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A GRAND TALE OF
TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOL DAYS.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



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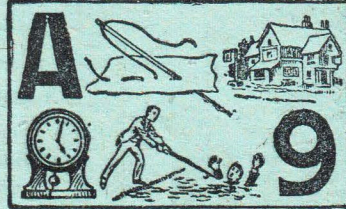
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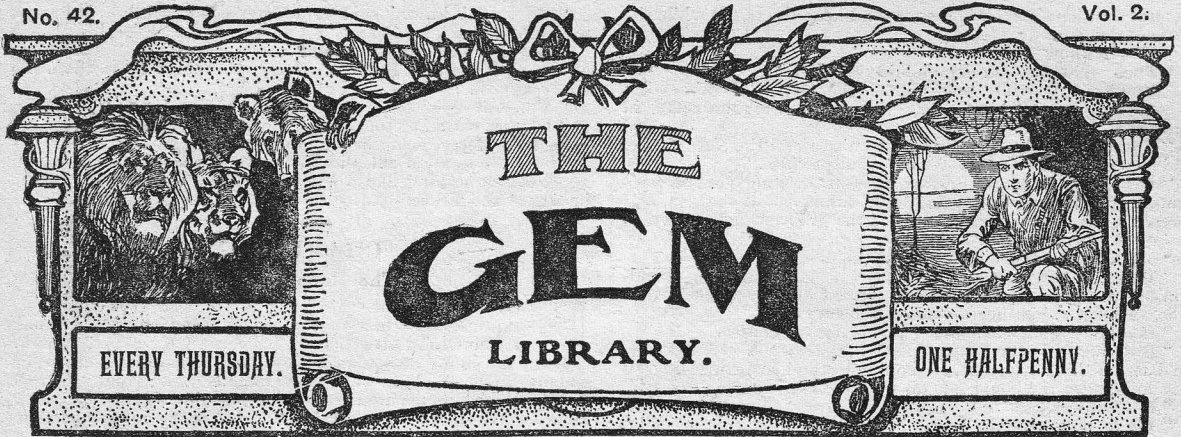


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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

A Splendid Complete Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays.

CHAPTER 1.

Trouble in the New House—Tom Merry Gives Advice.

TOM MERRY looked at Figgins, and gave a low whistle of surprise, and looked again.

Figgins was crossing the quadrangle at St. Jim's with long strides, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and a frown of the darkest gloom upon his face.

Figgins had never been called handsome by his best friend, but there was usually an expression of cheerfulness and good-humour upon his face that made it very pleasant to see. But cheerfulness and good-humour were gone now, and Figgins wore a frown more suited to the heavy villain in a melodrama than to the junior captain of the New House at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry was surprised.

There was evidently something wrong in the New House.

"I say, Figgy!"

Although Tom Merry was the leader of the School House juniors, and perpetual warfare reigned between the two houses at St. Jim's, he had a ready sympathy, and nobody would have gone more quickly to Figgy's aid if Figgy had been in real trouble.

Figgins did not look up as Tom Merry called to him.

He evidently did not hear, being too deeply enwrapped in gloomy reflection.

"I say, Figgy!"

Tom Merry bawled out the words, and Figgins gave a start and looked at him. But the gloom upon his visage did not relax.

"Hullo, Merry!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry, coming nearer to him. "Anything up? Got anything on your mind, Figgy?"

"Yes," said Figgins. "There's that old casual ward you call a School House, and a lot of silly duffers living in it who ask idiotic questions—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Joking aside, Figgy, is anything the matter?"

"Well, yes," said Figgins, thrusting his hands deeper into his pockets, and his frown becoming more gloomy and portentous than ever, "I'm beginning to think that life at St. Jim's isn't worth living."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry warmly. "I admit that it isn't nice to be in the New House, with the rotten set of wasters you have there, but—"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Tom Merry?"

"No. I'm sympathising with you."

"Well, don't! But, as a matter of fact, there is something wrong in the house. The house-dame has gone away to see a sick sister, or a sick uncle, or a sick something—blessed if I know what—but it's sick, and she's gone to see it."

"Well?" grinned Tom Merry. "You don't mean to say that these terrible frowns are because Mrs. Kenwigg has gone away? I didn't know you had a soft spot in your heart for Mrs. —"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Figgins, without the least relaxation of his grim visage. "Mrs. Kenwigg has gone away, and Mr. Ratcliff's sister is acting as housekeeper in her absence."

"Well, why shouldn't she?" was Tom Merry's natural question. "As Mr. Ratcliff is your house-master, it's only

natural that his sister should come and keep the house while the house-dame is away."

"Yes, I know it is."

"Then what are you complaining about?"

"You know Ratcliff," said Figgins gloomily. "You've got a decent house-master in Raitlon. We've got a regular rotter in Ratcliff!"

"Yes, I know; but there's nothing nice about the New House, and so a nice house-master would be out of place."

"His sister," went on Figgins, without heeding Tom Merry's remark, "is himself over again, only thinner, and sharper, and meaner. Since Mrs. Kenwigg went, the grub has gone down in the most alarming way."

"My hat, that's too bad!"

"There isn't enough, and it isn't good," said Figgins. "Mind, I'm not a particular chap about grub. I don't care much what it is, so long as it's nice and there's plenty of it."

"Ha, ha! That's not being particular, of course."

"But there's Fatty Wynn," said Figgins. "You know how he'd feel a thing like that. I couldn't stand his grumbling all day long, even if I could put up with the beastly grub myself."

"It's hard cheese."

"We're not going to stand it," said Figgins emphatically. "If it had only been for a day or two we could have stuck it out. But Mrs. Kenwigg has been gone for three days now, and we don't hear of her coming back yet. Why, those two Ratcliffs will starve us to death between them!"

"Awful!"

"It's all very well for you to grin, Tom Merry. It's a serious matter. It's no good complaining to the Head. It would look like sneaking, and, besides, you know the Head would never listen to complaints against a house-master."

"Probably not."

"Besides, complaining is a rotten game anyhow. That's barred. But what can we do? We're not going to be famished like this," said Figgins, rather excitedly. "I came out into the quad to have a quiet think over it. It's getting too thick."

"Well, I wouldn't stand it," said Tom Merry encouragingly. "What would you do?"

"We had something of the kind happen in the School House once," Tom Merry remarked. "It was when Raitlon became our house-master, and things hadn't got into good working order. We were bothered with the grub, and we went on strike. I daresay you remember."

Figgins grinned at last.

"Yes, I remember. And a nice muck you made of it!"

"Oh, I don't know. It was fun while it lasted. But the house-master was away. I don't know how it would answer with the bounder at home. Besides, Ratty isn't like Mr. Raitlon—he hasn't any sense of humour. He would be more likely to wade in with a cane and give you a variety of beans."

"I should say so. He's a beast, and there's no getting out of that," said Figgins.

"And if you remonstrate, he's just beast enough to pick on the leader and send him up to the Head for a flogging," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"That's the rub."

"But, I say, why not get up a round-robin?" exclaimed Tom Merry, a new idea striking him. "You know the trick. You all sign your names in a circle, so that nobody's first and nobody's last, and all are equally responsible."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Figgins heartily. "That's real good advice, and I'm much obliged to you, Tom Merry. I always said that you were the least fat-headed of all the silly duffers in the School House."

"Thank you, Figg! I like to help you youngsters when you are in a difficulty—"

"Youngsters?" said Figgins glowering. But then he grinned. "Never mind; you've given me jolly good advice. So long!"

And Figgins, with a less clouded brow and a much sprightlier step, strode off towards the New House, evidently bent upon immediately acting upon Tom Merry's advice.

Tom Merry went into the School House. His chums, Manners and Lowther, met him in the hall, and at once remarked the grin on his face.

"What's the wheeze?" asked the two together.

"Nothing. Only there's trouble in the New House," said Tom Merry. "The new housekeeper is cutting down the grub, and Figgins & Co. are on the warpath. They're going to send a round-robin to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject."

"Ha, ha! I should like to be there when he got it!" chuckled Lowther. "I've been hearing things lately about the grub in the New House. I believe some of the kids have got an idea of grubbing themselves in their studies, as we did when we went on strike."

"Good idea, too," said Manners. "It's fun, but it costs money."

"And you remember how those New House bounders chipped us at the time?" went on Lowther. "We'll do the chipping now. We'll make 'em sit up!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I think we ought to back up Figgins & Co., you know, as—"

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther emphatically. "Aren't we at war with the New House? Aren't we going to give them the giddy kybosh? Rats!"

"Yes, but—"

"I agree with Lowther," said Manners. "Rats!"

So Tom Merry, being in a minority of one, gave it up, but he kept to his opinion all the same. For the first time there appeared something like a rift in the lute, as it were, a slight jarring in the hitherto perfect harmony of the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 2.

The Round Robin.

FIGGINS came into his study in the New House with an expression of new resolve upon his face that at once attracted the attention of his chums, Kerr and Wynn.

Kerr, the canny Scotsman, and Wynn, the plump youth from gallant little Wales, were the famous Co.; and Figgins & Co. reigned undisputed leaders of the juniors of the New House. Whatever Figgins & Co. decided upon in the present emergency was pretty certain to be acted upon by all the juniors of the house. It was very different over the way, in the School House, as Figgins sometimes remarked proudly enough. There, Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, of Study No. 6, disputed the leadership of the house with the Terrible Three. Nothing of that sort in the New House, you know, Figgins would say.

"Got a new idea?" asked Kerr, as he looked at Figgins.

"You look as if you had found something."

"If he has, I hope it's something to eat," said Fatty Wynn dismally. "I feel as if I'd been in an open boat at sea for three months! I'm growing so thin that I shall be wasted to a shadow soon!"

"You don't look it!" growled Figgins, surveying disparagingly the plump proportions of his chum. "I can't notice any difference."

"Appearances aren't everything," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "I don't know how I am standing this awful trial. I had hardly any dinner, and since then I've only had some toffee I found in Pratt's desk, and some chocolate Jimson gave me, and a pie I bought at the tuck-shop, and the tarts we had in the cupboard here—"

"The tarts!" roared Figgins. "Do you mean to say that you've scoffed all those tarts? Why, there were nine of them, and we were going to have them for tea!"

"You can't expect a chap to starve with provisions under his very nose," said Fatty Wynn. "Talk about the tortures of Tantalus! Don't be brutal, Figgins!"

Figgins granted.

"Something must be done," said Wynn. "Things are going from bad to worse. Some of the seniors have been grumbling, but they have money enough to get things in for themselves. I know Monteith and Baker have been talking it over. But they won't do anything. They think it would encourage the juniors to get their backs up. I tell you, Figgins, if anything is done against this beastly tyranny, it will have to be done by us."

"Exactly!" said Figgins. "And I've thought of a plan. At all events, Tom Merry has suggested one to me, and we're going to act upon it."

"What's the wheeze?" asked the Co. together, with great interest.

"A remonstrance to the house-master in the form of a round-robin," said Figgins. "The cad would pick on a leader to make an example of him. There's no leader in a round robin. We'll shove on every name in the Fourth—in the New House, I mean—and when he knows we're all solid in the matter, it's bound to make some difference."

Fatty Wynn brightened up.

"Well, it's worth trying, anyway," he exclaimed.

Figgins looked at Kerr. The Scottish partner in the firm did not look over hopeful.

"Well, what do you think of the wheeze, Kerr?"

"We may as well try it, Figg. I don't suppose it will lead to anything, though. It isn't as if Ratcliff didn't know what was going on, you see. He knows perfectly well, and it's his idea of running a house economically. I believe he's glad that Mrs. Kenwigg has gone, and that he'd be gladder if she never came back. He's quite at one with Miss Ratcliff in the matter, and I believe a remonstrance will only get a crop of canings all round—"

"If you're afraid of a caning—"

"Rats! I'm with you. I only say that I don't think it will do any good. But we'll try it, I'm game."

"If it doesn't do any good," said Figgins, "we'll try something else. We'll start feeding ourselves in the studies, and boycott the hall. If we all march out of the dining-hall without tasting our dinner some day, that will wake Ratty up."

"Perhaps," said Kerr, dubiously. "He might wake us up afterwards."

"Well, let's get the round robin going, anyway," said Figgins.

"We'll draw up the document, and I'll get a School House boy to copy it out, so that Ratty won't know the writing."

"That's well thought of."

Figgins sat down at the table, and drew pen, ink, and paper towards him. He wrinkled his brow in deep thought.

"I suppose we had better begin, 'Respected Sir'?" he suggested.

"Well, we oughtn't to tell a whopper, Figgy. We don't respect him, and that's the truth. I know we ought to, but we don't."

"That's his own fault. We'd respect Mr. Railton if he were our house-master. Suppose I say, 'Dear Sir'?"

"He's not dear," said the scrupulous Kerr. "I don't believe in calling a chap dear if you don't like him—"

"It's only a matter of form, you know," said Figgins. "One must say something."

"Yes, I know, but—"

"Well, he is dear," said Fatty Wynn, coming to the rescue. "He's dear at any price. He'd be dear at twopence-halfpenny. In that sense—"

Figgins chuckled.

"That's right! In that sense we should be perfectly correct in calling him 'Dear Sir.' We'll say 'dear,' and 'at any price' is understood. 'Dear Sir—We, the undersigned, the juniors of the New House, hereby beg leave to protest against the—"

"The grub," said Fatty Wynn.

"Grub's vulgar. The provisions—no—the provender—the quality and quantity of the provender supplied to us since Mrs. Kenwigg left the house."

"That sounds well," said Kerr.

"We beg to request that the status quo—"

"The what?" asked the Co.

"The status quo," said Figgins; "that's the previous state, you know. It's Latin, and will go down very well in a round-robin—that the status quo be returned to, and grub—no, provender be supplied on the same scale as heretofore—that's a jolly good word, and sounds legal—as heretofore. In witness whereof we—"

"In witness whichof it ought to be," said Fatty Wynn.

"Where implies a place, and which implies a thing. 'In witness whichof—'"

Figgins scratched his forehead with the handle of his pen.

"There's something in that, Fatty," he agreed; "but I believe it's whereof, all the same. I don't think whichof is a word."

"Well, if it isn't, it ought to be."

"I suppose it ought," Figgins assented doubtfully. "I don't know about putting it in, though. Ratty might not understand."

"He's more likely to understand if you say what you mean than if you say what you don't mean. There's not the slightest doubt that whichof expresses the thing better than whereof," said Fatty Wynn.

"What do you say, Kerr?"

"Well, I am rather inclined to agree with Fatty, Figgy. I know whereof has a more legal sound, but whichof is a more sensible word, and it sounds very impressive."

"Well, we want to impress Ratty," said Figgins. "I don't mind. Whichof it is, then. 'In witness whichof we append our signatures.'"

"That's all right," said Kerr. "Get that written out on a blank sheet by a School House kid, and then we'll get every junior in the New House to sign it. Hallo, there's D'Arcy, he'll do."

Kerr was glancing from the window as he spoke. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, was coming round the corner of the house, after a visit to the "menagerie," as the boys called the place where their pets were kept. Figgins leaned out of the window, and hailed him.

"Hallo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus stopped, and adjusted an eyeglass in his right eye, and stared languidly up at Figgins.

"Hallo, deah boy!" he replied. "Did you address me?"

"Yes. Will you do me a favour?"

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy, who was all politeness, even to Figgins & Co., who usually chipped him unmercifully. "What can I have the extweme pleasuah of doin' for you, deah boy?"

"Come up into the study."

D'Arcy hesitated.

"I should have gweat pleasuah in doin' so, deah boy, but I am afraid that you may be plannin' some wuff and wude joke," he replied. "If you pwomise as gentlemen to tweek me with pwopah respect, I shall be vewy pleased to come up into your quartahs."

"My dear Gussy, we'll treat you with as much respect as if you were our own grandfather," said Figgins. "It's pax."

"Good! Then I will come as quickly as poss, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus disappeared into the house. A minute or two later a wild pattering of feet was heard in the passage, and the door of the study was burst violently open. Arthur

Augustus came pelting in, with a couple of New House juniors at his heels.

"Cornered!" yelled Pratt. "Collar him, Figgins!"

"Yah! School House cad!" shouted Jimson. "Got him!"

"Pway kick those wuff and wude boundahs out, Figgy, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "They have caused me to wun at a most exhaustin' pace, and I am quite wuffed and fluwvied."

"Outside!" said Figgins laconically. "D'Arcy has come here to see me, kids, and if a hair of his coccoant is harmed, look out for tornadoes, that's all."

"That's all very well, Figgins," began Pratt wrathfully.

"Of course it is," said Figgins. "Are you going?"

"No, I'm not; I—"

Figgins started towards the intruder, and Pratt changed his mind. He whipped out of the study in no time, and Jimson followed him. Figgins closed the door.

"Sorry you have been chased, Gussy," he said; "I'll see you off the premises, or Kerr will, when you go, so that's all right. Are you quite recovered?"

"Yaas, Figgins, thank you vewy much. I feel somewhat exhausted, but I am at your service, deah boy. What can I do for you?"

"You can copy out that document for us," said Figgins. "We don't want it in a New House handwriting, or else Ratty will have somebody to pick on. See?"

D'Arcy read through the manifesto of Figgins & Co.

"Yaas, wathah," he assented. "But will you allow me to make a wemark, with your permish?"

"Certainly. What is it?"

"I weally think there is no such word in the Bwitish language as whichof," said D'Arcy. "It sounds to me like a Wussian word."

"Oh, that's all right; you copy it out, whiskers, and don't teach your grandmother," said Fatty Wynn, who was rather proud of the word D'Arcy took exception to.

"I will copy it out with pleasuah," said D'Arcy; "but I weally wish you would not apply such a wudiculous expwession to me, Wynn. As I am perfectly clean of anythin' like a hirsute gwoth on my face, such a term as whiskahs is simply wudiculous."

"Oh, get on with the washing," said Kerr.

"That's it, Gussy, get on, and don't talk so much," said Figgins, placing a pen in the hand of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Blessed if you wouldn't talk a dumb man blind."

"Pway do not be personal, Figgins. I think—"

"Get on, I tell you."

"Unless I am addresssed with gweatah respect I must decidedly wufese to get on," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I—"

Figgins contained himself with an effort.

"Pray have the kindness to proceed with the copying of that document, Master D'Arcy?" he said, with elaborate politeness.

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"Certainly, with the gweatast of pleasuah," he exclaimed.

And the manifesto was written out.

"Good," said Figgins. "Thank you, Gussy. Kerr, see that tame lunatic off the premises while I get this document signed in the common-room."

D'Arcy rose to his feet, and surveyed Figgins through his monocle.

"Pway, Figgins, what did you allude to me as?" he inquired frigidly.

"Tame lunatic," grinned Figgins. "Harmless variety of howling maniac. Get him out of the house, you kids, while I—"

"I shall not leave this woom, Figgins, until you have eithah apologized for those diswepsectful words, or weweived a feahful thwashin'."

"Won't you?" said Figgins. "March him off, kids."

Arthur Augustus made a rush at Figgins, but the Co. seized him. Vainly protesting, the swell of the School House was run down the stairs and out of the New House, with such swiftness that he finished by sitting down in the quadrangle.

He rose to his feet with an air of extremely offended dignity.

"I weward that conduct as diswepsectful and wuff," he murmured. "I shall certainly thwash Figgins when I meet him again outside the New House."

And the swell of the School House marched off in a state of swelling indignation. Meanwhile Figgins & Co. were busy.

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Ratcliff Cuts Up Rough.

FIGGINS had no difficulty in getting plenty of signatures to the round robin. All the juniors of the New House were in the same state of indignation, and, besides, Figgins would certainly have licked any recalcitrant person who had refused to sign. The juniors signed fast enough, and some of the seniors would have done so, but for the consideration that their dignity would suffer by their being mixed up in any affair of the juniors.

Figgins, indeed, made one attempt to gain the support of Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. The circle of signatures was only half filled when the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors presented himself at Monteith's door.

Monteith was busy, and he looked up far from amiably. "What do you want, Figgins?" "I should like your signature to this, Monteith, if you don't mind," said Figgins.

"That! What on earth is it?" "A round-robin," said Figgins, importantly. "A remonstrance to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject of the beastly feeding we've had lately."

Monteith stared at him without speaking. "All the juniors are signing it," went on Figgins. "A prefect's name would give the thing weight. I should like to be backed up by a prefect's name—"

"You'll be backed up by a prefect's boot if you don't get outside this study in two seconds—" said Monteith.

"But—" "Outside!" said the prefect sharply. "But you see, Monteith—"

The prefect half-rose from the table, and Figgins thought that he had better go. He went out of the study and shut the door rather hard. Kerr and Wynn met him in the passage.

"Monteith won't sign it," said Figgins, shaking his head. "The seniors are afraid of their precious dignity, you know, which simply means that us juniors have got to take all the risks. Well, I don't care, for one. Come on, and let's hunt up the rest of the form, and get the names filled in."

It was a lengthy task, and it took up most of what was left of that Wednesday afternoon. But at length the name of every member of the Fourth Form who had the honour of residing in the New House was filled in, and the round robin was complete.

The question now arose, as to the precise moment when it would be most judicious to present the round robin to Mr. Ratcliff.

"If we take it to him in his study, only a few of us can go, and he'll pick on 'em for a licking," said Kerr.

"True enough. That won't do. Suppose we put it under his plate in the dining-hall," suggested Fatty Wynn.

"Or on his desk in the class-room," said Pratt.

Figgins shook his head. "That's no good. We must be present when he has the document. As Ratty takes the Fifth, we shouldn't be there when he had the paper. I rather favour the idea of sticking it in his place at the tea-table this evening. We must make it a point of being in the hall before he comes in, and then it will be simple."

This expedient was finally adopted. Figgins folded up the paper in his pocket, and at an unusually early time the juniors went into the dining-hall of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff was not yet there, and Figgins had no difficulty in placing the round robin half under his plate at the head of the seniors' table.

Several seniors saw him do it, but imagining that it was a note sent to Mr. Ratcliff by the hands of the juniors, possibly from the Head, no one thought of interfering with it.

The Fourth-Formers took their places at their table, which was presided over by a prefect, the master of the Fourth being a resident in the School House.

Tea in the New House was certainly of the sparest. It was a meal which the juniors frequently took in their studies, but on this occasion the whole of the New House contingent of the Fourth Form had turned up in the hall.

They wanted to see what would happen when the house-master read the manifesto.

The fare that was on the table did not take up much of their attention. It was what Figgins described as bread-and-scrape, with a liquid which was like warm water with a very faint flavouring of tea. The head and front of the new housekeeper's offending was the substitution of salt butter for the fresh the boys had been accustomed to. They believed it was in order to make them eat less, as perhaps it was. Miss Phoebe Ratcliff had, it was whispered, been the manageress of a boarding-house in a London suburb. It was natural that she should be a saving souer.

Mr. Ratcliff came in and took his seat. Every eye at the Fourth-Form table was turned towards the festive board of the Sixth-Formers. The paper lying by his plate at once caught Mr. Ratcliff's eye, and he picked it up and glanced at it. The house-master was a tall, thin, sour-featured man, with a prominent nose slightly red at the tip, and cold fishy eyes. When he was angry the tip of his nose became redder, and it was popularly regarded in the New House as a danger-signal.

The tip of the house-master's nose became very red indeed as he glanced at the precious manifesto of the New House juniors.

"He's reading it," whispered Figgins. Mr. Ratcliff certainly was reading the round robin. Not a

word of it escaped him. He did not smile when he came to "whichof." He seldom smiled.

He glanced over the names, too, and Figgins saw that he was counting them. He turned his head and glanced at the Fourth-Form table, and caught the anxious glances of twenty pairs of eyes fastened upon him.

Then he turned to his meal, thrusting the crumpled paper into his pocket.

The juniors looked at one another. "I wonder what he's going to do," murmured Figgins.

"He looks annoyed."

"Furious, you mean."

"Look how he's biting his lips, and his nose is awfully red."

"There's going to be a row."

"Shut up there, you youngsters," said Baker, who was at the head of the table. "None of that buzzing."

"Righto, Baker. Can we have something to eat?"

"You can have what's on the table."

"That's not fit to eat."

"You'd better tell Mr. Ratcliff so," said Baker drily. "But shut up now."

The juniors made some kind of a tea. As most of them had provisions waiting in their own studies, they did not mind much. It was breakfast and dinner being equally scanty that they objected to.

They left the hall at last. Still no sign had come from Mr. Ratcliff. The juniors were growing rather worried. Even Figgins & Co. looked uneasy. Mr. Ratcliff reminded them of some wild animal of a feline species, which lay low till the time came to make a sudden spring. When would the house-master make his spring?

Figgins & Co. went to their study. The tea they had made in the hall left them hungry, and they had a little feed in the study. It was not yet finished when a prefect looked into the room.

"You're wanted," he said laconically. "Are we?" said Figgins, looking up. "Where—and why?"

"Mr. Ratcliff wants to see you in his study."

And the prefect passed on. Figgins looked at the Co. dismally, and rose to his feet.

"I suppose the round robin business has been a bloomer," he remarked. "Of course, Ratty knows we're the leaders of the house. He's picked on us on suspicion. Any other master would wait for proof. Ratty won't! We're in for it. Come on."

And Figgins & Co. left the tea in the cosy study, and made their way with considerable apprehensions towards the house-master's quarters.

But they soon found that they were not alone in their misfortunes.

Boys of the Fourth Form and the Shell were going the same way, in twos and threes, and it soon became evident that the prefect had been sent round to gather in all the signatories of the round robin. Some had already reached the study. The door was open, the light streaming out, and Figgins saw that many of his form-fellows were in the room. The rest crowded in.

Mr. Ratcliff was seated at his writing-table near the fire. He was writing, and did not seem to observe the presence of the juniors filling up the room. It was a large room, but it was pretty well crowded by the time the signatories of the round robin had all crowded into it. Mr. Ratcliff looked up from his writing at last.

His eye ran over the groups of waiting boys, all with their eyes fixed upon him anxiously.

"I think you are all here now," he remarked. "Is anyone absent, Figgins, who put his name to this precious document?"

And Mr. Ratcliff indicated with a gesture the round robin that lay on his desk.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," said Figgins.

"Then you will kindly take the paper and call the roll, Figgins. You may close the door, Kerr. Now, Figgins."

Figgins, with rage in his heart, took the round robin and called the names. Every one was answered to. No junior of the New House was likely to stay away when the house-master sent him a special injunction to come to his study.

"Good," said the house-master, with a sour smile. "I see you are all present. You may lay the paper on the table again, Figgins. Now, my boys, tell me who was the leader in this piece of gross impertinence and disrespect."

There was no reply.

"Answer me!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"If you please, sir," ventured Figgins, "we didn't mean it for anything like impertinence or disrespect—"

"I have formed my opinion about that," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I do not intend to argue the point. I regard this document as grossly impertinent, or rather insolent. Who was the author of it? I demand an answer to that question."

An almost deadly stillness reigned in the study.

"I understand this device of signatures in a circle," went

on Mr. Ratcliff. "It is done, I presume, in order to equally apportion the blame, and keep a secret from me the name of the boy who was the leader in this disrespectful manifesto. But the name of that leader I am, nevertheless, determined to discover. I demand to know it."

Chilly silence!

The veins on Mr. Ratcliff's forehead stood out. His eyes had a savage gleam in them. It was evident that he was in such a passion that he could hardly remain calm. That fact alone was enough to banish any rag of respect the boys might have had left for him. A man who could not command his own temper was not likely to command anything, and certainly not respect.

"Will you answer me?"

Not a sound, save a slight uneasy shuffling of feet, broke the silence.

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff thickly, "very well. Every boy who has signed his name to this paper will be caned, and given an imposition of two hundred lines to do on the next half-holiday."

There was a murmur of dismay.

"Now," said Mr. Ratcliff, "will you give me the name of your leader?"

Still silence!

If any boy had been inclined to "sneak," the terror of what would come afterwards would have kept him silent. If anyone had given Figgins away then, his life would not have been worth living at St. Jim's afterwards.

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff, "you know your punishment. Stand—"

"One moment, sir," Figgins stepped out. "I was the chap who started this wheeze, sir, if you want to know."

Mr. Ratcliff stared at him.

He was certainly not prepared for this frank avowal on the part of the juniors: and still less for what followed. For Kerr and Fatty Wynn stepped immediately up to Figgins's side.

"It's all rot," said Kerr. "We were in it as much as Figgins, sir."

"That's so," said Fatty Wynn. "We all three started it, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sourly.

"Very well. You three are detained for the next three half-holidays, and you will take a thousand lines each. Now hold out your hands."

Mr. Ratcliff selected an extra strong cane with great care. He gave Figgins six on each hand, and bestowed the same attention upon the Co. Then every other junior in the room was called forward to take four cuts.

There was dismay and apprehension in every face, and something like scorn in some of them. Figgins hardly troubled to conceal the contempt he felt. It had been implied by Mr. Ratcliff's words that if the leaders in the movement were discovered, the rank and file would be pardoned, or let off lightly. To punish them as severely as if Figgins & Co. had not confessed was very much like a breaking of faith. But Mr. Ratcliff had never been known to have a nice sense of honour.

The unhappy signatories of the round robin went through the ordeal, and after the caning filed dismally out of the study, each with the prospect of a confiscated half-holiday and two hundred lines ahead of him.

"I think," said Mr. Ratcliff, "that that will be a lesson to you."

Figgins & Co. thought so too, as they made their way disconsolately to their study.

Their own spirit was undaunted; but it was doubtful what following they would be able to muster in another attempt to set matters right in the New House. The lesson had been a severe one. But whatever the rest of the juniors might think about the matter, Figgins & Co. were unconquered, and as determined as ever.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry's Treat.

TOM MERRY spotted Figgins & Co. in the quadrangle the next morning, and stopped to inquire as to the success of the round robin.

"You tried the wheeze?" he asked.

Figgins smiled a sickly smile.

"Oh, yes; we tried it," he replied.

"And what was the result?"

"Oh, ripping!" said Figgins. "Six on each hand, and a thousand lines, and gate for three half-holidays, each."

"My hat! That is coming it strong. Didn't the rest of the form back you up?"

"Oh, yes, they backed us up."

"And it didn't have any effect?"

"Yes, it did. It got them two hundred lines apiece, and four cuts. You see, as we owned up, we got the worst of it. Nice, isn't it?"

"If we had a house-master like that," said Monty Lowther "we'd scrag him. We'd—"

"We'd jump on his neck!" said Manners.

"No, you wouldn't," said Tom Merry, before Figgins could speak. "If you had a house-master like that, you'd grin and bear it—just as Figgins does."

"Who says we would?" demanded Manners and Lowther together, wrathfully.

"I do!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you're going to take the side of these New House bounders in everything, it's about time you stopped setting up as a leader of the School House."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

Manners and Lowther stalked away in great indignation.

"Hallo! A rift in the lute?" said Figgins, with a grin. "Knock their heads together, my boy. Never allow insubordination. I never do."

"Perhaps I will," said Tom Merry laughing. "But, I say, what are you going to do? You're not going to knuckle under to the Ratty-beast, are you?"

"Not if we know it," said Figgins emphatically. "We're trying to get up a boycott—to leave the grub alone, you know, and feed in our studies."

"Are the fellows backing you up?"

"Some of them. Of course, we can't absent ourselves from the meals—that's against the rules. But we're not compelled to eat if we don't want to. If the whole table goes out at dinner-time without touching the grub, that will be a strong hint to Ratty. We're going to lay in a feed at the tuck-shop, after."

"What about funds?"

"Oh, we're making this a question of the house," said Figgins. "Supplies are pooled, and chaps who have money have to treat those who haven't. Of course, it would be no good expecting a chap who was stony to go without his dinner, and have nothing at all to eat."

"I suppose not. I wish I could back you up, Figgy. I say, if there's any shortage of funds, you know where to come. I've had a remittance from Miss Fawcett, and a sovereign—"

Figgins slapped him on the shoulder appreciatively.

"That's jolly handsome of you, Tom Merry; but we couldn't accept it. It's an affair of the New House, and we couldn't accept help from the School House. We've got to fight it out on our own. Thanking you all the same."

Tom Merry nodded. He understood Figgy's feeling on the point. The rival leaders parted on unusually good terms, but when Tom Merry rejoined Manners and Lowther, he found them rather huffy. But he didn't mind.

Figgins & Co. went into the New House to breakfast. It was a keen winter's morning, and they were pretty sharp set. Figgins had had some idea of starting the boycott at once, but he decided otherwise on the spot. It was just as well to leave it till dinner-time, when the juniors would have plenty of time afterwards to fill up at the tuck-shop.

Dinner-time came, and the boys took their places in the dining-room of the New House. Mr. Ratcliff was there as usual. Figgins & Co. and their backers had agreed upon the plan of campaign. After the experience of the previous night, some of the juniors had been rather dubious about rousing the house-master's wrath again. But, as Figgins pointed out, he might be angry, but he couldn't very well cane them for leaving their dinners.

Figgins's influence was great, and he had his way, at least in his own form. The members of the Shell who had followed him before, fought shy of the new proposal. But if every dinner on the Fourth-Form table was left untasted, it would be sufficient for Figgins's purpose.

The prefect in charge of the Fourth-Form table looked along it, puzzled.

"Why aren't you eating, kids?" he asked good-naturedly. "I should think you were pretty hungry on a keen day like this."

"Yes, we're pretty hungry, Baker," said Figgins.

"Then why don't you eat?"

"There's nothing here fit to eat."

"Come, Figgins! Better buck to before the grub's cleared off," said Baker good-naturedly. But the juniors did not touch the food.

Figgins knew that Mr. Ratcliff, in his place, had caught something of the talk, and that his eye was glancing over the untasted portions.

Not a plate was touched. The dinners were cleared off untasted, and the second course, which consisted of a thin, streaky sort of a suet pudding, took its place. That was not touched either, and it remained in full view when the boys rose.

Mr. Ratcliff gave a look at the table, but said nothing. He scribbled in his pocket-book, and gave the note he had written to Sefton, a New House senior, and the worst bully in the house. Sefton was Mr. Ratcliff's favourite, and to a very great extent a fellow after his own heart. Sefton listened respectfully while the house-master spoke to him in a low tone, and then left the hall.

"You have not touched your dinners, my boys," said Mr

Ratcliff, in a very smooth tone, so smooth, that the juniors scented danger at once.

"No, sir," said Figgins, respectfully.

"Are you not hungry?"

"Yes, sir."

"How strange that you should leave your dinners if you are hungry! I hope you are not ill, Figgins?"

"No, sir!"

"Perhaps this means that some unhealthy feast of sweets and sticky things is planned to take place?" Mr. Ratcliff remarked. "I hope not. If you are looking forward to anything of the kind, you will be disappointed."

Figgins wondered what the last speech really meant, as he went out. The juniors at once swarmed away towards the school shop, kept by Dame Taggles.

They met Seiton coming out of it. The bully of the Sixth grinned at them as he passed, and his grin gave Figgins a vague feeling of uneasiness.

The juniors swarmed into the tuck-shop. Dame Taggles was there, looking somewhat surprised and worried. The youngsters gave a dozen orders at once.

"I am sorry, young gentlemen," said Mrs. Taggles.

"What are you sorry about?" asked Fatty Wynn. "Hand over some of those steak pies, and tell us about the sorrow afterwards."

"I am sorry——"

"Yes, yes; but we're hungry," said Kerr. "Buck up, Mrs. Taggles, there's a good soul."

"I am sorry, but I cannot serve you."

A bombshell falling into the tuck-shop could hardly have surprised the juniors more. Dame Taggles was usually only too willing to sell.

"Why, what's the matter, dame?" said Figgins, in astonishment. "We're not broke, you know. We're not asking for tick!"

"I know," said the dame, with a worried look. "But——"

"Come, hand over the grub; here's the tin!"

"I have just received a note from Mr. Ratcliff, and he says that no boys belonging to the New House are to be served until afternoon lessons."

"He says what——what——"

Dismay fell upon the hungry juniors.

Figgins understood now what the house-master had meant. He knew what Seiton's presence in Dame Taggles's little shop had meant.

The house-master had forestalled them!

This was Mr. Ratcliff's answer to the boycott in the hall.

"My word!" murmured Kerr. "This is fearful. What are we going to do?"

"I must have something to eat," said Fatty Wynn wildly. "I think I shall die if I don't have anything to eat till tea-time. I am sure I shall perish! Oh, dear!"

"Horrible!" said Figgins. "Who would have thought that Ratty was such an artful old bird? I believe he's the sharpest old knife-blade——"

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" exclaimed a cheery voice, as Tom Merry came into the shop. "Whence these frowns?"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Figgins; "it's awful. We've missed our dinner, as a hint to Ratty, and he's given orders that no New House juniors are to be served at the shop till after school. Of course, we depended on getting a feed here."

Tom Merry became serious at once.

"My hat, that's bad!" he remarked. "Ratty is up to snuff. Keen old bird! You'll all expire in fearful agonies before last lesson."

"I believe I shall," groaned Fatty Wynn. "Oh, Figgins, Figgins! How could you think of such a thing? How could you take this fearful risk——"

"Seems to me to be a bit fatheaded of Figgins," Pratt remarked. "He ought to have foreseen something of this kind."

"That's right—blame me!" said Figgins. "How could I foresee it?"

"I'm not a blessed leader, so I can't tell you. I tell you what it is, kids—I've had about enough of this blessed movement. The grub in the house is bad enough, but it's better than starving in this beastly cold weather. Ugh!"

"I say——" began Tom Merry.

"Oh, you shut up!" said several voices crossly. "We don't want a beastly School House bouncer talking to us now."

"Wait a bit," said Tom good-naturedly. "I'm in funds to-day, and there's no law against a School House boy buying grub here. I owe Figgins a feed, too. It's my treat. Walk up and take what you like, up to half a sov. I'm settling this, Dame Taggles."

"Good wheeze!" cried a dozen voices.

"That's jolly decent of you, Merry!"

Dame Taggles hesitated.

"I don't know whether I ought——"

"Oh, yes, you do," said Tom, with his sweetest smile. "You mustn't sell anything to the New House kids—well, you're not

going to. You are going to sell it to me. I'm standing a feed. No law against that, is there?"

Dame Taggles had to admit that there was no law against it.

"Then trot out the grub!" said Tom Merry, in a tone of finality.

And the "grub" was accordingly trotted out.

The New House juniors fell to. Fatty Wynn did not speak, but he attacked a steak-pie with an expression on his face that was more eloquent than words.

Figgins tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"This is awful decent of you, Merry," said the New House chief, with great feeling. "I really don't know how we should have got through the afternoon. This keen air makes one so beastly peckish. Thanks, mucky!"

The feed was a great success.

Tom Merry's financial resources being limited, there was not quite so much to go round as the hungry juniors might have liked, but after the prospect of famishing all the afternoon, it was a godsend.

The School House leader parted with the New House juniors on unusually good terms. As he walked away from the tuck-shop, he met Monty Lowther and Manners.

Lowther linked his arm in Tom Merry's.

"Come on," he said.

"Where?" asked Tom Merry.

"To the tuck-shop, of course. Didn't you tell me this morning that you were in funds, and am I not going to help you to blow your wealth like a Briton?"

Tom Merry turned red.

"Sorry," he said, "you're too late. I'm stony."

"What on earth have you been doing?"

Tom Merry explained.

Monty Lowther gave a sniff of great disgust.

"It's all very well to help a lame dog over a stile," he said. "But to stand treat to a lot of guzzling New House wasters, when I——"

"I'd forgotten about you, Monty. You didn't say——"

"Oh, rats! I'm getting fed up with your love for Figgins & Co. You'd better go and join the New House, I think, and cut this show," said Lowther.

"Looks like it," Manners agreed.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "Never knew such a pair of grumblers. Go and eat coke!"

And the hero of the Shell walked away whistling, leaving his chums staring after him somewhat glumly.

CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Ratcliffe is Not Pleased.

MR. RATCLIFF was disappointed. He had expected to see the New House section of the Fourth Form in the deliquescent dumps that afternoon; but he saw nothing of the kind. So far from looking hungry and miserable, the juniors seemed contented enough, and the house-master was puzzled.

Mr. Ratcliff, as well as being house-master in the New House, was Form-master to the Fifth, and he had little time to give to the lower Form that afternoon. But he saw them go into their class-room, and noted the absence of the signs he had expected to see. During the afternoon he looked into the Fourth-Form room for a few minutes, and spoke to Mr. Lathom, out of sheer curiosity to see how Figgins & Co. were getting on minus their dinner.

"I am afraid you have a troublesome class this afternoon, Mr. Lathom," he observed, to the master of the Fourth.

Little Mr. Lathom blinked at him inquiringly through his big spectacles.

"Not at all," he replied. "The class is very well conducted; indeed, unusually so."

"I was thinking that the boys belonging to my house would be a trouble, as they are in a very discontented mood."

"Indeed! I have not noticed it."

Mr. Ratcliff's sour glance swept over the class.

Truly, the Fourth Form looked much the same as usual,



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except that there was a very noticeable demureness in the looks of Figgins & Co.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes rested upon Figgins, who kept his down respectfully upon his desk, and did not meet the glance.

"Well, I am glad they are giving you no trouble, Mr. Lathom," said the house-master, after a pause. "I feared that some of them would be unruly. As a matter of fact, some of the discontented spirits refused out of rebellious obstinacy to eat any dinner to-day."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom.

"As I gave instructions at the school shop that their wants were not to be supplied there, they are probably very hungry by this time," the house-master remarked grimly.

"I should think so," said Mr. Lathom.

"But if they have been unruly at all——"

"Not in the least."

"I am glad to hear it."

And Mr. Ratcliff left the class-room. He had said that he was glad to hear it, but he did not look glad. He looked very sour and annoyed.

He was decidedly puzzled. He returned to his Form room, but he was thinking more of the Fourth Form than of the Fifth for the rest of the afternoon. He was glad when the class was dismissed, and he had an opportunity of inquiring further into the matter that puzzled him.

He knew that it was useless to question Figgins & Co.; but it was not necessary. He bent his steps towards the tuck-shop, and as soon as he saw Dame Taggles he noted signs of confusion in that good lady's face. His brow grew stern, as a suspicion came into his mind that his orders had been disregarded.

"Ah, hem, Mrs. Taggles! I sent you instructions by Sefton that no food was to be served to juniors of my house till after school to-day," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Taggles meekly.

"I hope that my instructions were carried out."

"Certainly, sir," said the dame, bridling a little. "I hope as how——"

"Exactly. Yet the boys appear to have obtained supplies from somewhere. You are sure, Mrs. Taggles, that you did not serve anything to any New House boys in this shop?"

"They didn't buy anything here, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff smelt a rat at once.

"I did not ask that. I said, did you serve anything to any New House boys here?" he said sternly. "Don't prevaricate, please."

"Which I never did, and it's a thing I never would do, not if it was ever so," said Mrs. Taggles indignantly.

"Did any New House junior obtain refreshment of any kind in this shop after the note I sent you was placed in your hands?" the house-master rapped out.

"I sold nothing, only to Master Merry, bless his generous young heart!" said Dame Taggles.

A light dawned upon the house-master's mind.

"Do you mean that Merry, of the School House, bought food and gave it to the boys of my house?" he demanded angrily.

"There's no rule against a boy standing treat that I know of," said Mrs. Taggles, rather aggressively. "If it's forbidden, I've never heard of it; and if you like to speak to the Head about it, sir, I'm quite ready to answer for my conduct."

Mr. Ratcliff set his thin lips.

"It was a practical evasion of my instructions," he said; "but I need not speak to you about it. Did Merry know that the order had been given?"

"You had better ask him, sir," said Mrs. Taggles, with growing tartness.

"Don't be impertinent, woman!"

"Who are you calling a woman?" demanded Mrs. Taggles indignantly. "My word! That I should live to be called a woman to my face! What do you call yourself?"

Mr. Ratcliff was about to rap out a sour reprimand; but as Dame Taggles showed strong symptoms of falling into hysterics, the house-master thought better of it, and strode out of the shop without another word. Mrs. Taggles recovered with wonderful celerity from the threatened hysterics as soon as he was gone.

"The old himage!" she murmured. "The old himage! Nice life he leads his boys, I don't think. Which I hope as Master Merry won't get into a bother; but that's not likely. If that hold himage goes to the School House, Mr. Railton will answer him sharp enough. Which he's a gentleman, he is, and I'd say so anywhere if it was ever so."

Mr. Ratcliff, who was deeply incensed, was indeed making his way to the School House to interview Mr. Railton. There was no love lost between the two house-masters. Each had a very low opinion of the other's ability in managing a house, and their natures were in almost everything diametrically opposed. But an almost painful politeness was always maintained between them.

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton cheerily, as he heard a knock at his door; but a cloud passed over his face as the master of the New House entered.

There could hardly be a greater contrast than that between the cordial, athletic master of the School House, and the tall, weedy, sour-visaged Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ratcliff, my dear fellow," said Mr. Railton, as cordially as he could, "pray sit down——"

"I have not come to stay," said Mr. Ratcliff, in his iciest tone, with his snowiest look.

Mr. Railton coughed.

"Indeed! To what then——"

"I have come to make a complaint, Mr. Railton."

"Yes?" said Mr. Railton, looking rather weary.

Mr. Ratcliff seldom was without a complaint of some kind to his lips.

"Yes," repeated Mr. Ratcliff. "My authority has been defied, and my measure frustrated, by a boy of your house, and I hope that will be sufficient to cause you to visit him with exemplary punishment."

"I should certainly severely punish any boy of my house who was guilty of such conduct as you describe," said Mr. Railton. "May I ask the particulars?"

"Certainly, if my assurance is not sufficient for you!" sneered the master of the New House.

"I could hardly punish a boy in ignorance of his offence," said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Very well. The boy I allude to is Merry, of the Shell Form. You may or may not be acquainted with the fact that there has been some discontent in the New House of late, owing to the new housekeeping arrangements. That discontent I am determined to crush. I know your method would be conciliation——"

"That need hardly enter into the discussion. What has Tom Merry done?"

"Some of the juniors in my house refused to eat their dinner. I consequently gave orders that they were to be refused food at the school shop. Knowing this, Merry treated them all to eatables, thus completely setting my order at naught. Dame Taggles was, of course, glad of the excuse to elude my command. I blame Merry."

"Are you sure that Merry knew what your orders were?"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it. But I am quite willing that he should be asked, and the point cleared up satisfactorily."

Mr. Railton appeared to ruminate.

"I don't know exactly what can be done in the matter," he replied. "It is far from being my province to criticise your management of your own house, my dear sir. But I must say that it is decidedly harmful for growing boys to be deprived of food for a whole afternoon after missing their dinner, and doubtless Tom Merry was aware of that. He seems to have acted very generously."

"In defying my commands!"

"There is no rule about treating juniors at the tuck-shop. The fact that Figgins and the rest were hungry probably seemed to Merry an additional reason for treating them, not a reason against doing so. I repeat that I don't see what is to be done."

"I can advise you. Merry should be severely caned."

"I cannot think so," replied the School House master tartly. "It is true that your orders, unfortunately, were set aside by this treat in the school shop. But Merry has broken no rule of the school, and it is impossible to punish him for nothing."

Mr. Ratcliff's face was like a thundercloud.

"Then you refuse to punish him?"

"I must certainly decline to do so until he is guilty of some offence."

Mr. Ratcliff seemed inclined to burst into a torrent of angry words. But he met the calm eye of the School House master, and restrained himself.

"Very well," he said, with lips white with anger. "I shall not forget this, Mr. Railton. I shall not forget that you have deliberately supported a junior in open defiance of my authority."

"I am sorry you should look at it in that light, Mr. Ratcliff. I am sorry that——"

"You have said quite enough, Mr. Railton."

And Mr. Ratcliff quitted the room, closing the door with a very audible bang. Mr. Railton looked worried for a moment, and then his face broke into a smile.

"How very like Merry!" he murmured. "I shall certainly not punish a boy for a kind action. It is hard, very hard indeed, to live on amicable terms with Mr. Ratcliff."

Mr. Ratcliff went back to the New House in a black fit of rage.

As Mr. Railton refused to take the matter up, Tom Merry was beyond the reach of his vengeance. Mr. Ratcliff would have given a great deal to have the hero of the Shell in the New House for a term!

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 6.

A Raid in the Rain!

FIGGINS & CO. gathered in the study after school. They had lines enough to do to keep them going for some time, but they had no intention of doing lines now. More important matters claimed their attention.

"Ratty is cutting up uncommonly rough," said Figgins. "After that row on Wednesday, the chaps were very doubtful about backing us up. The affair to-day is a finishing touch to most of them. They're crying off."

"We came out of it to-day pretty well," Kerr remarked.

"Yes, owing to Tom Merry standing treat. That won't happen every day. Ratty will give more precise instructions at the tuck-shop next time. The fellows are afraid of missing meals altogether; and, really, it would be no joke to do so."

"Rather not," said Fatty Wynn, with a shudder. "When I think of the agonies of mind I suffered to-day, before Tom Merry came on the scene, I—"

"The agonies of tummy, you mean," said Figgins disdainfully. "Don't talk any more about your unearthly appetite, Fatty! You make me feel hungry. As I was saying, Ratty is a wary old bird, and a tough customer to deal with. He's got no scruples. It's not the kind of joke we like, to have to miss meals—"

"I should say not. When I think of the—"

"Don't think of it, Fatty. Don't talk of it, at any rate. Most of the fellows are afraid of having to go through lessons hungry. Only a few who are able to feed in their studies are sticking to the idea. But whoever gives in or cries off, we, as leaders of the house, have got to stick it out."

Fatty Wynn looked alarmed.

"I say, Figgy, would you mind if I changed into some other study for a bit? I don't want to desert the cause, but when it comes to going without one's dinner—"

"Ring off, Fatty. I don't want you to go without your dinner. Blessed if I should care to sit next you in class if you did, in case you started as a cannibal. We're going to feed ourselves in the study, and cut the feeds in hall, that's the wheeze. I had two pounds from my father yesterday, and you two fellows are in funds. We're going to be fearfully economical, and make the money last a long while. We'll lay in a supply of provisions, so that no orders Ratty may give will make any difference to us. I can cook—"

"Oh, come, Figgy! You can't cook," said Fatty Wynn, remonstrating. "You'd better make me head cook, and I'll do the thing to a T."

"Who says I can't cook?" demanded Figgins.

"I say you can't cook," retorted Fatty. "If you don't remember how you burnt the bacon and sausages last time you tried in that line, why, I do. They were spoiled—"

"You managed to eat 'em, I remember, all the same, spoiled or not."

"Of course I did—there wasn't anything else. I had already eaten the pie and the pudding and the boiled eggs and bacon, and I should have had to go to bed hungry if I hadn't tackled the stuff; but it was horrid—"

"Look here, if you think I can't cook—"

"You can't! I appeal to Kerr. Wasn't the smell of burning in the study something fearful? You burnt the bacon and the sausages, and—"

"I'll burn what I like," said Figgins, rather excitedly. "Perhaps the sausages were browned a little too much, but—"

"Browned! The smell of burning in the study was—"

"But the bacon was done to a turn. I—"

"The smell of burning—"

"Besides, I've got an idea. When I was home last, we had a fig-pudding, and I watched the cook make it so that I should be able to do it myself here. Now's the time."

"Fig-pudding," said Fatty Wynn, his eyes glistening; "I like that! I don't know how I should like one you made, though!"

"I say, don't start ragging, you two," said Kerr, the peace-maker. "Suppose Figgins attends to the pudding department, and Wynn to the other department. It's an equal division of labour. There's no denying, Figgy, that Fatty cooks bacon and sausages like an angel. But at the same time, I'd like to have some of that fig-pudding."

"Well, I don't mind," said Figgins. "I'm not denying Fatty's abilities in that line. He can cook some things, I know."

"Good," said Fatty; "I'm satisfied."

And so it was arranged. Ways and means were the next subject of discussion. Fortunately, money, for once, was not lacking in the study. A list of requirements was made out, most of which could be obtained from Dame Taggles. An order was sent to the village shop for the rest.

Figgins was very keen about the fig-pudding. He had specially posted himself in the way the cook at home made one, and naturally was anxious to air his knowledge.

It was arranged that Kerr and Fatty Wynn should go down to the village for the supplies that were not to be obtained from the school shop.

While they were thus occupied, Figgins was to do some scouting in search of the utensils required for instituting a cooking department in the study. Some, of course, the juniors already had. But they would want more if they were to go in for such things as fig-puddings.

"Mind you don't forget the figs," said the New House chief, "and the pudding-cloths at Mrs. Hogg's. And a large-size bottle of syrup of figs."

Kerr looked rather doubtful.

"What's that stuff?" he asked. "Did the cook at home shove that in, Figgy?"

"Well, I remember the pudding was very syrupy, and it stands to reason that if you want a syrupy fig-pudding, you have to put syrup of figs in it."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Get the biggest bottle they make. If it's expensive it can't be helped; we're not going to spoil the pudding to save a little expense. Mind none of the School House rotters see you getting the things in, you know. They'd raid you in a moment if they had a chance. Don't take any bags, or they may suspect. You'll be wearing your overcoats, as it's raining, and you can stuff all the things in your pockets."

"Right you are," said the Co.

And they departed upon their errand. As it happened, Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were looking out of Study No. 6 in the School House, and they saw them go. The state of affairs in the New House was well known to the juniors of the rival building.

In spite of Figgy's great caution, Blake was not long in putting two and two together. He wasn't likely to think that the Co. had gone out for a walk for pleasure in a drenching downpour of rain.

"Those kids are gone down to Rylecombe," said Blake, as he turned from the window. "What do you think they are gone for, kids?"

"Blessed if I know," said Herries. "Giddy asses to go out in this weather, whatever it is."

"Gwub, most likely," said Arthur Augustus, after some reflection. "I know there is a movement o'vah the way to cut the school gwub and feed in their studies. Yaas, wathah, I should certainly say that they are gone to bwing in a supply of gwub, Blake."

Blake gave the swell of the School House a slap on the shoulder to signify his approval, which made the eyeglass drop from his eye.

"You're growing quite bright, Gussy—"

"Pway do not be so beastly wuff, Blake. I regard it as neithah respectful nor fwriendly to stwike me so suddenly, and wuffle my coat—"

"We're on this," Blake continued, unheeding. "When those innocent youths return with a supply of grub we're going to wolf it. It will be a lesson to them not to buck against the authority of their kind teachers."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There may be some of the New House rotters on the look-out to meet them coming in," said Herries. "Better get some more in the game."

"Righto! We'll ask the Terrible Three."

"Yaas, wathah. I really think that—"

"Come along, Gussy, and do your thinking afterwards."

And the chums of the Fourth marched out of No. 6 in quest of the Terrible Three. They found them in the hall staring gloomily out of the window into the pouring rain.

"Hallo," said Monty Lowther dismally. "Nice jolly sort of weather, ain't it? I was wondering when the snow would melt, and it's melted now. I wonder if we shall ever get a game of football again."

"I've got something on better than football," said Blake.

"Are you fellows game for a raid on Figgins & Co?"

"Rather," said Lowther and Manners at once.

Tom Merry did not speak.

Blake explained the circumstances. Lowther and Manners caught on at once.

"We'll meet 'em at the gate, an' kindly relieve 'em of their burdens," said Lowther. "I like showing kindness to my dear schoolfellows. Six of us—"

"I say—" began Tom Merry, hesitatingly.

Five pairs of eyes stared at him like gimlets.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Blake. "You don't mean to say that you're not game, Tom Merry?"

"Of course I am," said Tom indignantly. "It's not that. But I was thinking that it's hardly cricket to jump on Figgins & Co. just now—"

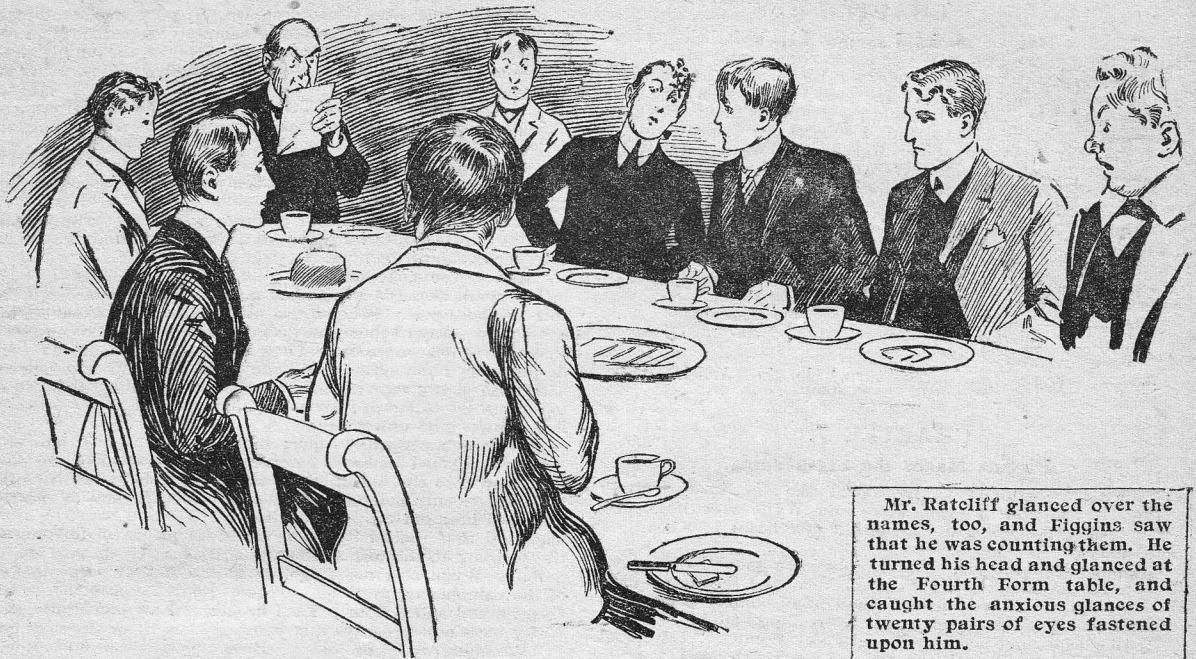
"Rats!" said Blake. "Why not?"

"Well, they've got their hands full at present, and—"

"My dear kid, when we were in a similar plight, did anybody ever get chipped so much as we were chipped by Figgins & Co.? Why, they used to call the School House the Casual Ward, and Figgins sent us an old mouldy loaf by parcel post."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I know that; but he'd have stood by us like a brick if we'd wanted him to, all the same."



Mr. Ratcliff glanced over the names, too, and Figgins saw that he was counting them. He turned his head and glanced at the Fourth Form table, and caught the anxious glances of twenty pairs of eyes fastened upon him.

"No doubt; but we didn't want him to, and he doesn't want us to stick by him, either. You're talking out of your silly hat, and that's what's the matter."

"I'm not talking about sticking by him," said Tom Merry, "and I daresay I'm wrong. But I'd rather let the ragging stand over a bit till Figgy has settled his present difficulties."

"Rats!" said Blake again. "I think you take the wrong view, but I'm willing to leave it to the majority. Everyone who doesn't agree with Tom Merry, say rats!"

"Rats!" came five voices simultaneously, including Blake's. "There you are!" said Blake. "Are you convinced now, Merry?"

"Not quite," said Tom, smiling. "I daresay I'm wrong, and I don't want to impose my opinion on you. I'll stand out of the raid."

"That's not chummy," said Lowther. "You ought to come."

"Yaas, wathah! I honah and wespact any honorable scupwies in any gentleman; but I weally think Tom Merry cawwies the mattah too fah, don't you know?"

"The Great Gustavus has spoken," said Monty Lowther.

"Listen, oh, ye common mortals—" "Oh, don't wot, Lowthah. I weally considah that Tom Mewwy is quite in ewwah on the pwesent occasion," said Arthur Augustus.

"You'll come, Tom?" said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Why don't you go and join Figgins & Co., and ask them to let you live in the coal cellar in the New House?" asked Monty Lowther acidly.

Tom Merry might have made a warm retort, and for the first time in history a quarrel arisen among the Terrible Three, but he had too much good sense for that.

"Can't a chap keep his own opinion?" he said. "Let's agree to differ. I'll go and do some of your latest lines, Monty. Lathqm won't know my writing from yours."

And the hero of the Shell walked away whistling.

"Is he often taken like that?" asked Blake, looking after him.

"If I had a chap like that in my study, I'd—"

"Well, what would you do?" demanded the Terrible Two at once, aggressively.

They were evidently not inclined to allow anyone but themselves to run down Tom Merry.

Blake grinned good-humouredly.

"I'd smooth his baby brow and call him Algy," he replied.

"Don't begin to rag now, when we're on the scent of a house raid. Tom Merry's all right. Every chap's entitled to his opinion. I am entitled to mine, and if it weren't respected in my study, there would be some thumping, I can tell you."

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"We five can handle the matter," said Blake. "We'll shove on our macintoshes, and get down to the gate in time to greet those innocent kids when they come in."

Blake's suggestion was adopted, and the five juniors were at the gate in good time. The wintry afternoon was thickening into dusk when the New House Co. came in sight on the road, and Blake nudged his companions.

"They're coming!"

"Yaas, wathah, I can see them. We had better wush upon them—"

"Shut up, they'll hear you. Get back into the shadow."

"I wefuse to shut up. You intewrupted me, Blake."

"Silence, image. I—"

"I wefuse to be chawaetahised as an image. I distinctly—"

Blake put his hand over D'Arcy's mouth as the figures of Kerr and Wynn came dimly in at the gate. The New House heroes were in overcoats and caps, and the way their overcoat pockets bulged showed that extensive purchases were crammed therein.

"Come on," shouted Blake suddenly.

The School House five made a rush. Kerr and Wynn, well on the alert, dodged and ran for the New House. Two or three figures loomed up out of the dusk, and the voice of Figgins was heard.

"Lucky I thought of coming down! Cut it!"

"Righto," said the Co. with one voice.

They ran on swiftly. Figgins threw himself gallantly upon the School House juniors, and grasping hold of Lowther and D'Arcy, dragged them to the ground. The contact with the soaked and muddy earth did not improve their macintoshes.

Blake and Herries and Manners were also gripped and held; but Blake tore himself loose and dashed on in desperate pursuit of the Co.

He came up with Fatty Wynn, and seized hold of him.

"Got you!" he yelled. "Now, then, hand over, or—"

Fatty Wynn turned and closed with him. They struggled, and in the struggle a packet came out of Fatty's filled pocket, and rolled in the rainy quad. Kerr turned back to his comrade's aid, and Blake was seized by the muscular Scotsman, and dragged from Fatty. He was no match for the two, and the Co. speedily left him sprawling in the rain and ran on again to the New House.

A loud whistle from Kerr announced that the Co. were safe in their own domain. Figgins and his companions ceased the struggle and fled after them. Five disconsolate School House juniors gathered in the rain.

Blake had a torn and half-emptied packet of figs in his hand. It was the sole prize. The juniors looked at one another.

"Might have known you Fourth Form kids would make a muck of it," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Whose fault was it?" demanded Blake. "If you clumsy duffers—"

"Who are you calling duffers?"

"I'm calling you two duffers."

"Then I'll jolly soon—"

"Oh, don't quawwel," said D'Arcy. "Let's get in out of the wain. I am feelin' in a muddy and howwidly disweputable condition, and I am quite exhausted by that severe struggle. Pwaj let us get in out of the wain."

The counsel was too good to be neglected. The juniors went in out of the rain. Blake handed round the packet of figs, and shared up equally. The figs were very good and fat, and it was something, after all.

"Jolly nice," said Lowther, somewhat mollified. "But

I say, what a feed we've missed. Those kids had their pockets fairly bulging with grub. We've lost a ripping spread."

"Perhaps we've not lost it," said Blake. "I know what Figgins wanted those figs for. I expect Wynn had a lot more, besides these few. Figgy has told me about his idea of making a fig-pudding often enough, and I expect he means to do it now that the young asses are starting feeding in the study. He fancies himself as a cook. Well, let him make his fig-pudding, if that's what he's going to do—and we'll eat it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo!" said the voice of Tom Merry. "You sound awfully jolly, so I suppose you've made a successful raid. Hard cheese for Figgins! Why, what's on earth's the matter? Have you been trying to wipe up the rain in the quad with your macintoshes?"

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther.

"Have you got the grub?"

"No, we haven't!"

And then it was Tom Merry's turn to laugh. And he did!

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins Makes the Fig-pudding.

FIGGINS grinned as he joined the Co. in the study in the New House. Kerr and Wynn were unloading their pockets and placing the purchases in a heap on the table.

"Good," said Figgins. "We might have guessed that those School House bounders would smell a rat and try to get hold of the tommy. It was lucky I thought of coming down with French and Pratt to meet you. Everything safe?"

"All except some loose figs," said Fatty Wynn. "I dropped a packet of them when Blake collared me in the quad."

"Well, that's not much. We've got off luckily. I suppose you got plenty of them."

"Oh, yes. Two pound packets of loose figs, and four boxes of them."

"Good! Did you get the suet?"

"Yes, Kerr got that. Where is it, Kerr?"

"It's in my pockets somewhere," said Kerr. "Hang There's a hole in the lining, and the suet's slipped out. Here's the paper."

"Oh, I say, I hope you haven't lost it," said Figgins anxiously.

"You can't make a fig-pudding without suet, you know."

"Oh, I've got it here," said Kerr. "That's all right. But it's in several pieces, and they are in the lining of my coat."

"Hunt them up, old fellow."

Kerr proceeded to hunt up the pieces of suet, following them in a rather exciting chase through the crannies and crevices of the coat's lining, and fishing them out one by one through the hole in the pocket.

"Moist sugar's wanted," said Figgins. "I can't get that from Dame Taggles. I hope you've got it."

"Blessed if I have," said Wynn. "I had a feeling that there was something else. It was the moist sugar."

Figgins's face fell.

"Oh dear! How am I to make a fig-pudding without moist sugar?"

"Soak some lump sugar in water. That will make it moist."

"Good idea. I don't see why that shouldn't do just as well. Have you got that suet yet, Kerr? You're having a lively time with that coat."

"I shall get it all out soon," said Kerr. "Get on with the washing. There's no hurry for the beastly suet, is there?"

"Yes, certainly there is. It's got to be chopped fine for the pudding."

"Have you got a chopping-board?"

"No," said Figgins dubiously. "But the top of the table is smooth enough, and we can scrub it clean."

The last of the suet was at last extracted from the lining of the coat, and Kerr sat down to rest in a rather flushed and exhausted condition.

Figgins looked at the suet with a rather gingerly manner. It certainly looked fluffy and dusty.

"It will want washing," he remarked.

"They always wash suet," said Fatty Wynn.

"Do they? Well, that's all right then. I've been busy while you've been gone. I've borrowed a big iron saucepan of the cook, big enough to hold two fig-puddings. It's a good idea to make two, you know, so as to have a good supply. We can either eat it cold, or else warm it up with some new syrup of figs, whenever we want any. I've got eggs from Dame Taggles, and flour—"

"Do you put flour in a fig-pudding?" asked Fatty Wynn doubtfully.

"Oh, just a little," said Figgins airily. He didn't know, as a matter of fact, but he could not admit that without losing all his prestige as a chef. "Along with the bread-crumbs, you know. I've got a very stale loaf for the bread-crumbs. It's a bit mouldy in places, but I've been chopping out the

mouldy parts with my pocket-knife. I've got a basin out of the dormitory for a pudding basin, to mix it in, you know."

Figgins took off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves, and tied on a white apron.

He flattered himself that he looked very like a chef, and certainly his appearance was most business-like.

"We'll get on with the pudding part of the business first," he explained; "as for the more solid grub, we can have cold ham and eggs for to-night and to-morrow morning, and then we shall have the grate free for cooking. The fig-pudding will be done to-night."

"I'm quite looking forward to it," said Kerr.

Figgins beamed upon the Scottish partner in the Co.

"And you're right, old chap," he said. "It's something to look forward to. It's going to make a bit of a stir in the house, this fig-pudding is. I know lots of people make fig-puddings; but a good many of them can't afford to spend money on it and shove in all the ingredients for a really good one. Very few fig-puddings have syrup of figs in them, I believe. That's a little idea of my own, to tell you the exact truth. I'm going to take a lot of trouble about this fig-pudding, and I believe it will make a bit of a stir-up."

And Figgins was quite right; but we must not anticipate.

Figgins washed his hands carefully, and proceeded to crumble the bread into the basin, which was also washed and dried in the most cleanly manner. Most of the mouldy bits, as Figgy said, had been cut out, and if a few had escaped his eagle eye, what did that matter? There would be plenty of flavour in the pudding to disguise anything.

Fatty Wynn had not forgotten to get a very large bottle of the valuable syrup of figs. Figgins poured it into the bread crumbs, and added flour. Then he plunged his hands into the sticky mess and began to mix it.

"It's going well," he said. "Buck up with that suet, kids. Chop it up with your pocket-knife, Kerr. Never mind about cutting the table, only don't get more splinters in the suet than you can help."

"Righto," said Kerr, working away.

"Break a couple of eggs into this, will you, Wynn?"

"Certainly. I say, these eggs are—well, a trifle talkative, Figgy."

"I know; but I've heard the cook say that you can put any eggs in a pudding, if it had a strong flavour," explained Figgy. "I bought those cheap eggs of Dame Taggles on purpose. Never mind the niff. Shove 'em in."

The eggs were shoved in. A lingering aroma hung round the study for a few minutes, till Kerr set the door open wide. It died away as the eggs were absorbed in the pudding, which was growing under Figgy's hands.

"Now the figs," said the New House chef. "Shove 'em in."

"Is that the right way to stick the figs in—"

"Of course it is. It's my way, anyhow. Shove 'em in, and plenty of 'em. Why, you greedy rotter, you've been wolfing them!"

"I've only eaten about a pound—"

"Grr—r—r! Shove the rest in, Kerr, before he starts on them."

The figs were put in the basin. Figgins, with the perspiration gathering on his noble brow, kneaded and kneaded away.

It was hard work, really, but it was a labour of love, and Figgins stood it out manfully. The admiring Co. lent all the aid they could.

"Lay out the pudding-cloths, Fatty," said the chef; "and you stick the saucepan on the fire to boil, Kerr. These puddings have to go on in boiling water, I—I believe—I mean I'm certain. Is that lump sugar melted yet?"

"Yes; it seems to be crumbling up."

"What about the water?"

"Let me see. This seems to be getting a bit thick. Shove the water in too."

Sugar and water were precipitated into the basin, which was now pretty full. This addition of liquid made the kneading much easier for Figgins. He worked away and gave directions.

"Got the pudding-cloths ready, Wynn? They have to be—to be somethinged? You have to rub 'em with something, I'm blessed if I remember whether it's butter or marmalade. Have we got any marmalade?"

"No," said Kerr, "I put the last in Sefton's silk hat last night."

"Well, I dare say it was butter. Yes, now I come to think of it, it certainly was butter. Rub some butter over the pudding-cloths, Wynn."

Fatty Wynn obeyed. Kerr poked the fire under the saucepan. It was an enormous saucepan, and it covered the whole of the open fire-grate of the study. It was beginning to bubble, and a cloud of steam rose as Kerr removed the lid.

"Is it boiling?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Just on," said Kerr.

"Good! I'm nearly ready. Those cloths finished, Fatty?"

"Quite finished, Figgy!"

Figgins took out a double handful of the fig-pudding and

plumped it into the middle of one of the greased cloths. He added to it till the half of the mass was there, and then he wiped his hands and tied up the cloth round it.

The ends of the cloth he drew together and fastened with a string, sticking in a safety-pin for additional security.

"There!" he said, surveying the result with great satisfaction.

"There, my pippins! What does that look like, hey?"

Kerr cocked his eye at it in a thoughtful way.

"Something like a football," he ventured.

Figgins gave him a withering glance.

"A—a football? You silly ass! It looks the nicest and most workmanlike pudding I've ever seen. A football! Gr-r-r!"

Figgins turned to the basin again.

"Shall I heave it into the saucepan, Figgy?" asked Kerr, anxious to atone for his unfortunate remark.

"No. They both have to go in together, or else we shan't know which is done and which isn't," said Figgins.

"Ah, yes; of course. You think of everything, Figgy."

The placated Figgy smiled benignantly.

"Wouldn't be of much use setting up as a cook if I didn't, Kerr, old son. Now, I'll have the second one tied up in a jiffy. That's safe! Now you can shove them in. Mind the saucepan doesn't stop boiling!"

Kerr slid the two big puddings, one after the other, into the bubbling saucepan. As a natural result, the cold contact stopped the water boiling.

"Oh, hang it!" said the chef. "I told you not to let it stop boiling, Kerr! I suppose I ought to have done it myself. What could you be expected to know about fig-puddings? Stir up the fire under it, for goodness' sake!"

The obedient Kerr stirred up the fire, and the saucepan soon began to boil again. Figgins washed his hands and towelled them with the air of one who has deserved well of his country, and knew it.

"How do you know when they are done, Figgy?" asked Kerr, anxious to gather up useful knowledge.

"Oh, you watch 'em," said Figgins, rather vaguely. "You have to be very careful in watching fig-puddings, you know."

"Yes; but when they're done, how do you know?"

"Well, that is a silly ass's question, old chap," said Figgins, in a tone of mild remonstrance. "Of course, when they're done, they're—done, and then you take them out of the saucepan. It's perfectly simple!"

Kerr looked a little bewildered.

"Yes, but how do you know when—"

"My dear fellow, I've explained twice, and you must really excuse me a third time. They say you have to use a mallet to get things into a Scotsman's head, and really—"

"But you haven't explained—"

"My hat! How much more do you want? Let the subject alone, Kerr, old fellow. It's a bit above your intellect, perhaps?" said Figgins. "I'm making the fig-pudding, and I'll see that it's done to a turn."

"I can't believe you know how to—"

"Now I'm going to get a wash," said Figgins. "That stuff is awfully sticky. Keep an eye on the fig-pudding while I'm gone. It's got to be kept on the boil!"

And Figgins escaped further argument by quitting the study.

CHAPTER 8.

On the Track of the Fig-pudding.

FIGGINS looked into the study again later to see how his pudding was getting on. Kerr was patiently watching the saucepan, which was nicely bubbling. Figgins removed the lid, and a cloud of steam rose in his face, and he coughed.

"That's all right," he said. "Getting on A. I. Keep an eye on it, though, Kerr. It would be no joke if a saucepan that size boiled over. Don't leave it unwatched for a moment."

There was a very peculiar expression upon Kerr's face as he received these instructions.

"I thought you were going to watch it," he remarked meaningly.

Figgins shook his head.

"My dear chap, I have had the trouble of making the pudding. It isn't much for you just to watch it boil."

"Still, I thought you might be anxious about it—"

"Oh, no; not at all. I know I can trust you," said Figgins heartily. "Just keep your eye on it, that's all, you know. It's stopped raining, so I think I'll go and have a blow in the quad after my labours."

And Figgins walked out of the study.

"Cool!" ejaculated Kerr. "I'm to sit here all the evening watching a beastly saucepan. I think you had better take your turn, Wynn."

"Can't be done, Kerr. You know I always fall asleep when I'm watching anything."

Kerr grunted.

"Well, get the diablo sets out, then, and let's have a game. I don't see why we can't play while we watch the saucepan."

Fatty Wynn did not see it either, and the chums were soon busily engaged in passing the spinning devil to one another over the table, while Figgins fondly imagined that his fig-pudding was being watched with loving care.

Figgins was taking a turn in the quad. The study was very hot with the huge fire that had been built up to boil the fig-pudding, and the steam that escaped from the saucepan. The coolness of the quadrangle was very grateful after it, in spite of the wet ground and the raindrops sprinkling from the drenched branches of the elms.

"Hallo, Figgy!"

It was Tom Merry's voice. He came full tilt through the gloom, and stopped just in time to avoid running into Figgins.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "What are you buzzing about like that for? Schneider after you?"

"No," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Only a little sprint, you know, to see what sort of form I'm in. You know it's the match with the Flyers pretty soon, and I'm captaining our juniors. I thought I'd have a little run as the rain had stopped."

"Where are Lowther and Manners?" asked Figgins curiously, for the Terrible Three were usually seen together.

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"They're chumming up with Study No. 6," he said with perfect good humour. "They didn't like my not taking part in that raid. We differed on the advisability of it, you see!"

"Oh, I see. They didn't get much, only a few figs. I say, Merry, it's very decent of you to back us up as you've done lately, and I should like to show you that I feel it. I'm making a first-class A. 1, regular, ripping fig-pudding, and I'll send you over a big lump of it in the morning. It's on the fire now, but it won't be done until the house is closed up for the night."

"That's good, Figgy. If there's anything I'm fond of, it's fig-pudding," said Tom Merry heartily. "I'm much obliged to you."

"Oh, after that treat you stood—hallo, hallo! What's that?"

They were nearly under the window of Figgins's study, and the window was open on account of the heat. A terrific buzzing and fizzing and sputtering was suddenly audible. Figgins tore his hair.

"Those lazy bouncers have let the pudding boil over!" he exclaimed.

"That's too bad—"

But Figgins had gone. He tore into the New House like one demented. Tom Merry continued his little run round the quadrangle.

Five shadowy forms loomed up in the gloom from behind the corner of the house, close to the spot where the two juniors had been talking.

"Good luck!" said the voice of Monty Lowther. "Heard every word. I thought it was a fig-pudding, as I said."

"As I said, you mean?" remarked Blake. "You'll remember—"

"Yaas, wathah! But don't start wagging now, deah boys. The question is, how are we goin' to get hold of that fig-puddin'?"

"That's the idea," exclaimed Herries. "It's all very well for Figgins to send Tom Merry a slice of it. We want to go the whole hog."

"You would," Manners remarked in a friendly way. "Like unto like—"

"Look here, Manners, if you—"

"Shut up!" said Blake authoritatively. "No rows, at least till we've captured the fig-pudding."

"Yaas, wathah! but how are we goin' to accomplish that extremely difficult task, deah boy? It's no use capturing the fig-puddin' before it's cooked, is it? We mightn't be able to get a saucepan in the study big enough to cook it."

"True enough! We must wait till the pudding is done, and then scoff it. If it won't be done, as Figgy says, until the house is closed up for the night—"

"Then we can't get hold of it to-night," said Lowther. "We shall have to have it cold."

"I don't see how we're to burgle the New House after daylight to-morrow," said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"Besides, Figgins & Co. may scoff the thing to-night. You know Fatty Wynn. Put him in the same room with a fig-pudding, and how much fig-pudding would there be left in that room the next morning?"

"Precious little."

"Ergo—that's Latin—we must scoff the thing to-night, and I know how."

"Well, if you know how," said Lowther, "you've got more sense than I've ever given you credit for, and I'm willing for you to take the lead."

"Whether you are willing or not, I reckon—"

"Oh, cut the cackles and come to the horses—that is to say, the fig-pudding," said Lowther.

"Well, then," said Blake, rather aggressively, "we can't get into the New House after it's locked up for the night, but we could get out of it all right, so my idea is for one of us to sneak in and hide himself in the box-room—"

"My hat! I never thought of that."

"Naturally you wouldn't. It requires a brain like mine——"
"Oh, get on!"

"Lathom sees lights out in our dorm. to-night. He's as blind as an owl. You can stick the bolster and pillows in my bed to make it look as if I'm there, and that will be all right. If I'm missed going up to bed, he'll only suppose that I was sleepy and went up early. I've been going to bed early lately——"

"Weally, that is a strange statement. How can you possibly have been goin' to bed early lately, Blake? If you were early you could not be late——"

"Ass!" said Blake politely. "The last few nights I've been going to bed early on account of the football, to be in good form for the match with Frampton Flyers when it comes off. So that won't excite any remark. I can easily nip into the New House in the dark and lay low somewhere. Then you fellows will be ready to let me into your house when I come back with the fig-pudding."

"Bravo!" said Lowther. "I never thought you had brain enough to think out a thing like that, Blake. We'll do our part right enough."

"Mind you do. Your part's easy enough."

"Better cut into the New House now, while there's a chance," suggested Manners. "There's nobody about at present, and it won't be long now before the door's locked."

"It'll be a bit dark and lonely in the box-room," Lowther remarked. "I've heard that there are rats there, too. But you won't mind them, Blake?"

"And if you should be discovered, old Ratty will march you across to Ralton for a good licking," observed Herries. "But you'll be careful?"

"Yaas, wathah. If the New House juniors get hold of you when you're collarin' the puddin', Blake, they will be wathah wuff, but——"

"Oh, shut up, can't you?" said Blake, rather uneasily. "Nice set of Job's comforters you are, anyway. I'm off!"

And Blake, without waiting for any more observations, disappeared into the darkness.

The four juniors returned to the School House. The plan was carried out without a hitch. It was easy for Herries and D'Arcy to arrange Blake's bed to make it look as if a sleeper were there, and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was too dreamy and short-sighted to note any difference.

The Fourth Form and the Shell went to bed. As Blake had not returned, it was evident that he had found a safe hiding-place in the New House, and was waiting his opportunity there.

At the appointed time the juniors left the dormitories, and met in the passage. Tom Merry was fast asleep when Manners and Lowther left, and they did not wake him. Tom Merry was "dead" in that act, as Lowther expressed it.

As the school clock struck eleven, four juniors were waiting at a certain window—often used as a means of egress and ingress—and looking for Blake!

CHAPTER 9.

Blake Makes a Capture, and Mr. Ratcliff Makes Another.

BLAKE was not idle in those same moments. He had remained hidden in the box-room of the New House, while the time dragged wearily by, and more than once during that dreary wait he had half-regretted his enterprise. The fig-pudding seemed hardly worth it.

But when the quarter to eleven chimed out from the clock-tower, his vigil ended, and with a sigh of relief he quitted the box-room.

It was the earliest hour upon which it was safe to venture forth, for though the juniors had long been in bed, the seniors were not so early as the lower Forms, and some of the masters were not retired yet.

When Blake passed a door from under which the light gleamed, showing that the occupant was up and awake, he trod very lightly indeed.

The house was dark and silent, and the feeling of being in a strange building at such an unearthly hour gave Blake a strange, eerie sensation. But he kept a strong control of his nerves, and made his way swiftly to Figgins's study, thinking resolutely only of the fig-pudding, and not of the creaking boards and nodding shadows.

He reached the study and entered. The atmosphere was still warm, and there was a faint glow of red among the ashes in the grate. The air was heavy, too, with the clammy warmth of steam, and redolent of figs.

Blake silently closed the door and lighted the gas, turning it up ever so little. Then he looked for the fig-pudding. The saucepan was gone, and had doubtless been returned to its owner. The pudding was not in sight, but Blake opened the cupboard, and then a warm and delicate aroma smote upon his nostrils.

There was the fig-pudding—or, rather, two fig-puddings, for there were two of them! They were still wrapped up in the cloths, and lay in the cupboard just as they had been taken

from the saucepan. Blake understood the reason of that. The boiling had taken a long time, and Figgins, who, as a matter of fact, did not know the length of time required, had left them on till the last possible minute. Just before bedtime he had nipped into the study and taken them off the fire.

Here they were untouched, untasted! A wide grin of contentment overspread Blake's face. Then he looked puzzled.

Both puddings were of huge size. It would not be easy to carry one, and to carry the two would be more difficult still. Blake regretted that he had not brought a chum with him in the adventure. But two would have found it harder to dodge unseen into the box-room. Then a generous thought came into Blake's mind.

After all, Figgins & Co. were in difficulties at present. He would leave them one of the fig-puddings! He would take one and leave one. That would be generous, and, after all, only playing the game! Blake felt quite a glow of virtuous satisfaction in his breast as he came to this decision.

"That's the idea," he resolved. "We'll have one each, and Figgins can consider that he is getting off lightly."

He took one of the puddings from the cupboard. He found a newspaper to wrap it in, and picked up a silk handkerchief belonging to Kerr to make a sling to carry it. He closed the cupboard door, and turned out the gas. Then he stepped silently to the door of the study.

A sudden shudder of surprise ran through him. He was about to turn the handle when it was turned from the other side!

For a moment the sudden alarm thrilled Blake from head to foot. Then he was himself again. As the door opened in the darkness it nearly struck him in the face, but with great presence of mind he stepped back quickly, and felt his way behind the screen with which the artistic Figgins adorned his study, and which was used to conceal the grate when there was no fire.

It wasn't a very big screen, but it was big enough to conceal the junior if he crouched down, as he was ready to do if a light was struck.

Scratch! He heard a match scrape along a box, and dropped on his knees. A glimmer of light flickered out, and revealed the plump form and features of Fatty Wynn!

Blake grinned to himself.

He had been half-afraid that it was a master. He understood now. The puddings had been taken up too late to allow them to be eaten or even tasted over-night. But Fatty Wynn was made hungry by the mere thought of them. He had been unable to rest. He had come down while his comrades were sleeping, to attack the fig-puddings, and gorge himself to his heart's content.

Blake wondered what he would think when he saw only one pudding instead of two. Fatty lighted the gas and closed the door, and went to the cupboard. An exclamation of satisfaction escaped his lips at the sight of the fig-pudding.

"Hullo!" Blake heard him murmur the next moment. "Where did Figgyp put the other? Never mind, one's enough for to-night. I shan't eat more than half of this."

Blake nearly giggled aloud at the idea of Fatty Wynn eating half the enormous pudding. Fatty took a knife and cut the string, and began to unfold the cloth. His eyes were glistening. But he had scarcely started unfastening the cloth when he gave a sudden jump, and whirled round in amazement and alarm. The door of the study had been thrown open!

Fatty's eyes nearly started from his head as he gazed at the form that strode into the room. It was that of Mr. Ratcliff!

The house-master's brows were contracted in a sour frown, and there was a glint of malice in his narrow eyes, half-hidden under the puckered brows.

"Ah! I thought I heard someone leave the Fourth-Form dormitory," he remarked, "and I was not wrong in thinking that I should trace the delinquent to this study."

Fatty Wynn could not speak. He stood with the knife in his hand, his lower jaw dropping, apparently frozen with terror.

"This study," resumed Mr. Ratcliff, with a disparaging glance round the quarters of Figgins & Co., "from which most of the mischief in the New House proceeds. I presume that you have come here to eat some of that huge pudding, Wynn?"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir!" stammered Wynn.

"You are hungry, I suppose?"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"Indeed! Then why did you not eat the supper provided by the house? I particularly noted that you left your plate untasted, as did your study mates."

Poor Fatty did not reply. He had not willingly left his supper untasted; it was because Figgins had made up his mind about it. Nor could he explain that he had made up for the deficiency by eating a couple of pies immediately afterwards.

"It is, I suppose, a fresh step in the incipient insubordination here, which I am determined to crush," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You will go back to bed, Wynn, and you will come into my study to-morrow morning for a severe caning. This pudding

I will take, and place in the housekeeper's quarters. Since you have taken the trouble to cook a pudding, it shall be added to the house supplies! You will doubtless have the pleasure of tasting it," said Mr. Ratcliff grimly. "But so will every other boy at the junior table. Now go!"

Fatty Wynn, without a word, quitted the study.

Mr. Ratcliff, with the grim smile still upon his narrow face, picked up the pudding, turned out the gas, and followed him.

Blake had remained quite silent and motionless. If Mr. Ratcliff had discovered him there he knew that he would have the warmest of warm times. But the New House master never dreamed that a School House boy might be there at that hour, and he did not once glance towards the screen.

Blake drew a long breath as he was left alone in the darkness.

"If I had a house-master like that," he murmured, "I'd—I'd—my hat! he ought to be jumped on and boiled in oil! I'd better get out of this!"

Blake waited till the sound of Mr. Ratcliff's footsteps had died away, and then he silently left the study.

With great caution he made his way downstairs, and let himself out of a window, which he closed behind him, but could not fasten.

He felt a great sense of relief when he stood in the open quadrangle again. The knowledge that Mr. Ratcliff was awake and on the prowl made the New House a dangerous quarter for the School House junior. But he was safe now, and he cut across the quad cheerfully enough towards his own house.

The rain was over, and the moon was peeping out through a rift in the banks of dark clouds. The light glimmered on the little window where Blake's comrades had agreed to wait for him and help him into the School House. Blake, breathless with his rapid run, came to a halt under the window and tapped on the glass.

CHAPTER 10.

The Fig-pudding is Eaten—With Startling Results!

MONTY LOWTHER opened the window cautiously. "Lend me a hand," whispered Blake, looking up as Monty Lowther looked out.

"Got it?"

"Yes."

"Good! Hand it in!"

Blake handed in the pudding, and Monty Lowther, with a grin of satisfaction, passed it to Herries, and then held down his hand to Blake.

With Lowther's assistance, Blake soon climbed in at the window.

"Everything go off all right?" asked Herries.

"Yes, first-rate—for us! There were two puddings, and I left one for Figgins & Co. But while I was there, Fatty Wynn came down to feed—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Might have looked for that!"

"And Ratty spotted him and collared the pudding! It's coming up in the menu to-morrow in the New House. Sorry for Figgins & Co., but it's their luck. They'll have their share of the pudding at table, I suppose."

"Well, so long as we've got ours, that's all right," said Lowther, closing the window after Blake, and fastening it. "Come on, and let's get back to bed. It's jolly cold here."

"Yaas, wathah! My feet are quite fwozen," said D'Arcy, "and I feel a howwid chilly feelin' cweepin' down my back, don't you know."

"Quiet!" whispered Lowther. "Railton's not gone to bed yet. I saw the light under his door as we came down. Better give me the pudding to take care of, Blake."

"Rats! I suppose I'm capable of taking care of a pudding?"

"Well, I don't know. Most likely you young monkeys will start scoffing it—"

"Us what?" asked Blake, stopping in the passage, and speaking in a tone of dangerous politeness.

"You young monkeys!" said Lowther. "Why can't you hand it over to the keeping of a chap in a higher Form? When you get into the Shell, if you ever do, you'll understand how annoying it is for kids in the Fourth to have such a thundering good opinion of themselves—"

"I object to bein' chawactewised as a young monkey!" said D'Arcy, after a pause, interrupting Monty Lowther. "I wequest you to withdraw that remark, Lowthah."

"Oh, go and eat coke! Are you going to hand over that pudding, Blake?"

"No, I'm not going to hand over that pudding, Lowther! Keep hold of it, Herries!"

"I mean to," said Herries grimly.

"You Shell-fish can come and feed in our study to-morrow," said Blake. "Like your cheek to think I'm going to hand over Figgins's fig-pudding when I had all the trouble and risk of capturing it. But you fellows in the Shell have no end of cheek."

"Yaas—wathah! I wegard it as distinctly impertinent

to chawactewise young gentlemen in the honorable Fourth Form as young monkeys—"

"Shut up!" whispered Lowther suddenly, as he caught sound of a footfall. "Shut up! I—"

"I wefuse to shut up. I wegard your words as insultin'! I—"

"Shut up! There comes a—"

"I wefuse to take the slightest notice of you, Lowthah. I wegard your wudeness as somethin' absolutely intolewable, and if you were not weally such a wank outsiders, I would give you a feahful—"

"Who is there?"

The deep voice of Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, sounded through the gloom. A match was struck, and the house-master looked at the boys by its glimmer, and the boys looked at the house-master.

"Ah," said Mr. Railton quietly, "I thought I knew the voices! So this is a midnight feed, I presume. I observe that Herries is carrying a large pudding. Herries, will you kindly hand that pudding over to me?"

Herries, with a grin of dismay, obeyed. Mr. Railton took charge of the famous fig-pudding. He smiled grimly.

"You will go back to bed!" he said, in his sternest tones. "You will also take a hundred lines each, and show them to me by to-morrow evening. Not a word! Go to bed!"

The match went out. Mr. Railton walked away, the pudding in his hand. The juniors dismally went upstairs. Blake, Herries and D'Arcy stopped at the door of the Fourth Form room.

"If we had that thing in our quarters," said Lowther, thus disrespectfully referring to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "we'd kill it and bury it under the floor."

"Oh, wats! You have only your own wudeness to thank for—"

"Why couldn't you shut up when I told you?"

"Why couldn't you wequest me to do so in a more polite mannah? How was I to know that a mastah was comin', when I didn't hear his twead?"

"I told you to shut up."

"I am not accustomed to bein' addressed in such a wude and bwutal mannah. Unless I am tweated with pwoper respect, I—"

"Gussy's quite right," said Blake. "It was all Lowther's fault for starting the row. If he hadn't quarrelled about the pudding—"

"Yaas—wathah! If the boundah hadn't quawwelled about the pudding—"

"You silly ass!"

"Who are you callin'—?"

"Are you gone to bed?"

It was the house-master's deep voice on the stairs. The juniors scuttled into their dormitories, and the argument, which was growing exciting, was suddenly terminated.

Tom Merry woke up as his chums came into the Shell dormitory.

"Hallo, kids!" he yawned sleepily. "Where have you been?"

Lowther grunted out an explanation as he took off his boots. He expected sympathy, but Tom Merry seemed to see the occurrence in a comical aspect, for he laughed heartily.

"Blessed if I know what you're cackling about!" growled Lowther. "I'm going to bed. I shall be as sleepy as a dog to-morrow morning. Good-night, Manners. Oh, do stop that cackling, Tom Merry, and let a fellow get to sleep!"

They got to sleep at last, and slept like tops till the rising-bell went in the morning. There was a great deal of speculation in the Shell, when the night's adventure was known, as to what Mr. Railton would do with the fig-pudding.

It was confiscated, but it was too good to be destroyed. No doubt it would be added to the house supplies, and would appear on the table in due course. The juniors hoped so. It would be too bad to lose it altogether.

But if the School House chums were annoyed by the fate of their fig-pudding, and the hundred lines each which had to be turned out that day, Figgins & Co. were in a still more exasperated frame of mind.

Ratcliff had confiscated one pudding, and they soon learned from the School House youngsters where the other had gone to.

Figgins was rather excited about it. He had taken the trouble to cook two magnificent fig-puddings, and his rivals of the School House had "scoffed" one, and the unearthly appetite of Fatty Wynn had caused the other to fall into the clutches of Mr. Ratcliff. It was really too bad, and Figgins and Kerr seriously discussed the advisability of giving Fatty Wynn a study licking. But Fatty Wynn was punished enough. The evident anguish he suffered at the loss of the pudding softened the hearts of his indignant chums.

Figgins's fig-pudding had gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream, and he was likely to see very little of it again. And it was not only the loss of the unexpected treat, but the expense was a considerable item. Four-and-six for a bottle of syrup

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S DOUBLE."

A Splendid School Tale.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

of figs alone, as Figgins said, made the loss heavy enough, without counting the other ingredients.

"Still, it's some comfort that it's coming up at dinner-time," said Fatty Wynn hopefully. "Don't ask me to miss dinner to-day, Figgy. I couldn't do it—I couldn't, really."

Figgins shook his head.

"Certainly not. We must get as much of our own fig-pudding as we can, of course. We'll be more careful to keep the next one out of Ratty's clutches."

And the juniors waited anxiously for dinner-time; so did their rivals over in the School House. The fame of Figgins's fig-pudding had gone forth, and everyone was expecting a regular treat. When it was known for certain that the fig-pudding had been warmed up, and was coming on the table at dinner-time, the satisfaction was general. Even Blake, though he was disappointed about the study feed, beamed.

"After all, it's a treat for the whole house," he said. "We mustn't be selfish. So long as the fellows enjoy the pudding, I don't care."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, fully endorsing this generous view.

Dinner-time came at last! Most of the masters of St. Jim's dined with the boys. Mr. Railton was in his usual place at the head of the Sixth Form table. Little Mr. Lathom was in charge of the Fourth. Upon the latter, when the more solid part of the meal was over, appeared a goodly portion of the fig-pudding. It looked nice; it smelt delicious. Perhaps by chance Figgins had boiled it the exact length of time. The fig-pudding was a success. It was a dream! The boys looked at it, and exchanged glances of satisfaction. This was better than duff—rather.

The fig-pudding, as we have said more than once, was an enormous one. There was more than enough to go round. A portion had to be removed to grace the Head's lunch before it appeared in the School House dining-hall. Now each fellow had a generous helping, seniors and juniors alike enjoying the treat; and many a joke was cracked at the expense of Figgins, who had thus unintentionally added such an improvement to the ordinary School House fare.

Some of the fellows had second helpings, the pudding was so nice. Undoubtedly the syrup of figs imparted a richness of flavour to it. There was hardly a vestige of the fig-pudding left, except about the mouths of some of the smaller boys, when the School House trooped out of the dining-room.

"Jolly nice," said Tom Merry heartily. "Much obliged to you, Blake, and to Figgins too. I noticed rather a curious flavour about the pudding; but I supposed Figgins used some spices. I never knew that chap could cook like that."

"Neither did I," said Monty Lowther. "It was prime."

"Ripping!" said Manners, with great heartiness.

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think Figgins ought to receive a testimonial, you know, from the whole school," remarked Arthur Augustus.

The verdict on the fig-pudding was generally hearty. It was the same in the New House. Every fellow had eaten as much as he could get of it; and Mr. Ratcliff, in his sour way, had eaten with unusual heartiness, because it pleased him to devour Figgy's pudding before Figgy's eyes. But in the Shell class-room that afternoon Tom Merry suddenly noted that Monty Lowther started and turned pale.

"Anything wrong, old fellow?" he muttered, immediately forgetting their late little differences as he thought that Monty might be ill.

"N-no; ye-e-es," muttered Lowther. "I've got a pain."
"Curious. I had one just now. There it is again!" Tom Merry twisted in his seat. "My word! Is your pain anything like a dagger?"

"Yes; and something like a—like a burning iron."

"Then I've got it, too. What can it be?"

There was a gasp from Manners.

"Ow! ow!"

"What's the matter, Manners, old chap?"

"I've got a—pain! I—I feel as if I had been eating Chicago tinned meat," said Manners, turning quite pale. "I believe I'm poisoned."

Tom Merry glanced rather apprehensively at the Form-master. Mr. Linton usually had his eyes and ears wide open for talking in class. But on the present occasion he seemed to be deaf and dumb. He was leaning one hand on his desk, and had laid down his book. Tom Merry could see that his face was chalky, and the drops of perspiration thick upon his brow.

"My only aunt! He's got it, too!"

"Boys," said Mr. Linton hurriedly, "I must leave you. I—er—I shall quickly return. In the meantime, I leave the class in charge of—"

The master of the Shell hurriedly went out without finishing. He twisted as he went like one in deadly pain. On ordinary occasions, the class would have gone in for a general riot; but now they were twisting and screwing about. The Terrible Three were not the only sufferers. Every boy in the Shell was equally afflicted, New House boys as well as those of the School House. A flash of illumination darted into Tom Merry's mind.

"It was the fig-pudding!"

"The fig-pudding!" cried a dozen voices.

"Yes, there was something wrong with it."

"Ow!" groaned Monty Lowther. "There's something wrong with me, I know that. I'm not going to stick here. I wonder if those kids in the Fourth have got it, too."

The Shell turned out of their class-room. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, shot past them in the passage, with a face like chalk. He almost ran into the Head, who was coming out of the Sixth Form room, looking pale and perturbed.

"Dear me, Mr. Lathom! Are you ill?"

"Ye-e-es, sir," gasped the master of the Fourth. "And strange to say, most of my Form appear to be ill also. And you look—"

"I am strangely unwell," said the Head, shivering. "Dear me, what is that?"

It was a very audible groan from the Fifth Form class-room. Dr. Holmes opened the door in alarm, and looked in. Most of the Fifth Form were twisting uncomfortably in their seats.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the doctor. "The Sixth are similarly afflicted. It must be some poisonous matter in the water supply. Look at Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Ratcliff, indeed, seemed to be in a bad state. It was from Mr. Ratcliff that the groan had proceeded, and he was sitting on the floor, and groaning again, his face twisted into a ghastly semblance of a Guy Fawkes mask. What was the matter?

Tom Merry thought he knew. He looked into the Fourth-Form room. The sight that met his eyes would have been ludicrous if he had not been suffering internal twinges which made it impossible for him to see anything in a comical light just then.

The Form master was gone; the boys were twisting and gasping. Arthur Augustus lay with his face downward on his desk. Herries was putting his head out of window. Blake and Kerr were walking about very quickly, as if to ease some penetrating pain. Figgins stood looking like a ghost. Fatty Wynn was wriggling on the floor. Figgins looked weakly at Tom Merry.

"Have you got it, too?"

"Yes," mumbled the hero of the Shell. "You—you—you image, what did you put in the fig-pudding!"

"The fig-pudding!" said Figgins vaguely.

"Yes; that's what's done it. You've poisoned us all!"

"Rot!" said Figgins, with some spirit. "It couldn't have been the pudding. It was a first-rate pudding. You should have seen old Ratcliff scoffing it."

"And you should see him now," said Tom Merry, grinning, in spite of himself. "He's trying to shut himself up like a pocket-knife. You—you villain! What did you put in the pudding?"

"Only the proper things," said Figgins obstinately. "Figs, and flour, and breadcrumbs, and sugar, and suet, and syrup of figs—"

"And what?"

"Syrup of figs—"

"Ow! ow! Ger-r-r-rooh! Syrup of figs! That accounts! You—you villain! You horrible assassin! Syrup of—ow!"
But let us draw a veil.

There was one good result of that terrible experience. It brought to the doctor's notice the state of dissatisfaction existing in the New House, and although the Head did not exactly find fault with the management of Mr. Ratcliff's sister, yet he wired in haste to Mrs. Kenwigg to return at the earliest possible moment, which that good lady did. Glad enough were Figgins & Co. to see the house-dame again.

So good came out of evil, as it often does. But it was a long, long time before the boys of St. Jim's forgot Figgins fig pudding.

THE END.

Next Thursday

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TEMPEST HEADLAND

A SPLENDID NEW SCHOOL TALE.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

READ THIS FIRST!

Tempest Headland is a large school standing in an exposed position of Britain's coast.

A fearful storm is raging outside, when Cyril Conway tells Herr Ludvig, who is taking the class for German, that he can see from the window a ship being driven ashore. Dr. Buchanan, the headmaster, Herr Ludvig, and the boys immediately make their way to the cliff, but on reaching there they find that the ship has sunk. However, the Head is instrumental in saving a little black boy. He is taken to the school, and money to the amount of £1,000, with a request that it may be used for his up-bringing, is found on him. A medical man examines the nigger, and he finds the boy has had such a shock to his system as to affect all memory of the past. He does not even remember his name, so the Head leaves it to the boys to re-christen him. After a lengthy discussion, Billy Barnes and Cyril decide on naming their new schoolmate Snowy White Adonis Venus. He is taken as a fag by Graft, a bully.

One afternoon Venus is told by Graft to get tea ready, which he does, and makes himself thoroughly at home. Just as he is finishing his meal Graft, with his croney, Snigg, enters the study.

(Now go on with the story.)

Graft's Punishment.

If you have ever seen a man who thinks he has seen a ghost he must have resembled Graft. His face had turned livid, and it twitched. His fury was far too great for words.

"I tink I'm 'bout up to time," observed Venus, stuffing the last piece of cake into his mouth, and helping it down with the remains of the tea. "It's just de quarter ob de hour."

"Why, you little demon!" hooted Graft. "Do you mean to say that you have dared to consume my provisions?"

"Why, you told me to get tea, and dat's exactly what I hab been doing."

"You black beast!" howled the infuriated bully. "I told you to get my tea!"

"Don't remember anything like dat. You said get tea, and I naturally tought you meant my tea."

"Oh, I'll about skin you alive for this!" yelled Graft, rushing at him, though he first seized his cane.

Now, Venus had had enough of that cane, and he was not taking any more if he could help it. He dodged under the table, and hit Snigg on the nose when that worthy tried to stop him. Then Venus went round the table, with Graft in hot pursuit. The bully got in some stinging cuts, so Venus got under the table again; and when Graft looked beneath it to see where to hit, Venus clenched his fist and hit the bully between the eyes.

Graft commenced to kick beneath the table now, not daring to show his face there again; and as Venus backed away from the kicks, Snigg seized him by the ears.

"It's all right, Graft!" cried Snigg. "I've got him!"

"Drag him out!" roared the bully, locking the door. "I will make a terrible example of him. Here, wait a bit. I will help you."

Venus was in a fearfully awkward position—in fact, he was on his back; and as Snigg commenced to lug him out by the ears, Graft helped by seizing him by the collar, for which reason Venus had to come; but as they wrenched him out he clutched at the cloth, and everything that was on the table fell on the top of him with a dismal crash.

The teapot fell by his side. It was a metal pot. Seizing it, he struck backwards over his head, and bent that teapot with

Snigg's head. That got rid of Snigg so nicely that Venus tried the effect on Graft, and the severe blow the bully received on the nose caused him instantly to release his hold.

Venus was up like a wild-cat. Darting to the fender, he seized the poker, then he bounded on the table.

"Now, dis is where dis child has a sort ob advantage," observed Venus, catching Graft a frightful crack over the head with the poker. "Yah, yah, yah! I rader tink I'm coming off first best dis journey. Come on, Snigg. Come and pull me off de table, and if you succeed in doing dat I shall be surprised in shifting me. Come on, Graft. I would like to surprise you at de same time. Dere's going to be some fun directly you get widin reach ob dis poker."

"Fury! I will have a pretty settlement for this!" panted Graft. "Catch him at the back, Snigg. You know that I invited you to tea; well, the little brute has consumed all our provisions. I got that jam and cake specially, and the thief has wolfed every bit of it. He has eaten a whole pot of the best jam and a plum cake."

Snigg was very angry at his lost tea. He was remarkably fond of good food, and as far as he could see they were not going to have any that night. He got behind Venus, reached forward his hand to grab him by the ankle, then he received a rap over the knuckles with the poker that caused him to dance round the room and howl; while Graft got too close, and he got another rap over the head that must have raised a bump.

How matters would have ended it is difficult to say. Probably Venus would have been knocked off the table, and then he would have had a rough time of it; but the fearful noise they were making was distinctly audible to Jim, the captain of the college, as he had his tea in his study. He came to the door and, finding it locked, put his shoulder against it, and sent it flying inwards.

"Get off the table, Venus!" ordered Jim.

"Nunno, old boss!" exclaimed Venus, who thought this was another foe. "I'm defending dis situation to de best ob my ability, and if you come widin reach ob dis poker, you will notice dat fact."

"You surely don't think that I am such a coward as to touch you!" exclaimed the young captain, glancing round the room. "I detest bullying. I think a big fellow who bullies a little one is a contemptible cur. Come, Venus. I pledge my word of honour that these brave creatures shall not touch you."

"In dat case I'm off!" exclaimed Venus, springing to the captain's side, though he still held the poker in readiness.

"You see what the little villain has done!" cried Graft, trembling with passion.

"I see that there is a good deal of damage done to your study," retorted the captain. "I will question Venus."

"And, I suppose, accept his version of the affair?"

"Not necessarily; but I would not take yours because you have lied to me so often. Come this way, Venus. Oh, you need not have the slightest fear of Graft. He would not dare to touch you in my presence."

Then the captain led the way to his own study, and when he heard what had happened he laughed.

"Mind," he exclaimed, "I am not quite certain that you made a genuine mistake," laughed Jim. "Still, you appear to have got your own back, so I shall let the matter drop. You may be sure that Graft will not say anything more about it. Be off with you!"

Then Venus bolted, and having found Cyril, told him exactly what had happened.

"Now, look here, Snowy White Adonis Venus," exclaimed Cyril, when that worthy entered the study where Cyril and

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(Continued).



THE TEMPEST HEADLAND

The Only New and Original School Tale. By S. CLARKE HOOK.

Billy Barnes were supposed to be preparing their lessons, "you say Graft and Snigg hurt you?"

"I rader tink so," answered Venus. "Then you can depend on it they did. If you think you are hurt, it is nearly sure to be the case. Very well, it is our duty to teach Graft that he cannot bully small boys, even if they are as black as a chunk of coal, with impunity."

"He did it wid a thick stjck; I don't tink he used a punity!"

"Ah, well, that makes it worse! Now, it is our duty to punish him, and that is what we must do this very night. We have a splendid opportunity, because Herr Ludvig is going out, and I happen to know he has asked Graft to see that lights are out. The only question that remains for us to decide is how to punish him; and, seeing that Billy is a boy of brilliant ideas—you can tell that by the appropriate name he gave you, Venus—why, we will leave it to Billy to decide how Graft shall be punished."

"Let me think," growled Billy. "I say, be careful, Billy!" exclaimed Cyril, springing to the door, and pretending to stand in readiness to bolt from the room. "If you get thinking too deeply, there is no telling what will happen."

"You dry up! I often get some good ideas, only I forget 'em again. Do you want to punish him severely?"

"Certainly." "Well, he will come up the stairs." "Undoubtedly! People often do when they go upstairs."

"We can be on the upper landing." "Good again! It is really wonderful where it all comes from!"

"There's a fourteen-pound weight in the kitchen scales. I can get it, and we can drop it on his head as he comes up!"

"Scissors! Why not drop the garden roller? Or we might poleaxe him while we are about it!"

"Well, I thought you wanted to punish him?"

"So I do, but I don't want to brain him!"

"Well, slop a gallon of paraffin over him, and set him alight!"

"Billy! Your ideas are charming, but they are rather too drastic!"

"We could shoot him in the legs with Mopps's blunderbuss!"

"So we could, but we might get hanged for it. That would be unpleasant. No; we must punish him in a lighter manner than that."

"Shave all his hair off, and paint his head yellow and his nose green!"

"Who is going to hold him?"

"You and Venus can while I do the painting."

"I see a drawback."

"Well, let's tie him up, and flog him!"

"That sounds all right, but there is the same difficulty about the tying. I don't mind flogging him a little bit; but I would not care to tie him up, and—"

"I've got it! Let's sling him up. Make a noose in a strong cord, lasso him over the banisters, haul him up, make him fast, and flog him!"

"Excellent! I am not going to raise difficulties over such a brilliant idea as that. We must be careful not to catch him by the neck."

"Why?" inquired Billy. "Well, we might possibly hang him if we did that." "So we might. I never thought of that. Still, we ain't likely to do that. You leave it to me. I know where there is just the rope we want; then I will borrow a riding-whip, and we can lash him from the top of the landing."

"Good again! Make your arrangements. There's not much time to lose if you are going to learn that history."

"I think I know it." "All right, Billy; but I'll bet the master won't when he comes to hear you to-morrow. When did Henry the Eighth commence to reign?"

"Why, in—in 1709."

"All right, Billy; that's not a bad start! You are only a couple of centuries out of it."

"P'raps I'm thinking of Henry the Ninth," growled Billy.

"I should say you were thinking of Henry the Thirtieth!"

"Well, I don't care! What's it matter to me when he commenced to reign? I know he's dead now."

"Well, I see you do know some history, after all; but Mr. Napier asked me to thump a little of the lesson into your noddle, and if you tell him Henry the Eighth reigned a hundred and sixty years after he died, he will think I haven't taken much pains."

"Oh, bother him! I can't remember all the dates."

"I've noticed that, Billy. But be off and get your rope!"

"Was tinking what dat boy will do when he gets loose," observed Venus, as Billy left the room.

"We sha'n't let him know that we have done it," answered Cyril. "Besides, he will hurt you as much as he can for having wrecked his study; so he won't be able to hurt you any more for slinging him up."

"Dat so? Still, he might keep on hurting me two-free times. All de same, he's got to be slung, so what comes after it won't make any difference."

It was such a common occurrence for Cyril to have some lark on at night that the boys in his dormitory took no heed of him when he left the room, followed by Venus and Billy.

They had concealed their apparatus in the passage outside, and as they closed the dormitory door they were in darkness; but they relied on Graft bringing up a candle.

"He doesn't always do so," murmured Cyril; "but even if he does not on this occasion, I think I shall be able to see him sufficiently to lasso the brute. Don't either of you speak, but, directly I drop the rope over him, pull for all you are worth. He will be heavy, but the three of us will be able to haul him up easily; and we don't want to hoist him too high. So long as we get him off his legs that will do. Directly we get him up, leave him to Venus and me. We shall be able to hold the rope easily, and you shove your arm through the balusters, Billy, and lash away for all you are worth. Never mind his howls. He has got to have a severe lesson, remember!"

"He will get it," murmured Billy. "I owe him a bit, and if I don't pay him to-night, it will be because the lasso doesn't act."

"Hark! I can hear his footsteps now! He's coming without a light, but that does not matter."

Cyril leant over the rail, and he could just make out Graft's form ascending the stairs beneath. The next moment the noose was round the bully's body, and Cyril murmured one word.

That word was "Pull!" and that is exactly what they did. They all gave such a violent wrench that they raised their victim about a foot, and while Cyril and Venus held him in that helpless position, Billy lashed away in a manner that produced some of the most awful roars ever heard.

"Stop it, Billy—stop it!" gasped Cyril.

"No fear!" panted Billy, lashing away. "He hasn't had half enough yet!"

(Another long instalment of this splendid school story in next Thursday's number. Please order your GEM in advance.)

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