in the direction of Figgins—securely held by Monteith.

"I call upon you to surrender!" said Mr. Ratcliff, setting his lips. "As you see, one of your number has fallen into my hands—one of the ringleaders in this disgraceful rebellion. It is my intention to flog him here and now—flog him until he cries for mercy—unless there is an instant end to your insubordination!"

There was a silence among the juniors in the gym.

They read the fixed purpose in the Housemaster's eye, and with growing anger realised that he intended to make Figgins pay for the sins of them all—unless there was an ignominious and unconditional surrender.

"You may well be silent!" observed Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "I will allow you five minutes in which to decide. If, at the end of that period, you still persist in your reckless defiance, Figgins will be flogged and expelled before your eyes. If you decide to surrender, I will undertake to expel only Talbot and Merry. The rest will be caned. You have your choice!"

And Mr. Ratcliff folded his arms and waited, grimly confident that the rebels would take the course of surrender, rather than see an innocent comrade punished for their sins.

There was a buzz of anger among the rebels.

"The—the awful rotter!" breathed Lowther. "He means

(Continued on page 17.)

SEVEN DELICIOUS TUCK HAMPERS AWARDED TO READERS THIS WEEK!



Each Hamper contains:

An Iced Cake, Chocolates, Biscuits, Jam, Sardines, Honey, Sweets, Figs, Lemonade, Etc.

If at first you don't succeed,
Try, try, try, again!

Do you know a good story, chum? Of course you do! Would you like a ripping Tuck Hamper? What-ho! Then send your joke along, as these other chaps have done. All efforts should be addressed: Special "Tuck Hamper Competition" No. 10, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

ENERGETIC BILL!

The plumber eyed the leaking pipe thoughtfully for ten minutes while smoking his pipe. Then, turning to the householder, he requested the loan of a chair. "A chair?" queried the tenant. "Would not a pair of steps be more suitable?" "Oh, no!" countered the plumber. "This 'ere job needs thinkin' about!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Percy A. Stoner, 55, Protheroe Road, Fulham, S.W. 6.

VERY "A-MOOS-ING!"

Schoolmaster Wackum was taking the class in grammar. At the end of the lesson he put this question to his inattentive pupils: "I milked the cow." What mood? "There was a scuffle at the back of the class as Tommy Jones jumped smartly to his feet. "Please, sir, the cow!" he piped excitedly.—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Wm. A. Ward, 39, Gladstone Street, Wigston Magna, near Leicester.

AN AWKWARD SITUATION!

It was election day at Noisyville, and all was bustle and excitement. The candidate was making a tour of the polling-booths, and the reports of his supporters were encouraging. When he emerged he found a large crowd awaiting him, and he was grasped in many hands and raised shoulder high. "It is very good of you gentlemen," he said, smiling happily, "but really I would prefer to walk to my car." "Car!" roared the excited crowd. "Why, you're for no car—you're for the canal!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to M. Buchanan, 345, Garscube Road, Glasgow, N.W.

Owing to the interest taken by readers all over the world in this Weekly Joke Competition a Delicious Tuck Hamper will be awarded for EVERY joke published on this page. Cut out the coupon below while you are of the mind to win one of these NOVEL PRIZES. Editor.

AN APPROPRIATE PRESENT!

A farmer was up in London for a few days. Before leaving home he had promised to buy his daughter a present. So, having gazed at a jeweller's shop window for a time, he entered the shop. "I want a pair of ear-rings, cheap but pretty," he said to the assistant. "They're a present for the darter." "Yes, sir," said the man behind the counter. "Something showy—a trifle loud, eh?" "Well, it 'ud be a good thing if one of them was a bit loud," answered the farmer, "cos the gal's deaf in one ear!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Leslie Press, 52, Leigham Court Drive, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

OFF HIS GUARD!

A young undergraduate was taken before his dean for turning up two days after the beginning of the term. "I'm awfully sorry," said the young man, "but I couldn't get back before. I was detained by most important business." The professor looked at him sternly. "So you wanted two more days of grace, did you?" he asked. "No," replied the undergraduate, off his guard for the moment; "of Marjorie!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to J. E. McCrea, 43A, Kashmir Road, Belfast.

THE REASON!

A young man, with journalistic ambitions, was visiting his pal. "I say, old man," said the would-be journalist, "I'm very much afraid I shall never be a successful writer." "Why so despondent?" inquired his friend. "Well, I sent to an editor the other day my best poem, entitled 'Why Do I Live?' and I received a letter from him this morning saying: 'Because you didn't bring this in person.'"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to N. H. Wass, 3, Albion Street, Hull, East Yorks.

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FAGGED!

A regiment of soldiers had just finished a march of twenty-eight miles, and were standing at attention. "My men," said the officer, "we are all proud of you. You have walked twenty-eight miles, and not one man has fallen out; but you have all got to walk twenty-eight miles back. Any man feeling unable to do it can take three paces forward." The whole regiment, bar one man, stepped forward three paces. This somewhat surprised the officer, and, going up to the man, he said: "You can walk twenty-eight miles back?" The private looked at the officer. "Why, blow me," he said wearily, "I can't even take three paces forward!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to L. Wells, 253, Queen's Road, Wimbledon, S.W. 19.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

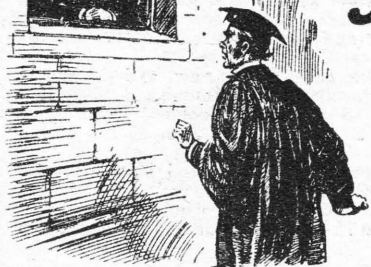
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No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.



STANDING UP FOR JUSTICE!

(Continued from page 15.)



to take it out of poor old Figgy—unless we came in to him like a lot of giddy sheep!"

"The howling cad!" said Kerr. "If I were near him I'd—"

"He's giving us five minutes!" said Tom Merry quietly. "We've got to decide one way or the other in that time. We can't leave Figgins to stand the racket—"

"But he will expel you—and Talbot, too!" said Redfern.

"I'm willing, if Tom is!" said Talbot at once. "I can't let all you fellows be dragged into this on my behalf! But Tom will have to go if Figgins is to be saved! He's got us either way, the rotter!"

"You can't surrender, Tom!" said Lowther earnestly. "Have a bit of sense, old chap. Heaven knows, I'd do anything to get old Figgy out of their clutches, but there's no sense in sacrificing both you and Talbot!"

Mr. Ratcliff was watching the counsel among the rebels with a smile of triumph.

"You have only one minute left!" he called. "We shall have to stand still and see Figgy flogged!" muttered Kerr. "My hat, if only there was anything a chap could do—"

"We could open fire with the flour and soot—" began Lowther. "By Jove! The hose! What blithering idiots we were not to have thought of that, you fellows!"

"Come on!" gasped Tom Merry. "One moment! What is your answer?" called Mr. Ratcliff.

He paused, like Brutus, for a reply—fully expecting to hear that Tom Merry & Co. were climbing down. But he was disappointed.

There was no answer.

The rebels, uncoiling the long fire-hose, were much too busily occupied to heed the Housemaster. If the hose could be got into working order in time, they could sweep the quad with it—and with a sudden dash into the open rescue Figgins.

"Am I to take this for defiance?" rasped Mr. Ratcliff, approaching a little nearer the gym and peering within. For a moment he glimpsed the fire-hose in the hands of a crowd of juniors, and he flushed livid. Two minutes would have sufficed the rebels to have got the hose going. But in those two minutes the Housemaster acted quickly.

"Monteith! Run!" he gasped. "Turn off the water at the main! These—these young reprobates are fitting up the school fire-hose!"

"Oh, my hat! Hold Figgins, sir!" ejaculated Monteith faintly.

Mr. Ratcliff's bony hand closed on Figgins' shoulder, and Monteith made a dash for the water-main. If he could turn it off in time, the hose would be useless. And already Tom Merry was poking the nozzle out of a window and taking aim.

"Quick! Now's our chance!" gasped Blake.

Tom Merry turned on the water, and Mr. Ratcliff ducked instinctively, dragging Figgins down with him.

But there was only a feeble gurgle.

With chagrined faces the juniors realised that Monteith had beaten them by a short neck, so to speak—the school water supply was turned off at the main!

"Oh, my hat! What rotten luck!"

"Bai Jove! And they have still got poor old Figgy, deah boys!"

The swell of St. Jim's, deeply distressed, eyed Figgins sympathetically through his celebrated monocle, but even that did not seem to have any beneficial effect on the prisoner.

"Thank you, Monteith! You were just in time!" said Mr. Ratcliff, as the prefect came up again grinning.

"Yes, sir."

"And now, we will proceed with the flogging!" said Mr. Ratcliff in his most icy tones. "It is clear that nothing but a practical demonstration will have any effect on these hardened rascals. I will see what effect I can produce with a birch, however. Hoist Figgins, please!"

Figgins clenched his fists as Monteith hoisted him, but he could see that it was useless to struggle. The distance to the gym was too great; the prefect would have caught him again with ease, even had he succeeded in making his escape.

The junior was hoisted on Monteith's broad back, and Mr. Ratcliff, with a glance at the rebels, allowed the birch he was carrying to slip into his hand.

Tom Merry gripped a missile, but Lowther touched his arm.

"Hopeless, old man!" he said quietly. "They're too far off!"

"This is positively your last opportunity!" called Mr. Ratcliff, swishing his birch through the air. "If you do not surrender, Figgins will be made to suffer dearly!"

"I say—" began Talbot uneasily. It went hard against the grain for the loyal Shell junior to stand back while another suffered in his place—however much he was undeserving of his own punishment.

"It's all up with old Figgy!" said Fatty Wynu miserably. "I sha'n't look!"

Mr. Ratcliff glanced for the last time towards the rebels, and then raised his birch.

"Tom Merry!"

The Shell captain spun round as Glyn's voice sounded in his ear; and he stared. Glyn had been very busy in a corner of the gym during the last few minutes—so busy that nobody had paid particular attention to what he was doing. Now there was a grin on his face, and he held out to the rebels an apronful of little bags, from the tops of which projected short fuses.

"There's just time!" said Glyn quickly. "I've only just finished making 'em. Chuck 'em at Ratty—and watch what happens! In the meantime, each fellow must shove on one of these home-made gas-masks! As soon as Ratty and Monteith are lost in the smoke, a few of us can dash out and rescue Figgins as easily as falling off a form. Quick, I tell you!"

"But what—"

Glyn wasted no more time in explanation. The birch was already descending for the first stroke—descending with all the strength of Mr. Ratcliff's arm; a stroke to make a fellow wince.

But Glyn, judging the distance, hurled one of his little bags in the direction of the flogging—and though it dropped short, it was only by a few feet.

Startled by the missile, which he had seen out of the corner of his eye, Mr. Ratcliff spun round, and the birch swished harmlessly at his side.

The little bag fell and rolled over. The fuse smouldered close, and there was a sudden report. Immediately, a dense, choking cloud of smoke arose from it and, wafted by a breeze, enveloped Mr. Ratcliff, Monteith, and Figgins like a blanket.

In a moment the Housemaster, prefects, and junior were coughing and spluttering as if for a wager.

"Another! Chuck it, Merry, you ass!" urged Glyn, forcing one of his bombs into the Shell captain's hand. He himself proceeded to hurl a second bag, and Tom Merry, needing no second bidding, hurled his.

The second and third bombs landed close to the first—and at once the smoke cloud was thickened until the coughing and spluttering of the three victims arose like a chorus above it.

"Now!" rapped Glyn. "Unbolt the door, somebody! When I give the word, dash out and bring Figgy in. But shove on these masks first, or you'll suffocate. I made those things pretty potent!"

"Good egg!"

"Good man, Glyn!"

While Bernard Glyn and one or two others kept up a steady fire with the smoke bombs, though, after the devastating effect of the first two or three, it was hardly necessary to maintain the offensive, Tom Merry, with a party of rebels, unbolted the door and awaited the command. Their gas masks were rough and ready enough, but they would serve for the short time they would be required.

"All ready? Go it, then!" shouted Glyn, hurling yet another bomb. The quad was hidden from sight now, veiled in a pall-like shroud of jet. Somewhere in that cloud, Figgins was reeling and coughing and choking with the temporary headmaster and the Sixth-Formers.

A rush under ordinary circumstances would have been disastrous, as several of the rebels would certainly have been caught. But, protected by their masks, Tom Merry and his little band made a gallant dash into the swirling smoke, and almost the first figure they laid hands on was that of Figgins.

A prefect loomed up in the way, and was rolled unceremoniously on the ground, while Mr. Ratcliff himself received a shove which caused him to sit down with unexpected suddenness.

"This way, Figgy!" breathed Tom Merry, taking one arm, while Lowther took the other.

"Oh, my hat! Is that you, Tommy?" gasped Figgins. "By Jove, what luck!"

Two figures loomed ahead of the rescuers, crashed together, and rolled over. Tom Merry and his men swerved round and dashed precipitately for the gym.

Eager hands held the door open, and as the last of the rescue party reached safety, Blake slammed and bolted it. The ruse had been successful—owing to Glyn's scientific genius, Figgins had been saved from the birch, and the rebels were a solid body again; all the more determined to hold out against Mr. Ratcliff or perish in the attempt.

A breeze sprang up now, and lifted the pall of smoke from the enemy. Sixth-Formers and Housemaster stared blackly and smudgily at the grinning rebels, who did not trouble to restrain their grins. They roared:

"Yah! Go and wash your dirty face, Ratty!"

"Haven't you got any soap in the New House?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Figgins forgot to refute that suggestion in the general delight.

"You will hear more of this!" grated Mr. Ratcliff, and his lips were drawn and white under the smoky smears.

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Kangaroo.

"Come!" said Mr. Ratcliff to the Sixth-Formers.

And, with feelings too deep for words, the Sixth-Formers followed Mr. Ratcliff into the House in search of a clean-up. The second round had been fought—and once again the honours were with the rebels.

It really began to look as if Mr. Ratcliff had bitten off a little more than he could chew!

CHAPTER 10.

Against all Comers!

"YAW-AW-AW!"

Tom Merry sat up amid his blankets on the floor of the gym.

He rubbed his eyes and blinked drowsily in darkness. It was early morning; very early morning. Something had awakened him, for the Shell captain was, as a rule, a sound sleeper.

As his eyes became used to the gloom, he made out the guards—Grundy and Wilkins—seated on a box by the window. They were huddled together, breathing deeply; and Tom Merry bit his lip.

The spirit, he knew, was willing, but the flesh was weak. It was easy enough to fall asleep in the stilly watches of the night, when a keen eye should have been on the alert for a surprise attack from the enemy.

Mr. Ratcliff was highly unlikely to turn out of bed at this hour; that was true enough. It was doubtful if the seniors, either, would have been willing to rise so early on that cold winter's morn. The rebels had been left in peace since Saturday afternoon, when Glyn's smoke-bombs had put the enemy to rout. Mr. Ratcliff had not appeared in public on Sunday; it was Monday now, and Tom Merry, glancing at the luminous dial of his watch, saw that it was barely half-past four.

The chance of a surprise was small enough; but, even though they would not be court-martialled, the captain of the Shell decided that Grundy and Wilkins deserved to be startled into wakefulness.

He groped for a boot, and took aim in the dim light from the stars.

Crash!

Crash! Crash!

Tinkle, tinkle!

It was not the impact of Tom Merry's boot with the forms of the sleeping guards. It was a heavy crashing on the oaken door of the gym, with the sound of glass smashed from the windows! Tom Merry leaped to his feet, and his yell echoed through the gym.

"Wake up, you chaps! It's an attack!"

"What?"

"Attack? Why—what—my hat, they're coming in at the windows!"

"Ware boarders!" roared Monty Lowther, scrambling to his feet and snatching up a broom.

"Hasten! You can climb through the window, Monteith!" came Mr. Ratcliff's voice from without.

Tinkle, tinkle!

Crash! Crash!

In spite of Mr. Ratcliff's eagerness, Monteith preferred to remove all the glass from the window-frame before he essayed to clamber over the sill. He was likely to collect a good many bruises before the rebels were subdued; but he did not want to add a cut or two to the collection.

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"Brooms and mops!" panted Tom Merry. "Put your beef into it, you fellows! If they get in, sit on 'em!"

Crash! Crash!

The crashing on the big door was deafening. It was a hefty door, but it could not withstand that terrific battering indefinitely. The rebels were awake and dashing to their posts now, and Figgins and Kerr scrambled swiftly up the ladder to the window over the door.

Other windows had been smashed by now, and the enemy were clambering in determinedly. Monteith already had his leg over the sill, and in another moment would have dropped into the rebels' camp. But Tom Merry had a broom ready.

"Now, you young rascals—" commenced Monteith. He ended with a wild gurgle, as a broom took him full in the mouth, and swayed dangerously in the window.

"Lemme gerrat him!" roared Grundy, flourishing a cricket-stump.

"Hold on, Grundy!"

"Don't brain him!"

But the juniors were too late. Tom Merry had no time for a second thrust with the broom—if that was needed.

Grundy was thirsting for blood—perhaps as a result of his lapse while on guard—and as Monteith paused uncertainly, the cricket-stump thumped on his head. There was a terrific yell from Monteith, and the prefect disappeared suddenly from view.

He rolled in the quad, still yelling.

"Oh, crumbs! The dangerous maniac! Oh, crikey!"

"Monteith! Why do you grovel on the ground in that ridiculous manner?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "Resume the attack at once!"

"Yow-wow! I've got a bump as big as an egg!" gasped Monteith. "Lemme get my wind, and I'll—I'll brain that idiot Grundy!"

But the rebels did not wait while Monteith got his breath. It was evidently an attack in force. Sixth-Formers and Fifth-Formers as well were scrambling in at the windows, and the juniors rushed to defend them.

Wild and furious yells sounded as brooms and mops drove home, and several rebels armed with cricket-stumps did great execution.

Baker, his face set, rolled in at the end window, and was immediately seized by half a dozen pairs of hands. He hit out fiercely, but weight of numbers told heavily against him.

"Out with him!" gasped Tom Merry. "All together, and don't mind if he bumps on the sill!"

"You young scoundrels! I'll— Oh, crikey! Yaroooh!"

Baker was lifted like a sack and shoved unceremoniously into the quad. He rolled and gasped, while Mr. Ratcliff glared at him, as he had done at Monteith.

At the next window Knox was coming in, his ashplant in his mouth, rather after the style of an African warrior on the warpath. He was given a warm reception.

"Come on, Knox!" shouted Monty Lowther. "Don't be shy!"

The prefect did not hesitate. He knew that his only chance lay in getting in and laying about him recklessly with the ashplant, and he was not likely to spare the rod once he got in.

Surprisingly enough, he was allowed to drop from the sill unmolested, but then the rebels closed round him in a swarm. Knox, yelling, went under with a crash, and was bumped repeatedly on the floor of the gym.

He had intended to bring the rebels to order with a liberal application of ashplant; instead, his ashplant was rammed down his neck, and his tie followed it. His collar was strewn to the winds, and his waistcoat burst open. He opened his mouth to yell for help, and a cap was jammed into it, effectually putting a stop to speech.

"Chuck him out!" rapped Tom Merry. "They're coming in elsewhere! All together, now!"

"If you dare—" gurgled Knox, spitting out the cap and struggling fiercely.

"Up!" said Tom Merry.

And Knox landed on the window-sill, bruised and aching, and dropped on his hands and knees in the quad.

Members of the attacking force were still coming in wherever they had made an aperture, but brooms and mops met them at every turn, and any fellow who gained an entry was glad to escape after a few moments among the rebels. The rebels were winning all along the line in this direction, but the crashing on the door continued, and the bolts creaked under the strain.

A shout from Figgins brought Tom Merry and Glyn running to the ladder.

"Bring one of your bombs, Glyn!" gasped Figgins. "There's Taggles and the school gardener and two or three others out here. We've smothered them in soot and treacle, but they won't budge!"

"Wait a minute!" said Glyn.

Tom Merry slipped up the ladder and glanced down at the



Figgins was hoisted on Monteith's broad back, while Mr. Ratcliff, with a glance at the rebels, allowed the birch he was carrying to slip down into his hand. "This is positively your last opportunity," said the New House master, swishing his birch through the air. "If you do not surrender, Figgins will be made to suffer dearly!" (See Chapter 9.)

attackers, and his face became a little anxious. Taggles was hardly recognisable under the thick covering of soot and treacle which Figgins had given him. The gardener was in little better plight, and Sefton and MacGregor, who had been detailed to lead the charge when the door had been battered down, were a picture.

But, smothered as he was, Taggles wielded his axe with grim determination, and it could not be long now before he made a breach.

"Give a fellow room!" called Glyn, and Tom Merry descended to allow him to ascend. The Shell captain followed him up, and contrived to look over Glyn's shoulder as he threw his smoke-bomb.

"Good man!" gasped Figgins, as the little bag dropped dead on Taggles' head, adhering to the sticky mass.

"If they put it out—" breathed Tom Merry.

But the attackers did not have time to put out the fuse. Glyn had timed it to perfection, and with a sharp report the smoke-bomb burst. Tom Merry & Co. jerked their heads back just in time to escape the cloud of choking vapour which arose, and Figgins slammed the window.

Peering through the panes, the juniors could see little, but what they saw gave them cause for merriment. The crashing on the door had ceased automatically; Taggles had something else now to occupy his attention.

He was sneezing and coughing away at a great rate, with the gardener, MacGregor, and Sefton keeping him company.

"Back up, Tom Merry!"

It was a shout from the opposite end of the gym, and, glancing down, the Shell captain saw that two or three seniors had forced an entry, and were fighting hard in the dim light of the dawn.

"We can leave Taggy, you chaps!" gasped Tom, slipping to the floor. "Come on!"

Figgins and Glyn were after him in a flash, and they joined energetically in the conflict.

Monteith, goaded to fresh efforts by Mr. Ratcliff's bitter tongue, together with Lefevre and Cutts of the Fifth, had

gained entry, and the Fifth-Formers were armed with ash-plants for the nonce. Although outnumbered, the seniors hoped to hold the rebels' attention while their comrades scrambled in after them, and in some measure they were succeeding.

Headless of brooms and stump, Monteith slashed recklessly with his ashplant, and wild yells signalled that several of the rebels were hurt. That did not matter to Monteith and he slashed all the more recklessly as he heard the yells.

"Stand by!" rapped Tom Merry grimly. "It's neck or nothing now!"

Others were dropping in at the windows, and the fate of the rebels seemed to hang in mid-air.

But, as the seniors slashed with their ashplants, the rebels, following Grundy's example, responded vigorously with stumps, and sundry cracks were followed by fiendish shouts from the recipients.

"Into 'em! They're on the run!" roared Lowther.

Whether the attackers were actually on the run or not was a little doubtful at that moment. But there was no doubt that Monty's cheering war-cry spurred the defenders on to greater efforts, and the first of the seniors to retreat went tumbling out of a window, his head fairly humming from a blow from Grundy's stump.

Another and another followed. It was more than flesh and blood could stand when the rebels began to use their stumps freely. Two or three of the seniors, Knox among them, were half-stunned by terrific slogs from excited defenders, but they had only themselves to blame. In a few seconds after Lowther's shout, the attacking party was in full retreat, those who were too dazed to clamber out themselves being shoved through the windows like so many sacks of coke.

They bumped and rolled on the hard, unsympathetic quad below, while Mr. Ratcliff, with despair in his heart, stormed and raved over them.

But the seniors were beyond heeding Mr. Ratcliff. They

had had enough; more than enough in most instances. And they had left their mark in the rebel ranks. There was hardly a junior who had not some bruise to show, and many had weals from the ashlants of the attackers. But the enemy had been driven off; that was the main thing; indeed, the only thing that mattered.

The juniors were used to taking hard knocks; and a few bruises did not worry them. They crowded the windows, in a cheering and defiant manner, while in the dawn Mr. Ratcliff shook his fist at them.

"Come and try yourself, Ratty, old dear!"

"We're ready for you!"

"What price us?"

"Hurrah!"

There was satisfaction in the ranks of the rebels. And there was none to be had among those of Mr. Ratcliff's storming force. For a moment the Housemaster appeared almost as if he contemplated making an attempt to enter the gym himself; but wiser counsels prevailed, and he drew his gown round his spare form and rested his glance balefully on the battered seniors.

Nearly all the Sixth and Fifth had taken part in that early morning surprise attack; and it was safe to say that never before had the Fifth and Sixth at St. Jim's presented such a battered and bruised front as they did then.

"To allow yourselves to be beaten by a handful of juniors—" began Mr. Ratcliff, glaring at Monteith.

He stopped suddenly. He read insubordination in Monteith's look, and he realised, with a sinking feeling, that it was but a step to open defiance, from the seniors as well as the juniors! And then what could he do?

The Housemaster bit his lip, and left his men without another word.

Monteith & Co. strode wearily into their respective Houses, followed by a derisive yell from the rebels.

"And now I think we've earned our brekker!" said Monty Lowther, with satisfaction.

Whereat there was a chorus of "Hear, hear!" And the rebels sat down to a rather early breakfast in a cheery—a very cheery mood.

CHAPTER 11.

Meeting Kid Morgan!

"**W**HAT next?" asked Monty Lowther. And the rebels grinned.

Breakfast was over, and they were awaiting

Mr. Ratcliff's next move—if there was to be one that morning. It was much more probable that the Housemaster was taking a rest, and it was certain that he would receive no further support from the Fifth or the Sixth.

"I rather think Ratty has come to the end of his resources!" chuckled Cardew. "Unless he calls in the fags, there's nobody else to do his biddin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cardew's right!" said Blake thoughtfully. "The seniors are fed-up; we know that. Ratty may call in the police—" "Or the militia!" chuckled Lowther.

"But I don't think he would get much change out of old Crump, what?"

"Inspector Grimes, of Wayland, would tell him it was no business of his!" said Cardew coolly. "He would think Ratty ought to be able to run the school off his own bat—an' so he ought!"

"Hear, hear!"

It was indeed a little difficult to imagine what Mr. Ratcliff would do next. If he did not want the barring-out to continue until the Head and Mr. Railton returned, he had to make a move—and the quicker the better. The rebels were provisioned for a long siege—much longer than would elapse before the Head's return.

But, short of invoking the aid of the police, there was no course open to him. The juniors had shown themselves more than capable of dealing with the Fifth and Sixth—and the latter had no desire to try conclusions again.

Certainly, Mr. Ratcliff could tip "old Crump," the village constable, to test the power of his official eye on the rebels; but it was only too certain that Mr. Crump would attract more ridicule than respect.

The Housemaster had thought more than once of laying a charge against Talbot before the inspector at Wayland; but even he shrank from that desperate step, when he had no definite proof to offer—when he had, in fact, nothing but wild suspicion, with little foundation, with which to substantiate the charge.

But what else he could do presented something of a mystery.

"I don't think we shall have any trouble this morning," said Tom Merry. "We can run off the finals of our boxing tournament, and decide which of us is to meet this fellow Morgan to-night."

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"Jolly risky, going to the station to meet him, and then smuggling him in here!" grunted Trimble. "I think if any of you fellows are caught, you ought to take all the blame—if you do Ratty may let me off! I can tell you I'm not surrendering to save you from the sack—that's flat!"

"Ass!" said Lowther.

"Fathead!" supplemented Tom Merry. "Nobody asked you to surrender. If any of us get nabbed, the rest will carry on—that's all. But we sha'n't get nabbed. There will be no moon to-night, and if we can't sneak out unobserved I'm a Dutchman!"

Baggy Trimble grunted again, and subsided. So long as his own fat skin was safe, it was a matter of complete indifference to Trimble whether the other fellows fell into Mr. Ratcliff's hands or not.

"Four of us are still left in!" called out Tom Merry. "There will be two bouts, and a final. The first is Talbot versus Figgins!"

The juniors named threw off their jackets and pulled on the gloves. Tom Merry's idea of holding a tournament in order to decide the St. Jim's champion to meet Kid Morgan had caught on, and had served to while away many a weary hour in the gym.

Talbot and Figgins shook hands, and Kangaroo called "Time!"

The combatants went away with rare vim, and Blake, who was referee, had to look very lively on occasion to get out of their way. The first round was Figgins', but Talbot came into form in the second, and proceeded steadily to gain the upper hand.

After five rounds, Blake awarded the contest to Talbot on points, it being considered advisable to limit the fights, that the chosen champion might be all the fresher for the evening's test.

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy met in the roped space in the second combat, and a keen and interested exhibition resulted. Gussy got home a regular "pile-driver" early in the proceedings, causing the Shell captain to mop up the claret with a handkerchief; but in the closing stages Tom Merry slightly out-boxed his opponent, and won on a narrow margin of points.

"Tom Merry and Talbot—to decide the champion!" announced Blake.

"Good luck, old man! I'd like to see you represent the school!" grinned Tom Merry, as he shook Talbot's hand.

"Don't let me off lightly, Tom!" said Talbot, smiling.

"Time!" called Kangaroo.

The final bout was fast and keen, and the points mounted up, with the scores fairly even. In the third round the captain of the Shell gained a slight supremacy, but in the fourth Talbot came into his own again. Everything depended on the fifth and last, and there was great excitement as Kangaroo sounded the gong—a frying-pan—and the round commenced.

Tom Merry staggered under a left to the chin, but rallied and drove home a hard upper-cut. He swung again, but missed, and Talbot, slipping in, did good work on the Shell captain's body. The gong ended hostilities, just when they were at their height, and all eyes were fixed on Blake as he gave his decision.

"Go it, Blake!"

"Talbot must have won it!"

"Rot! Tom Merry had it easily!"

"I tell you—"

"Shurrup!" roared Blake, making a megaphone of his hands. "Talbot gains the verdict on points; but there was hardly anything to choose either way!"

"Hard luck, Tom!" said Lowther. "Never mind. Old Talbot will do well against this Morgan johnny—I feel it in my bones! Congrats, Talbot!"

"Thanks!" said Talbot, smiling. "If Morgan beats me, it won't be for the want of trying!"

"Talbot's the man!" said Tom Merry crisply. "What we've got to do now is to decide how we're going to smuggle Morgan into the school without Ratty spotting us. He's due at Rylcombe at seven!"

"Some of us will have to cut across the playing-fields!" said Figgins practically. "We can bring Morgan in the same way. It'll be rank bad luck if Ratty happens to be prowling around while all the fags are at prep! He hardly ever goes out of his study during the evening, unless it's to speak to Lathom, and he'll probably keep himself a bit secluded after the raid this morning!"

"Rather!"

"Half a dozen of us will be enough," said Tom Merry. "If we meet anybody we can roll them over and run for it. Lowther, Figgins, Kangaroo, Manners, Kerr, and myself. If we are captured, Blake or Talbot will take command."

"Trust me!" said Blake. "We shall not sheathe the sword which we have not lightly drawn—"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"All right!" grinned Blake. "I expect I shall have to come to the rescue of you silly asses, but you can rely on me to pull you out of a scrape!"

"Fathead!"
"Chump!"

Blake chuckled, and Tom Merry & Co. glared.

But the call to dinner—prepared quite in the style of the best French cooks by Fatty Wynn and his staff of helpers—gave the juniors something else to occupy their thoughts.

The afternoon wore away without any further attempt on the part of Mr. Ratcliff to dislodge them, and the time for the departure of Tom Merry and his little band drew near.

As soon as tea had been disposed of, the Shell captain took a cautious survey from the windows of the gym, and then, with the remainder of the garrison standing ready with ammunition, he dropped to the ground.

If there had been a prefect or a master in sight, the rebels could easily have held them off while Tom Merry regained shelter. But a quick scout round the corner of the building was sufficient to assure the junior that the coast was clear, and he gave the signal for the rest of the party to descend.

One by one the half-dozen dropped from the window-sill, and then, with Tom Merry in the lead, they set off round the edge of the playing-fields, keeping well out of sight under the hedges.

"So far, so good!" said Monty Lowther, as they emerged at last into the lane. "Ratty and his minions seem to have given us up as a bad job—what?"

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched!" remarked Kangaroo sagely. "If the old bouncer once lays his paws on us, we shall be for it!"

"No doubt about that!" agreed Manners.

"We'd better get a move on!" said Tom Merry. "Morgan's train is due in a few minutes. Put your best feet forward, you fellows!"

The juniors broke into a steady jog-trot, and, keeping in the shadow of the hedge, made good progress towards the village. They reached Rylcombe, with its twinkling lights, a little before seven, and marched boldly into the little station.

"She's signalled!" said Lowther, after a minute or two. "Look! Here she comes!"

The local from Wayland ran in, and, with a creaking of axles, came to a standstill.

Tom Merry & Co. watched the passengers descend with anxious eyes.

Two old gentlemen alighted, and a young lady, and then, just as the juniors' hopes were beginning to droop, a boy.

The boy was followed by a gentleman wearing horn-rimmed spectacles of the largest and horniest variety Tom Merry & Co. had ever seen. A long, black cigar protruded from one corner of his mouth, and his suit—a loud check—arrested the eye from afar.

But, apart from a glance at the man, the boy riveted their attention.

"My hat! What a young giant!" gasped Blake.

"Look at his fists!" ejaculated Lowther.

"Like legs of mutton!" said Manners.

"Come on!" whispered Tom Merry. "They're looking round for us already!"

He led the way to the newcomers, and raised his cap politely to the gentleman with the horn-rimmed glasses.

"Good-evening, sir!" Tom Merry could not prevent his glance from straying to the American boy boxing wonder. He towered like a young monument on closer acquaintance. "I'm Tom Merry, from St. Jim's. We've come to meet and welcome you—and escort you to the school!"

The American gentleman extended a large and bony hand.

"Shake, pardner!" he said, removing his cigar for the purpose. "So you're the Merry guy, eh?"

"You sure said a mouthful!" murmured Monty Lowther, and the American's eyes glimmered.

"Say, introduce me to your friends, Mister Merry!" he went on. "Who's the lil' guy with the landslide of a face?"

"One for you, Monty!" chuckled Manners. "Keep your little jokes for your pals, old man!"

Monty Lowther coloured and subsided, while the introductions were completed.

"And now, gentlemen," said the American. "Mister Merry knows my name—Huxton Rumble, manager of this hyer champeen boy boxer, in whom you are all interested. This is Kid Morgan, who is to fight your man to-night, and if any of you is keen on a little gamble, I'll lay—"

"We don't bet, sir!" said Tom Merry hastily. "But we want you to do a sporting thing to-night!"

"I'm open!" responded the original Mr. Rumble

"You see, we have fallen out with the master who has been left in charge of the school," explained Tom Merry. "We're holding a barring-out in the gym, and if the fight is to be held, it will have to take place on the roof. One of our fellows had rigged up some arc-lamps, and the contest

will be in full view of the whole school, Mr. Rumble. You can referee yourself, if you like!"

Mr. Rumble stared. He seemed to have some difficulty in believing his ears.

"Waal, carry me home to die!" he ejaculated at length.

"As soon as the headmaster comes back, we're willing to abide by his judgment, sir," said Tom Merry quietly. "But at present we are standing out against an injustice!"

"Waal, this is the best ever!" observed Mr. Rumble, apparently still in a daze. "Still, you can rely on me to see you through, Mister Merry. The Kid will fight anywhere you like."

"This way, then!" said Lowther.

And Mr. Rumble nodded, and followed with his giant protege.

CHAPTER 12.

Strategy and the Fight!

"WHAT the merry thump—"

"Fire!"

"What?"

"The fire bell!"

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a buzz amongst the rebels.

The urgent tones of the school alarm bell could not be mistaken. They boomed clear on the night air, and sent a shiver down the spine of more than one of the rebels.

A wild yell from Trimble drew Blake from the window.

"Oh dear! Help! Fire! Murder! Save me, somebody! I tell you I'm jolly well not going to be burned alive! Sus-save me from the flames, you fellows!"

The rebels crowded to the windows and peered out. The alarm bell was still tolling, and a gasp went up as a column of smoke swept across the quad from the direction of the school buildings—concealed by the corner of the gymnasium.

"Oh, my hat! Look at that!" exclaimed Cardew, who had been straining his eyes to see the source of the smoke.

A tongue of flame had leaped into view—evidently proceeding from the School House—and it was followed by another, and yet another.

The faces of the juniors as they observed the flames were set. It was useless to stay longer in the gymnasium—that much was certain. The rebellion looked like coming to an end in an unexpected manner, after all. The general opinion appeared to favour getting into the open while the going was yet good.

"I've unbolted the door, Blake!" called Lennox nervously. "Shall I open it?"

"What will Tom Merry say when he comes back with Morgan?" asked Blake.

"Blow Tom Merry and Morgan into the bargain!" roared Trimble. "Open the door, Lennox!"

A rush of footsteps in the quad attracted the rebels' attention to the windows again. It was a little body of prefects and Sixth-Formers—the school fire brigade—and they were rushing towards the gym.

It was Monteith who loomed up first out of the smoke with which the quad was filled now. His face wore an anxious look, and he was grimed and sooty.

"Chuck out the hose, you young fools!" gasped the prefect. "Haven't you heard the alarm?"

"What's caught, Monteith? Is it the School House?"

"The whole place is blazing!" said Monteith, with a gleam in his eyes. "Buck up with that hose! The Wayland Fire Brigade will be too late at this rate!"

"Blazing!" echoed Baggy Trimble, clutching Blake's sleeve. "Chuck it, Blake, you idiot! We shall have to give in—"

But Baggy Trimble's remarks were not heeded. The long hose was passed out of a window, and it was seized eagerly and borne away by the prefects.

That there was a fire was beyond doubt; smoke filled the quad, and was already causing many of the rebels to choke and cough. But Blake, for one, was determined to hang on till the very last; though he did not feel justified in refusing to open the door.

As commander of the rebels, his word was law; but it was obvious that his orders would not have received much obedience at that moment.

"Any fellow who wants to can clear out!" said Blake quietly. "I'm staying on for a few more minutes. There's a precious lot of smoke, but that's beginning to blow away now. It looks a bit fishy to me!"

Smoke was eddying into the gym, and a flash of red in the swirl decided the more faint-hearted of the rebels.

"Come on, you chaps!" gasped Lennox; and the rest followed his lead.

"Shut the door, Grundy!" ejaculated Blake. "Oh, my hat! I believe it's spooof, after all!"

"What?"

"Spooof!" repeated Blake, setting his lips.

The rush of footsteps in the quad had ceased suddenly, and was replaced by a series of yells. Above the shouting came Monteith's voice, grimly exultant.

"Got you, you young rascal! Hang on to 'em, you fellows!"

"Rescue!"

"Help! Help! The prefects have got us!" came Baggy Trimble's well-known roar.

There were deep frowns on the faces of the remaining rebels. Their comrades had fallen into a trap; but the risk entailed in an attempt at rescue would be great.

"I thought as much!" said Blake, between his teeth. "Look! The smoke's clearing now! It was a trick of Ratty's—and it jolly nearly came off!"

"Rescue!" hooted Trimble, with all the force of his powerful lungs.

His captors were allowing him to roar as much as he liked, in the hope that the rest of the juniors would dash to his aid—when the rescue would be over!

"Wescue, deah boy!" breathed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We can't leave the poor fellows in the lurch, can we?"

"Risk it!" said Blake desperately. "Two or three of us had better stay here and guard the door; then we can retreat in a hurry when we like."

"Good man, Blake!"

Grundy threw open the door again; but the rescue party halted abruptly on the threshold. The smoke was clearing off quickly now, and a yell went up from the prisoners as they recognised Tom Merry and his party returning from their expedition with Kid Morgan and Mr. Rumble in their midst.

One glance was enough for the Shell captain. He and his comrades dashed into the fray, and Blake and his men attacked from the opposite side. The prefects, caught between two foes, faltered, and the battle was lost.

A stampede of feet in the direction of the gym signalled the retreat of the rebels—with the deserters safely in the fold again!

It was over in a flash—and Mr. Ratcliff's ruse, clever as it had been, had failed. Monteith and the prefects rolled on the ground, and a defiant roar went up from the rebels.

"Ever been had?"

"Jeyver get left, Monteith?"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Waal, I must say you young guys have sure some way of dealing with your superiors!" commented Mr. Rumble, eyeing the seniors as they picked themselves up.

"You—you—" gasped Monteith, shaking his fist wildly.

"Give my love to Ratty, dear!" grinned Lowther. "My hat, that was a close shave, though!"

"No harm done!" grinned Blake. "You fellows turned up in the nick of time! Now, what about introducing us to the Kid, Tom Merry?"

"Excuse us!" said the Shell captain, turning to Mr. Rumble and his protegee, who had been hustled into the gym without much ceremony. "I explained at the station that things are—ahem!—rather unusual here just now, sir. But I can assure you that you will be satisfied with the ring and the lighting arrangements. This is Blake—Mr. Huxton Rumble. Blake—Kid Morgan!"

The American boxer, appearing bigger than ever in the gaslight, shook hands cordially with Blake, and one by one the St. Jim's juniors were introduced.

"And this is our champion to-night—Talbot, sir!" said Tom Merry, pushing his chum forward.

"You don't mind being eaten, kid?" asked Mr. Rumble anxiously. "You will be, you know!"

"Not at all, sir!" grinned Talbot. "Providing the Kid can do it!"

Talbot shook hands with the Kid, and the latter stared at him.

"Excuse me; I didn't quite catch your name?" he asked.

"Talbot!"

"Guess you're the guy that fellow Montague was speaking of!" said Kid Morgan. "We've just come from Lynchester, as you know. I was to have met a fellow named Montague there—but he was called away to a sick relative."

"My hat!"

The St. Jim's juniors exchanged glances. If Kid Morgan had seen Montague, he might possibly be able to shed light on the question of Talbot's alibi. There was no doubt in the minds of the rebels, but evidence from an outsider would convince even Mr. Ratcliff—obstinate and suspicious as he was.

Anyway, a question or two could do no harm, thought Tom Merry.

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"I suppose you didn't meet Montague personally, Morgan?" asked the Shell captain.

"Yes; he was on the same train as Mr. Rumble and myself arrived on!" said the Kid calmly.

"Oh!"

There was a pause while Mr. Rumble and the Kid stared. This cross-examination was rather extraordinary, to say the least of it. But Tom Merry was evidently in earnest, and the Kid answered quickly enough.

"Do you know if Montague had come from his sick relative's by train, or had he cycled part of the way?" asked the Shell captain quietly.

The rebels hung on the American's reply.

"He was cycling as far as Rylcombe," said Morgan. "But he had a nasty spill near there, and took the train. He left his bike to be repaired in Lynchester before going on to the school. Montague mentioned Talbot to me as the fellow who helped him up after the smash!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

The last shred of Mr. Ratcliff's flimsy evidence—if evidence it could be called—was disposed of now. Talbot's story was proved true—he had another witness to call now—and Mr. Ratcliff could not refuse to accept the American's word, backed by that of his manager.

"Thanks, old man!" said Tom Merry at last. "It's rather important that you should be able to tell our Housemaster what you have just said. It clears Talbot of a rotten suspicion—the root of this barring-out! We're no end obliged, and after the fight, perhaps you'll speak to Ratty?"

"Sure!" said the Kid. "We'll get on with the scrapping right now!"

"Up this ladder for the roof, then!" said Glyn.

And the combatants, followed by Mr. Rumble and the rebels, made their way to the ring on the roof of the gym.

CHAPTER 13.

Talbot's Triumph!

"A SCRAP!"

"What?"

"Scrapping on the roof of the gym!" shouted Wally D'Arcy, his face crimson with excitement.

"My only summer bonnet!"

Curly Gibson of the Third, followed by a horde of fags, halted before the gymnasium and stared in amazement.

The news of Mr. Ratcliff's strategy and its failure had spread, and there had been chuckles among the Third-Formers at the Housemaster's discomfiture. It had been Wally's suggestion that they should pay the rebels a visit and cheer them on; and incidentally, Wally intended to "cheek" his major, finding pleasure in that pastime.

But to discover the roof of the gym turned into a ring—with huge electric arc-lamps illuminating the scene as bright as day—was the last thing the fags had expected. They stared at the figures of Kid Morgan and Talbot as they shook hands; but the moment the fight began Wally found his breath.

His shrill shout brought a crowd of fellows to the scene—Fifth-Formers, and still more fags—till practically the whole of the school, apart from the Shell and Fourth, had gathered to watch the contest.

"Who is it?" called D'Arcy minor, as the first round ended. "Who's scrapping, Tom Merry?"

"Kid Morgan versus Talbot!" responded the Shell captain, taking up a megaphone. "The referee is Mr. Huxton Rumble, the Kid's manager. Figgins is timekeeper!"

"My only hat!"

"Did you ever!"

"What a nerve!"

"Look! Talbot's down!"

There was a running fire of comment from the crowd of onlookers.

The fight had begun evenly enough, Talbot holding his own, in spite of the superior height and reach of his opponent. Kid Morgan was under seventeen, but his development was extraordinary for a boy of his age. It was probable that he could have knocked out most of the juniors at St. Jim's with one hand, and a good many of the seniors would not have stood many minutes against him.

Talbot fought warily at the start, being content to hold the Kid at arm's length and search for his weaknesses—if any. But, almost at the commencement of the second round, Morgan had feinted neatly and connected with his left against the St. Jim's junior's jaw—and there was a man down.

"Get up, Talbot!" whispered Tom Merry, as second. "Buck up, old man!"

Talbot was up on one knee at the count of eight, and he plunged into the fray fiercely from then on. The round



Monteith had his leg over the sill, and in another moment would have dropped into the rebels' camp. But Tom Merry had a broom ready. "Now, you young rascals——" commenced Monteith. He broke off with a wild gurgle, as the broom took him full in the mouth, and swayed dangerously in the window. "Let me get at him!" roared Grundy, flourishing a cricket stump. (See Chapter 10.)

ended slightly in his favour, the Kid having been forced to remain on the defensive.

"Look out for his left!" advised Monty Lowther, as he sponged his man. "It's a holy terror, and no mistake!"

"I'm looking!" said Talbot grimly.

The gong sounded and the third round began, to the accompaniment of a rousing cheer from the crowd of fellows in the quad.

Talbot was on the offensive, but the Kid wormed out of the corner into which the Shell fellow had forced him, and drove home his huge fists in succession. Talbot staggered, and was hard put to it to finish the round. His face was white as he sank on to the chair in his corner.

"Feeling bad, old chap?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Ow! I'm not beaten yet!" gasped Talbot.

"The Kid's not feeling much better!" said Lowther comfortingly. "Let him tire himself out in this round—if he will!"

Talbot advanced very cautiously to the attack, and, following Lowther's advice, allowed the Kid to take the initiative. But, towards the close of the round, Morgan's dreaded left came through, and Talbot rolled in the resin again.

"One, two, three——" counted Mr. Rumble.

"Time!" said Figgins.

There was a gasp of relief from the St. Jim's fellows, and Mr. Rumble smiled.

"Luck!" he remarked coolly.

Talbot revived a little under the ministrations of his seconds, and he began the next round with a gleam of determination in his eyes. The Kid fought easily and well, but Talbot's chance came at the end of the round. His right flashed out, and the Kid went down in a heap at his second's feet.

"Oh, golly!" ejaculated Mr. Rumble. "One, two——"

"Time!" interrupted Figgins laconically.

Mr. Rumble made no remarks on the subject of luck this time. He was busily occupied in getting his candidate ready to resume—the American combining the duties of referee and second for the occasion, with Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to help him in the latter capacity.

"Time!" announced Figgins, sounding the gong.

The Kid, looking very unsteady, advanced to meet his opponent, and Talbot stepped up grimly. A quick side-step, and the St. Jim's champion's left shot out, straight from the shoulder, and Mr. Rumble gave a gasp as the Kid crashed down on the floor.

Talbot stepped back and Mr. Rumble began to count.

He could not help pausing when he came to "nine"; but there was no motion in the prostrate form of the Kid. Mr. Rumble shook his head despondently, and put away his watch.

"He wouldn't get up if I counted fifty!" he granted. "Still, I take my hat off to you, Mister Talbot. That last one of yours was a regular sockdolager!"

Mr. Rumble bent down and helped the now-reviving Kid to his feet.

"It was a great fight!" said Mr. Rumble, apparently noticing the crowd below for the first time, and advancing to the edge of the roof. "Gentlemen, I declare this guy Talbot the winner—the first Englishman to hand it to my man here. Shake your mit, Kid!"

Kid Morgan held his gloved hand aloft and waved, and his action was greeted instantaneously by a terrific cheer from the assembled fellows. Further and even more thunderous cheering greeted Talbot as the St. Jim's champion nodded and waved in turn.

"It was touch and go, Morgan!" said Talbot, taking the Kid's hand in a frank grip. "Another time, perhaps, you'd have done it!"

"If we ever meet again, we'll put it to the test, chum!" said the Kid, grinning.

Mr. Rumble laid his hand affectionately on Morgan's shoulder; but a sudden murmur from below caused him to turn back.

In the bright light of Glyn's arc lamps the quad was clearly illuminated; and at the gates, just alighting from his car, could be seen an august figure.

Mr. Rumble, naturally, did not recognise the dignified gentleman; but the juniors did. It was the Head!

Dr. Holmes had evidently seen the lights on the roof of the gym. He gazed at them in astonishment for a few moments, and then the crowd made an avenue for him to approach.

The rebels looked down on the Head's grim features, feeling for the first time a slight tremor. It was easy enough to defy the irate Mr. Ratcliff to his face, but there was something in the Head's calm gaze that compelled respect. The juniors were quite willing to give in, if it came to that, but they had some doubt whether the Head would take a reasonable view of their conduct or not.

But Dr. Holmes' voice was calm and reassuring when he spoke.

"Boys! Has Mr. Ratcliff given you permission to act in this unusual manner?"

"Ahem! Nunnno, sir!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Then—then what is the meaning of it?"

"It's Kid Morgan, sir!" explained Tom Merry. "You remember he was coming here—"

There was a stir among the onlookers, and Knox strode forward.

"Can you explain this, Knox?" asked the Head, with a touch of asperity.

"It's a barring-out, sir!" said Knox briefly. "These young scum—ahem!—rascals are defying Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

"They refuse to give in unless he promises not to expel Talbot, sir!" said Knox. "Mr. Ratcliff believes he has proof that Talbot stole the scarab!"

Dr. Holmes was silent for a moment, appearing to reflect. Then he turned to the rebels, looking down rather anxiously from the roof of the gym.

"I take it that you boys have commandeered the gymnasium," he said coolly. "You will cease this nonsense and descend at once, when a full inquiry will be held into the matter, Talbot may rely on justice being done. The ringleaders will come to my study, where they shall meet Mr. Ratcliff. I think that is all!"

And the Head, without another glance at the crowd of juniors and seniors, turned and made his way towards the School House with Mr. Railton, who had remained behind to attend to some luggage at his side.

The Head had not noticed Mr. Rumble, but the American stared after him with a fixed expression on his angular features.

"I guess that guy sure knows how to hand out the back chat!" he observed, at length. "I think we follow, children!"

And the "children," with one or two qualms, followed Mr. Rumble and the Kid to the Head's study.

"I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Rumble!" said Dr. Holmes, when the American had been introduced. "And I am equally pleased to hear that a St. Jim's boy was successful in overcoming your champion. Possibly you will stay with us a few days before resuming your travels, sir?"

"We'll stay until you kick us out, siree!" said Mr. Rumble cordially. "And now, I take it, you have some private business to transact with these young guys. Come along, Kid!"

Left alone with the Head, Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to give a full explanation of the circumstances which had urged them to hold the "barring-out." Dr. Holmes listened very attentively, and by the time Tom Merry had finished Mr. Ratcliff was announced.

"Ah, Mr. Ratcliff!" said the Head, waving the Housemaster to a chair. "I fear there has been some little trouble with the juniors since I left?"

Tom Merry looked at Talbot, and both set their lips. They were prepared to hear a string of abuse from Mr. Ratcliff, with a venomous accusation against Talbot. They were quite surprised that Mr. Ratcliff seemed unable to begin.

"Well, Mr. Ratcliff, what is your view of the matter?" asked the Head, turning a very peculiar glance on his colleague.

Mr. Ratcliff, his face white, licked his lips. Tom Merry and his chums were full of amazement. This was an entirely different "Ratty" from the one who had led desperate assaults on the rebels' stronghold, and they were at a loss to account for the change.

"The—the whole trouble arose over the—the Egyptian scarab which I said I had lost," said Mr. Ratcliff, at last.

"So I understand!" observed Dr. Holmes. "Pray proceed!"

"I—I have found the scarab!" said Mr. Ratcliff, getting it out at last.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 979.

"What?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He's found it!"

The anxious looks of the rebel leaders were replaced quite suddenly by grins, and Figgins chuckled.

The Head frowned, and Figgins was silent again. But the secret was out now—the scarab had not been stolen, but lost, as Tom Merry and a score of fellows beside had suggested at first.

It was a come down for Mr. Ratcliff with a vengeance!

The Housemaster seemed hardly able to meet Dr. Holmes' grave glance, as he stammered out his explanation.

"It was not my fault, Dr. Holmes!" he said. "My study was searched exhaustively when I first missed the scarab, but it was not found. A few moments ago one of the maids brought it to my notice; it had slipped down behind a bookcase, and was lodged in a crevice in the woodwork. The maid moved the bookcase in order to dust behind it, and— and discovered the scarab. I—I deeply regret—"

"Indeed! I should imagine so!" retorted the Head coldly. "You have caused suspicion to be directed against an innocent lad—"

"Quite unintentionally, I assure you, sir!"

"There has been a serious disturbance in the school," continued the Head, evidently considering that he did well to "rub it in."

"Most—most regrettable, I agree, sir! I promise—"

"You owe Talbot an apology, Mr. Ratcliff!" said Dr. Holmes.

"I—I regret deeply that I ever suspected you, Talbot!" gasped the New House master, enunciating the words as if each was a tooth separately drawn.

"Thank you, sir!"

"I add my regrets, Talbot!" said Dr. Holmes. "And, in consideration of the circumstances, I shall not flog every boy who participated in the rebellion, as was my original intention."

"Oh!"

"But every boy will take a hundred lines, to be delivered to me by to-morrow evening," finished the Head. "I think that is all. You may go!"

"My hat! The old boy's a brick!" gasped Blake, as he left the Head's study in company with his chums.

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, grinning. "Just think of poor old Watty's face, dear boy; he's pwobably goin' through it now, poor chap!"

"He deserves it for suspecting old Talbot—true blue, if ever a fellow was!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically.

"Hallo! Here's a crowd of fellows ready to celebrate your win, Talbot!"

"Oh, my aunt!" ejaculated Talbot, glancing at the juniors in the quad, and listening for a moment to their refrain—"For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

"Where away, you ass?" roared Blake, as the champion made a dash for the stairs.

"Talbot doesn't want a fuss made!" grinned Tom Merry. But Blake shot after the Shell fellow, and glimpsed him entering his study. The Yorkshire junior thumped loudly on the panels and turned the door handle. It was locked.

"Talbot!"

"Hallo?"

"Come out in the quad, you ass! There's a crowd of fellows waiting for you!"

"Not this evening, thanks!"

"Talbot!"

"Hallo?"

"Open the door!"

"Catch me!"

"You silly ass!"

"Thanks!"

"You burbling chump!"

"Go away!"

Blake bestowed one last terrific kick on the door of Study No. 9, and left the hero of the hour in peace.

The barring-out was a thing of the past now, and next morning a very orderly set of schoolboys filed into their Form-rooms. There was no inattention that day, or the next—perhaps to show the masters, and especially the Head, that it was only Mr. Ratcliff who had caused the trouble. And the impositions, trifling as they were, were handed in to a man at five o'clock in the evening.

And no junior wrote his lines more cheerily than Talbot of the Shell, now cleared of the stigma of suspicion, and acknowledged the first junior to defeat the famous Kid Morgan, of America!

THE END.

(Look out for another long complete story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "TRIMBLE TRIES IT ON!" It shows Martin Clifford in humorous vein, and the yarn is one long laugh from beginning to end.)

TRY AND TAKE A RISE OUT OF HUNKS and then look out for squalls. He's a dog in a thousand, as Ted Minster discovers to his cost.



Hunks At His Best!

TOM'S face went very white as he listened; but he did not speak, and Colonel Chaplin wondered.

"Thoughts, Tom?"

The boy flushed.

"I'd rather keep them to myself, sir."

"As you please. But I am only telling you what they say about the Apaches round here. And how they butchered babies."

"Well," Tom jerked out, "I don't know about those babies. If I saw my—the warriors doing that I'd hang every one! But it's just that they are my friends. I love White Cat. I know that he loves me. To call him vermin is an infernal lie!"

"I dare say you are right!" the colonel remarked, eyeing the boy shrewdly. "It might not be a bad scheme if you were to tell this to the folk. We'll see."

They had reached Servita, and Tom looked about him in surprise. Main Street was crowded with every kind of vehicle—wagons, buggies, and light sulkies. There were women in the place; not the ladies whom he had seen entering the dance-hall two evenings ago, but the wives and daughters of stockmen, from the hard, bare-handed farmer's wife in a pink sun-bonnet, and a gown which looked fifty years old, at least, to quite smart ladies in silk shawls and kid gloves. Their men-folk were as variously attired. None, however, had the carriage and presence of Colonel Chaplin, who, though clothed as plainly as any of them, looked now, Tom thought, with his hooked nose and masterful eyes, more dominating in personality and distinguished in appearance than he had done last night in his own house.

Everyone greeted him by name, then stared at Tom, whose identity was perfectly well known. The ranchmen and all members of their families had heard of this strange youth, who had held up Mick Mander, the best shot in Servita; set his dog upon the Texan bull, and, still more wonderful, had got him off, and then defied the crowd when it would have hanged that Indian boy. But Tom's notoriety, considerable as it was, paled before that of Hunks.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

TOM HOLF, a sturdy young Britisher of seventeen, lands in New Mexico—at the invitation of some friends of his father's—to start business on the Doggett Ranch.

He finds the place in a deserted and dilapidated condition, and from a letter, left by a former employee, learns that his two friends have died. Tom's in a quandary, for he knows nothing about ranching, but he buckles to and makes the ranch-house shipshape. In the course of this general clean-up he comes across a dog with whom he makes friends instantly. Hunks, as he names the dog, proves a real pal.

Shortly after his meeting with Hunks, Tom falls in with a wandering tribe of Apache Indians. Their chief is Black Hawk. Unknown to Tom, the chief cherishes the hope of wiping out the "whites" in the country, and to help him to collect the necessary knowledge before a successful raid can be made on the white settlements, he offers to take Tom on the trail, and show him how to become a successful rancher.

Knowing nothing of the sinister motive underlying all this, and keen to learn the ways of the country, Tom accepts the offer. He proves a most efficient pupil, and becomes the fast friend of White Cat, Black Hawk's son. Later, when Tom is in Servita he falls foul of a bullying desperado named Mick Mander. Tom stands up to the bully, however, and publicly declares his friendship for the Indians amongst whom he has been living. This enrages Mick Mander's cronies, for a Redskin is regarded as dirt. Thus, when Black Hawk's tribe arrives

WHITE EAGLE!

A Grand Story of a young Britisher's Adventures with a Tribe of Apache Indians in New Mexico.

Told By

ARTHUR PATTERSON.

All last evening in the saloon stockmen far and near had plied Billie with questions about the pup, and though the old pug never told Tom afterwards what he had replied, one thing was certain—the subject lost nothing in his hands, and the reputation for ferocity of the Britisher's dog-devil grew and grew.

Hunks, this morning, started off by giving colour to these yarns. All sensitive dogs hate being stared at, and when a crowd of boys gathered round him and began to follow at his heels, exchanging remarks upon his personal appearance, the pup's crest rose, and along the centre of his back an ominous line of hair showed itself, and he began to growl.

His feelings exploded when a particularly audacious youngster, accustomed to the mongrels at his father's farm, threw a stone with deadly aim and caught him in the midriff.

With the spring of a wolf, Hunks leapt for that boy, who, terrified out of his wits at the awful apparition—for the pup's teeth were bared to the gum—lost his balance and fell sprawling in the middle of the road. The crowd fled right and left; women screamed, and men pulled their pistols. The only persons unmoved were Tom, who had foreseen the contingency, and Colonel Chaplin.

"My dog will not hurt the boy," Tom said quietly but distinctly. "He will just teach him a lesson. Hunks, bring him to me!"

By this time the boy had recovered his wits, and, finding that the dog had not bitten him, lay flat on the ground, and emitted a series of sharp, staccato yells, in the hope that they would attract public attention and a hurricane of shots.

His first object was attained. At the sound women rushed out of the store; cowboys rode into town at the lope, and men ran to the spot from all directions. But there were no shots, a circumstance attributed to the fact that Colonel Chaplin had held up a warning hand.

Hunks, meanwhile, stood still. His master's voice, as usual, had brought back his self-control; but something was required of him, and this needed thought.

The delinquent was a substantially-built youngster of twelve years. He was too heavy to carry, and to drag him would be both inconvenient and undignified. Besides, his howling got upon the pup's nerves, and he was afraid he might bite too hard.

at Servita, Mander's cowboys drive a "rogue" bull into that section of the town where the Indians have pitched their market. The infuriated bull does great damage amongst the valuable skins belonging to the Indians, before Hunks seizes the animal by the nose and hangs on like grim death. Whilst Tom is trying to get Hunks to release his grip of the stricken bull, Mick Mander draws his revolver and attempts to shoot Tom. At the critical moment, however, White Cat springs forward and buries his knife in the would-be murderer's ribs. Instantly White Cat is surrounded by the infuriated cowboys and marched off to gaol on the charge of attempted murder, and Tom, with a sickening of the heart, realises that his red friend is a doomed man before even he is tried. Billie Punt, who has taken a great liking towards Tom, advises the young Britisher to proceed to Colonel Chaplin and lay all the facts before him. Tom, who has met Sadie Chaplin, the colonel's daughter, thinks there is a sporting chance of saving White Cat's life and agrees to do as Billie proposes.

Eluding two sheriff's officers who have come to arrest him, Tom makes all speed for Colonel Chaplin's house, where he receives a most cordial welcome. After hearing Tom's story and offering to do what he can, the colonel dispatches twenty cowboys to camp-round the prison. Then he and Sadie accompany the young Britisher to Servita.

En route the colonel tells Tom that the white men hate the Apaches like poison on account of their acts of brutal savagery on a former occasion.

(Now read on.)



With the spring of a wolf, Hunks leapt for the boy who, terrified, lost his balance and fell sprawling. The crowd fled to right and left. Only Tom and Colonel Chapin were unmoved, for they had foreseen the contingency. (See page 25.)

Presently the boy, finding that no one came near him, cautiously raised his head and met the pup's eyes looking into his own. Ted Minster was no fool, and like every Western lad, was well accustomed to animals. It began to strike him that he had made a mistake. The beast was, of course, a dog, and of dogs as a race he had no opinion whatever. But was it only a dog?

No dog in all New Mexico could hold a bull. It was said, too, that he had fought a bear! And, by jingo, what a funny face he had! Wrinkly all round the eyes; nose as square as a block; and those front teeth—sordy! Yet he was kind of cunning, too; and his eyes, deep-set behind the creases, had a twinkle in them. Ted Minster sat up.

At his motion, the dog retreated a foot, and Ted could have sworn he saw it wag its tail. He got to his knees slowly. Yes, that tail did wag! Gee-winks! It was going to let him up!

He rose to his feet, and very cautiously put out a hand. The dog responded with another tail-movement, and came a few inches nearer. This was fine; there was no kind of harm in him! Coming to this conclusion, Ted Minster picked up his cap, turned to the watching crowd, and grinned.

He had read in books of the power of the human eye over wild beasts. His father, an old frontiersman, had roughly told him to practise on a bob-tailed lynx at mid-night—after he had dug his own grave. The matter, therefore, had not been mentioned since. But it occurred to Ted that this was the secret of the dog's behaviour, and now, puffing out his small chest, he flourished his hand at Hunks, so that all might see, and walked away with important strides.



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Alas, how often pride comes too soon! Hardly had he gone two paces than he felt a strange compression on his arm, and found that the dog had got him by the sleeve. It was quite nice about it; its brown eyes were twinkling more than ever, and its bushy tail wagged lustily. But, oh, jiminy! How it squeezed!

Ted tried to jerk his arm away, but the dog jerked, too, and nearly pulled his shoulder out of joint. He spoke severely. The dog wagged his tail in reply, pulling Ted steadily to the left, where Tom and the colonel stood together. But Ted was not going that way, and made a violent effort to free himself, with the result that he came down painfully upon his knees. Worse still, he heard his father shouting at him.

"You blamed young fool! Leave off that caperin', and do what he wants. If you don't, he'll tear your sleeve out, and then I'll get busy on ye with a stick!"

Ted rose limply. He knew what that meant. So, making the best of a bad job, he surrendered unconditionally, and boy and dog came up to Tom together at a trot.

At a sign from his master, Hunks let go.

Tom took the boy by the shoulder.

"What did you throw that stone for?"

"Just fun."

Tom produced the stone.

"What sort of fun would you find it if you got that in your stomach? That's where you hit him."

Ted Minster kicked his feet.

"Did he do anything to you?"

"Nope!"

"Then you are the sort who hits a harmless chap, and squeals when he goes for you. Now, you can do one of two things. Either say you are sorry—honest—or he shall run you out of town. Which is it to be?"

He raised a finger, and Hunks growled. Ted Minster turned pale.

"Oh, I am sorry right enough! It was a bit mean, too."

He added the last words roughly.

The crowd jeered, but Tom did not.

"That's playing the game," he said gravely. "Hunks, it's your turn. What have you to say about it?"

The dog was watching his master's face and following every word. Now he slowly approached the boy, reared

himself on his hind legs, placed both paws upon his shoulders, and licked him on the cheek.

The action was very solemn and deliberate, and Ted Minster's blood turned to water when he felt those heavy feet. But at that caress he sharply recovered, and hugged his former enemy round the neck.

There was a cheer from the boys, in which several women joined; whereupon Hunks, thoroughly enjoying the situation—for he was half a puppy still—must needs indulge in yappy barks on his own account, and gambol cheerfully round Ted as if the whole thing had been a joke between them.

A minute later that youth was seen holding him by the collar and displaying his points to the Minster family with the familiarity of private ownership.

Up Against It!

THE court for the trial of White Cat had a strange setting. It was held in the engine shed of the railway depot. The reason was that the authorities saw by the influx of people into the town as the morning drew on that it was the only place big enough to hold them all.

A rude platform at the one end, from which goods were loaded into trucks, was swept and dusted, and filled with chairs for the accommodation of judge, jury, and privileged visitors, and rough forms, used at the school over the way, were placed for the lady members of the audience.

Yet, quaint and informal as the court of justice might be to look at, there was no doubt in Tom's mind, or anyone else's, of the reality of its purpose.

At one side below the platform, in a space kept clear of all people by polite but heavily-armed cowboys, stood the prisoner. He was handcuffed, and behind him were four men with Winchester rifles, held unostentatiously but firmly in the hollow of their elbows.

Opposite, upon a table, with a mattress and some pillows, and draped in a red blanket, lay Mick Mander. He had carefully disposed himself at full length, nothing moving but his eyes, and presented a pitiful and tragic figure which brought tears to the eyes of some of the younger ladies in the court. Behind all the rest, standing against the wall, were the Apaches, with the exception of Black Hawk, who had been given a seat on the platform not far from Colonel Chapin.

But it was not the Black Hawk Tom knew. He was clad now in all the regalia of Indian full dress. He wore a line of black hawk's feathers upon a band of buckskin which swept from crown to shoulder. His shirt, of buckskin also, was so thickly set with beads that its original material could hardly be seen. His breeches were lined with fringes six inches long, and upon his feet were resplendent moccasins, with curiously worked patterns of plaited leather.

The sight of all this frippery made Tom very grim, for outside the courthouse he had seen something which had reduced his hopes to ruins and almost sapped his faith in Colonel Chapin.

This was a gibbet, newly built, of four pine "vegas," or beams, used to support the roofs of log houses, set square, looking rather like big football goal-posts, with cross-bar. In the centre of the bar was a pulley fixed upon an iron ring, and through the pulley were a raw-hide lariat and a noose, swinging grimly to and fro in the morning breeze. Worst of all, to Tom, was the fact that round this gibbet lounged a group of Calumet cowboys, and, sitting on a timber-wagon underneath the noose, dangling his legs and puffing thoughtfully at a black clay pipe, was their oreman, Sandy Bowker.

There could be no doubt about the significance of that gibbet. As Tom passed it he had noticed the sheriff's officer who had tried to arrest him in friendly confabulation with the foreman, and that when the man caught sight of him he grinned, and said something in Sandy's ear which was clearly unfriendly. Tom found that no particular notice was taken of him in the courthouse, for which small mercy he was devoutly thankful.

When, seeing where White Cat stood, and wishing to be near him, he made his way up to the front, no one intercepted his progress, and he finally took up a position close behind the seats placed for the women, directly opposite the judge, Pim Bolland, and half way between the prisoner and the recumbent Mander.

(The queerest trial ever witnessed was about to begin—with White Cat's fate hanging in the balance! Be sure you read next week's exciting instalment of this powerful adventure yarn, chums.)



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YOUR EDITOR CHATS WITH HIS READERS!

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"Shakespeare's game," the game of NINE MEN'S MORRIS, was originally an outdoor game, but owing no doubt to the inclemency of our English climate it became an indoor game, played on a carved oak board with men carved of the same material.

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Next Wednesday's Programme:

"TRIMBLE TRIES IT ON!"

By Martin Clifford

This is a screamingly funny story dealing with Baggy Trimble, the fat junior of the Fourth, and if it doesn't bring umpteen laughs to your chivvies then I'll eat my hat! Mind you read it, chums!

"WHITE EAGLE!"

By Arthur Patterson!

There will be another fine instalment of this Wild West serial, boys. Keep a sharp look out for it!

"FAGGING!"

Once again the St. Jim's Rhymester piles in with another natty little poem. This time he takes the subject of "fagging." And don't forget there will be more delicious Tuck Hampers awarded for prize jokes. Order your GEM early! Chin, chin!

YOUR EDITOR.

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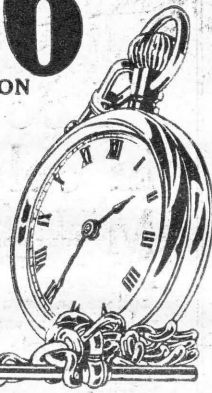
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