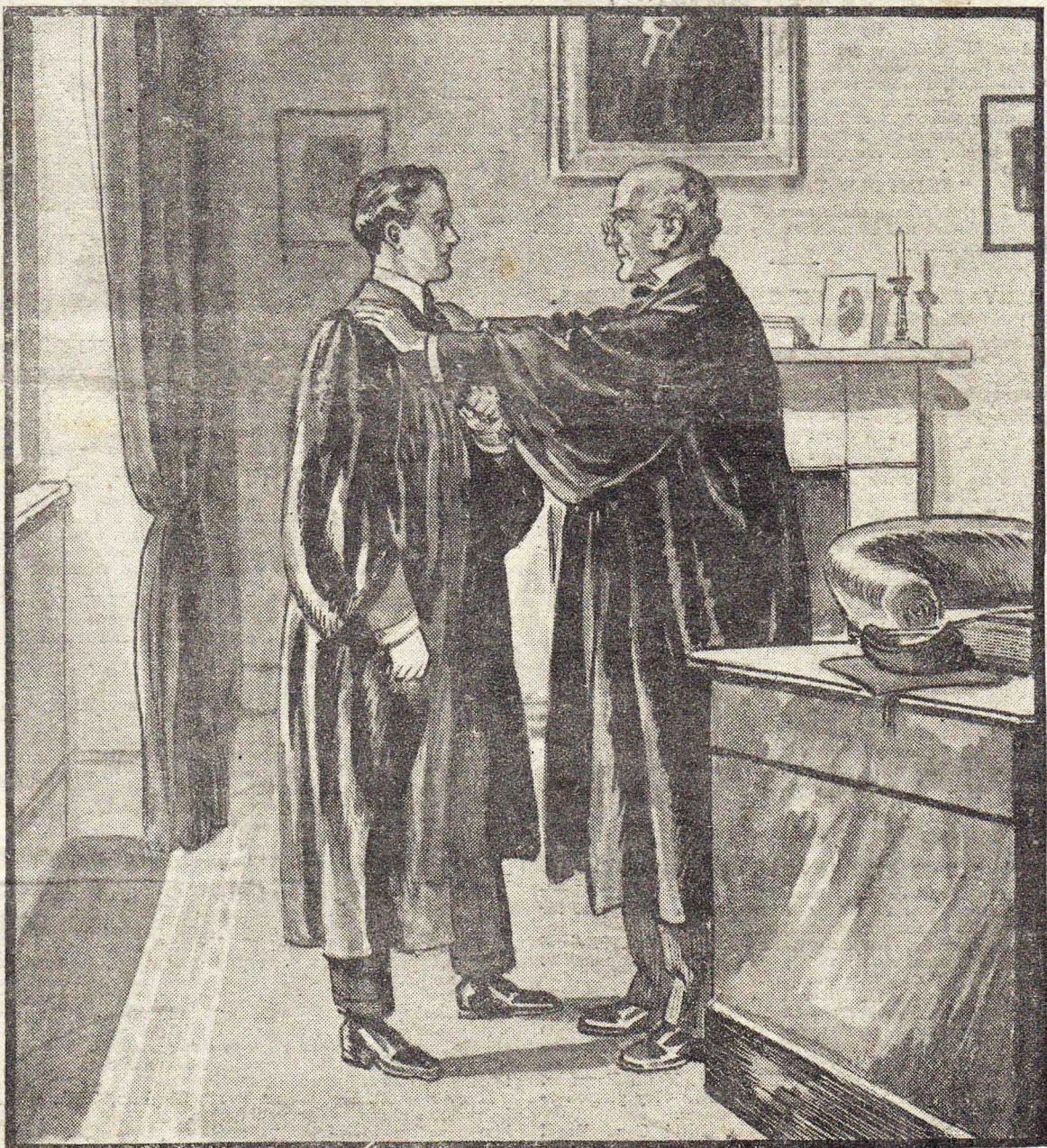


M. L. Norman

THE MAN FROM THE FRONT!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete Tale of School Life at St. Jim's.



A PARDON FOR THE PRODIGAL!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON E.C.
 OUR · · THREE · · COMPANION · · PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY CHUCKLES."
 — LIBRARY — ; — POPULAR — ; — 1/2P —
 EVERY MONDAY ; EVERY FRIDAY ; EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday:

"SKIMPOLE THE SPORTSMAN!"
 By Martin Clifford.

Next Wednesday's grand, long, complete story of school life at St. Jim's deals with that weird and wonderful genius of the Shell, Herbert Skimpole. To the boundless astonishment of his schoolfellows, Skimmy develops a craze for "backing winners," and becomes mixed up in all sorts of shady doings. That there are charitable motives working in his mighty mind is apparent to Tom Merry & Co., but for whom

"SKIMPOLE THE SPORTSMAN!"

would certainly have made an untimely exit from St. Jim's. Martin Clifford will be unanimously voted at his best in next week's fine story.

PRIVATE BROWN OF THE LANCASHIRES.
 Who Will Write and Cheer Him Up?

Lonely soldiers are gradually diminishing in number, thanks to the warm-hearted attentions of scores of loyal readers; but here is a Tommy who would appreciate a few chummy letters from fellow-readers. Read Private Brown's human epistle:

"Dear Editor,—I should be very grateful if you would, through the medium of the 'Gem' Library, be kind enough to put me into touch with other readers of the companion papers. I have been out in the firing-line nearly a year, and only have my parents to write to. I have few friends.

"I have taken a great interest in your book for a long while, and it is sent out to me weekly by my old schoolmaster, who sends a copy to ten others as well.

"Best of luck from a British Tommy!

"Yours ever,
 "(Private) W. H. BROWN, 14037,
 "10th Battalion,
 "Loyal North Lancashire Regt.,
 "British Expeditionary Force,
 "France."

Now, boys and girls! Rally round, and see what you can do for this loyal son of Lancashire!

In passing, I am pleased to note that some schoolmasters have no hesitation in spreading copies of the companion papers broadcast, so convinced are they as to the sterling quality of the stories provided week by week.

ITEMS OF GENERAL INTEREST.

Seaman W. C. Jackson, H.M.S. Valiant, desires to thank those readers who so kindly responded to his appeal for spare copies of the companion papers.

Alfred Tremlin, Tea Rooms, Lansdown Station, Midland Railway, Cheltenham, is willing to purchase back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet" Libraries prior to No. 200.

Leonard Haynes, 12, River View, New Ferry, Cheshire, has formed a Correspondence Club, devoted to the exchange of picture-postcards, stamps, correspondence, etc. Would-be members in all parts of the world are invited to write, enclosing stamp for particulars.

Private A. Binns, R.M.L.I., H7 Room, North Barracks, Royal Marine Depot, Deal, Kent, would be very pleased to receive spare copies of the companion papers.

No. 549, Driver H. Read, Cheshire Field Coy., Royal Engineers, British Expeditionary Force, France, would appreciate any back numbers which "Gemites" care to send him.

J. C. T. Robinson, 9, Lancaster Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, is anxious to obtain back numbers of "Pitman's Shorthand Journal," "Pitman's Weekly," or other shorthand periodicals.

R. H. Brown, 2, Arthur Street, Anlaby Road, Hull, wants members for his "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to anyone in the United Kingdom. Will anyone writing please enclose a stamped and addressed envelope?

Private J. N. Jackson, 27197, 15th Royal Scots, attached D Coy., 3rd Entrenching Battalion, 3rd Army, B.E.F., would be glad to correspond with a girl reader between 17 and 19.

Private A. Fielder, 16006, 15 Platoon, 4th Coy., 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards, B.E.F., France, would welcome letters from readers.

Cyril Churchey, 110, Underhill Road, Dulwich, S.E., wants to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League for his neighbourhood. He can be seen at home between six and seven any evening.

Private J. Brown, 38039, 51st Field Ambulance, R.A.M.C., B.E.F., France, would like to correspond with a few Lancashire readers.

F. W. Allwood, 117, Clapham Road, Clapham, London, S.W., wants to buy No. 211 of the "B.E. 3d. Library," "Pete & Company."

Private R. Harman, B Coy., Signal Section 3/8 Middlesex Regiment, Sevenoaks, wants to correspond with readers aged 18-22.

R. White, 131, Empress Road, Southampton, wants to form a "Gem" League for boys in his district, and will be glad if anyone interested will write or call.

Miss E. Kennet asks Trooper H. Readman to write her again as she has mislaid his address.

Private J. L. Foreman, 1225, H Coy., South African Scottish, Borden, Hants, would like to correspond with readers.

D. Collins, care of Captain of Dockyard's Office, North Yard, Devonport, and his chum, G. W. Simms, wants to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to anyone in the United Kingdom, and will be glad if those interested will write to Collins.

Chas. F. Piggott, Church Lane, Wilby, Wellingborough, asks for back numbers of the companion papers for a girl-chum who has undergone three operations, and is now bed-ridden.

Clarendon C.C., average age 15, want matches for Saturday afternoons, home or away, within a four-mile radius of Bootle. Hon. Sec., F. Wait, 72, Marsh Lane, Liverpool.

G. Jenkins, 15, Moor Park Avenue, Preston, Lancs, wishes to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League for his town. Welsh readers in Preston cordially invited. Will anyone interested write, enclosing stamped and addressed envelope, or call between three and four on Saturday afternoon?

Regent C.C., average age 14, want matches after two o'clock Saturdays with teams in their district. Hon. Sec., L. Barnett, 39, Maple Street, Fitzroy Square, London, W.

Seaman Arthur S. Handley, 54, Orotava, appeals for a mouth-organ (key C).

F. Bell, 211, Western Road, Sheffield, wishes to organise a junior football league (average age 14-16) from districts such as Abbeydale, Ecclesall, Hunter's Bar, etc., for next season, and will be pleased to hear from anyone interested. Will those writing please enclose stamped addressed envelope?

Private F. Howe, 24508, 3/12, South Lancashire Regt., 2nd London General Hospital, Chelsea, asks for a football. Perhaps some of the "Gem" and "Magnet" Leagues which specialise in the sending of gifts to soldiers may be able to meet this and the requests above; but this suggestion is not intended to deter any other readers who may be able to attend to them from doing so.

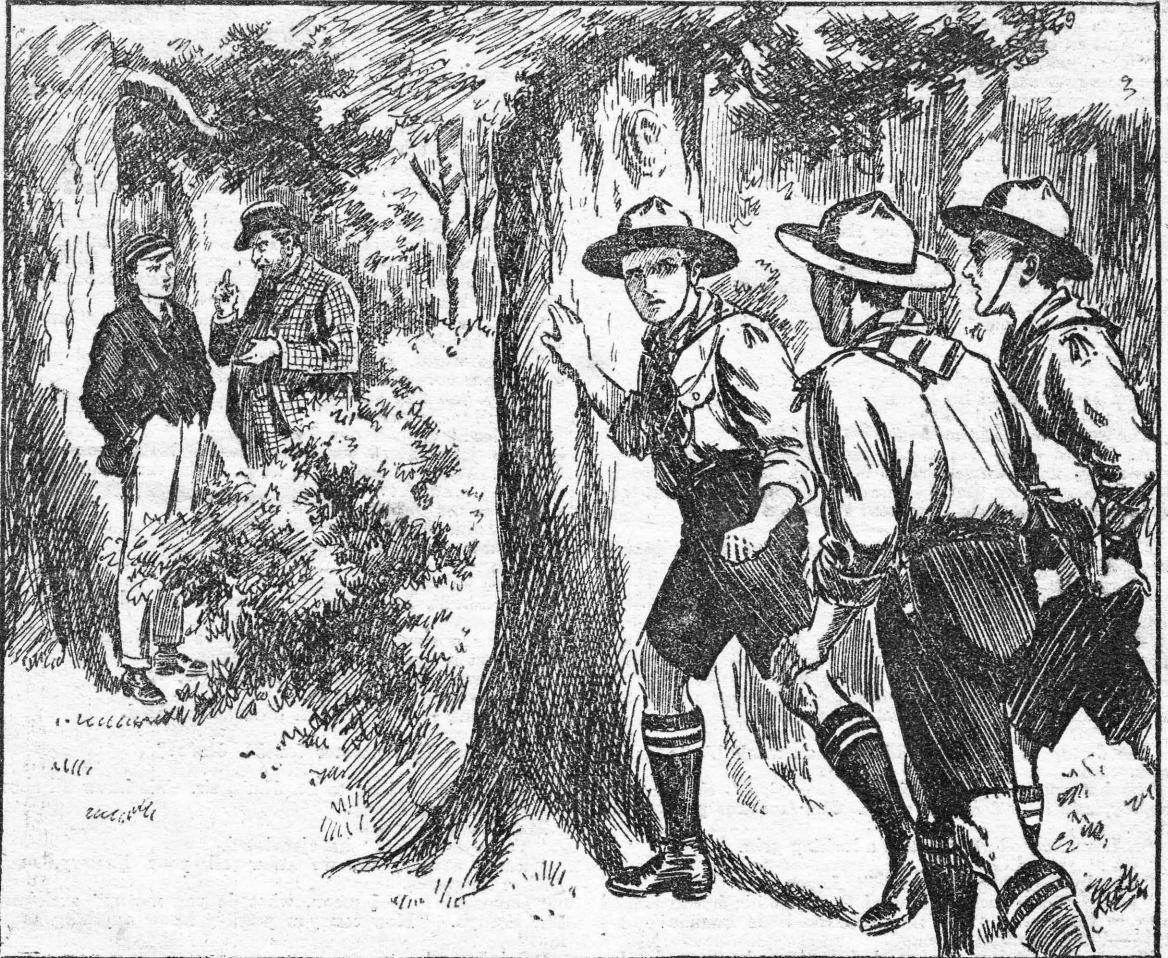
E. J. Kingett, 134, Manor Street, Clapham, S.W., would be grateful if any reader would let him have No. 377 of the "Gem," containing "For Another's Sake."

Donald Penny, 3, Middle Road, Sholing, Southampton, would be obliged if any reader could supply him with the 1910 Christmas Number of the "Gem."

Your Editor

THE MAN FROM THE FRONT!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Through an opening in the wood, two figures were visible, ahead of the juniors. One was Langton of the Sixth, and the other was a squat, stubby man, with a red face, and a bowler hat cocked rakishly on one side of his head. (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 1. Cutts Gets in the Way.

READY!"
"Yes, rather!"
"Quite weedy, deah boy!"
Then Tom Merry gave the signal.
"March!"

The Boy Scouts of the School House marched. There was quite a little army of them.

The Curlew Patrol, of course, was in the lead. There were seven juniors in the Curlew Patrol—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell, and Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy of the Fourth.

But at least fifty scouts were backing up the Curlews. It

was evidently an important occasion. Some of the juniors were armed with bugles, mouth-organs, or comb-and-paper; not part of the ordinary equipment of a Boy Scout. This showed that the occasion was very special indeed.

It was, indeed, very special. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, had left St. Jim's for a time. The Housemaster had served at the Front, and returned wounded, and his old wound had begun to trouble him again. He had left St. Jim's for a rest on the Yorkshire coast. The juniors were sorry enough to see him go, for Mr. Railton was very popular. But they were preparing to give a great welcome to the gentleman who was taking his place during his absence. For that gentleman, Herbert Selwyn, M.A., had also served in Flanders, and was home on extended leave while recovering from the effects of a gas

Next Wednesday,

"SKIMPOLE THE SPORTSMAN!" AND "INTO THE UNKNOWN!"

attack. A man who had fought at the Front, and had been "gassed" by the savage Huns, was a man whom the St. Jim's juniors delighted to honour.

Hence the march of the Boy Scouts of the School House.

It was quite a School House affair, the New House being quite out of it. Herbert Selwyn was coming to St. Jim's as temporary Housemaster of the School House, and the School House fellows were determined to make it clear that the new Housemaster was, as Blake expressed it, a "School House chap." Upon the House was reflected a portion of the glory Mr. Selwyn had won in the trenches.

Cutts of the Fifth was lounging in the gateway, with his chum St. Leger, when the scouts came marching down. Cutts stared at them.

"Hallo! What's the name of this game?" he asked.

"We're going to meet the new Housemaster," explained Tom Merry. "He gets to Rylcombe at three, and we're going to give him a reception."

"And an escort to St. Jim's," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We are going to show him how the School House appreciates pluck. You can come along if you like, Cutts, deah boy."

Cutts laughed.

"Thanks! I don't usually play monkey tricks with a gang of fags!" he replied.

"Why, you cheeky rotter——" said Blake.

"You feahfully impertinent beast——"

"Get out of the way, Cutts!" said Tom Merry sharply.

"Can't you see you're blocking the way?"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

St. Leger stepped aside, but Cutts remained where he was. The dandy of the Fifth apparently wished to make it clear that he was not to be ordered by juniors.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Tom warmly.

Cutts nodded.

"Well, get aside!"

"Oh, shut up, you cheeky fag!" said Cutts.

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"March!" he said curtly.

The scouts marched on again.

As Gerald Cutts was directly in their path, and did not step aside, they marched right into him. Cutts, apparently, had the impression that they would go round him. But they did not go round him; they went over him.

Bump!

Cutts went over, in great surprise, as five or six juniors bumped into him, and he gave a roar.

"Tread on him!" chuckled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cutts was trodden on.

The Fifth-Former made a spring to rise, but he was promptly bumped over again, and the School House scouts tramped over him cheerily. Nearly every boot in the "army" was wiped on him before the scouts had passed, and they marched on down Rylcombe Lane, chuckling.

Cutts sat up dazedly.

The dandy of the Fifth did not look much like a dandy now.

His hat was gone, his hair was tousled, his clothes were muddy, and his collar was a rag. His face was purple with rage.

St. Leger looked at him with a lurking grin.

"Oh!" gasped Cutts.

"Cheeky little beasts!" said St. Leger.

"I—I'll smash them!" howled Cutts, as his friend helped him to his feet. "I—I'll smash the little hounds! I—I'll——" Cutts almost choked.

He strode out into the road, but there he paused. In-furiated as he was, Cutts realised that it would not do to tackle half a hundred juniors at once. He gave up the idea, and went in again.

He strode into the School House with black brows.

"Great Scott! What's the matter, Cutts?"

It was Langton of the Sixth who spoke, as he met the Fifth-Former in the passage. Cutts gave him a black look. There was no love lost between him and the prefect. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was away, and during his absence Langton was House-captain—a position Cutts had hoped to secure for himself.

"I've been mobbed by a gang of juniors!" Cutts said, between his teeth. "That's how you keep the rats in order, Langton!"

"I dare say you asked for it!" said Langton tartly. "But if you make a complaint, I'll look into it."

"Oh, rot!"

Cutts strode on savagely, and went to the Fifth-Form dormitory to clean himself. He needed it.

Langton glanced after him, and shrugged his shoulders. He knew Gerald Cutts and his ways pretty well, and he had little doubt that the dandy of the Fifth had indeed "asked" for it.

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Langton left the house, and went down to the gates. He looked down the road after the army of scouts, who were still in view, marching in order. He smiled a little at the sight, and struck off across the fields. But the smile disappeared from Langton's face as he walked on, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. A frown was on his brow, a troubled look in his eyes. Most of the School House seniors considered that Langton had been lucky to step into Kildare's place while the captain of St. Jim's was away. If they could have seen him now, they would have seen that the House-captain was far from enjoying his new position.

CHAPTER 2.

The Man from the Front.

"HERE we are, here we are, here we are again!" sang Monty Lowther, as the School House scouts arrived at the little station in Rylcombe.

It wanted a few minutes to three.

"Now, do we wait outside, or line up on the platform?" asked Jack Blake.

"Outside," said Tom Merry. "Same as we did when we gave Sergeant Brown his reception."

"Bai Jove! It's wathah a pitay we haven't a bwass band, the same as we had that time," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"It wasn't much of a success that time," grinned Blake. "It turned out to be a German band you'd engaged, you ass!"

"Weally, Blake, accidents will happen. I weally considah we ought to have eithah a bwass band or a twiuphal arch."

"Bow-wow! I've got my mouth-organ," said Digby.

"A mouth-organ is hardly sufficient musical honours for a chap who has been gassed by the Huns, Dig."

"I'd have brought my cornet," said Herries, "but some silly ass has hidden it!"

"Quite wight, Hewwies. Mr. Selwyn could not possibly stand your cornet aftah bein' gassed by the Huns."

"Why, you silly ass——"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Order!" rapped out Tom Merry. "We haven't come here to jaw! Here comes the train. Now, look out for Selwyn. When he comes out, we give him three times three."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors waited eagerly.

The train was in the station, and the eyes of all the scouts were fixed upon the entrance.

There was a sudden murmur:

"Here he comes!"

A well-built, handsome young man stepped out of the station.

He was a stranger in Rylcombe, so the juniors had no doubt that it was the new Housemaster.

Tom Merry stepped forward, raising his hat.

"Mr. Selwyn?" he asked.

The young man glanced at him, and nodded.

"Yes."

"The new Housemaster for St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"Good! We belong to St. Jim's, sir. We know all about you," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Selwyn started.

"You—you what?" he ejaculated.

"Yaas, wathah, sir, we know all your histowry," said Arthur Augustus.

"Impossible! I—I mean, what do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Selwyn. "How can you possibly know anything about me?"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's in the papers, sir," said Tom Merry wonderingly. "Everybody knows about you, sir—about your chucking out the German bomb, and being gassed, and—and——"

"Oh, I—I see!"

The young master was himself again in a moment. Tom Merry could not help wondering why he had been so startled.

"We've come to meet you, sir," said Blake. "We're all School House chaps, and we're rather proud to have you, sir."

Mr. Selwyn smiled.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Now!" he said.

"Hurray!"

It was a roar of cheering from the scouts.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

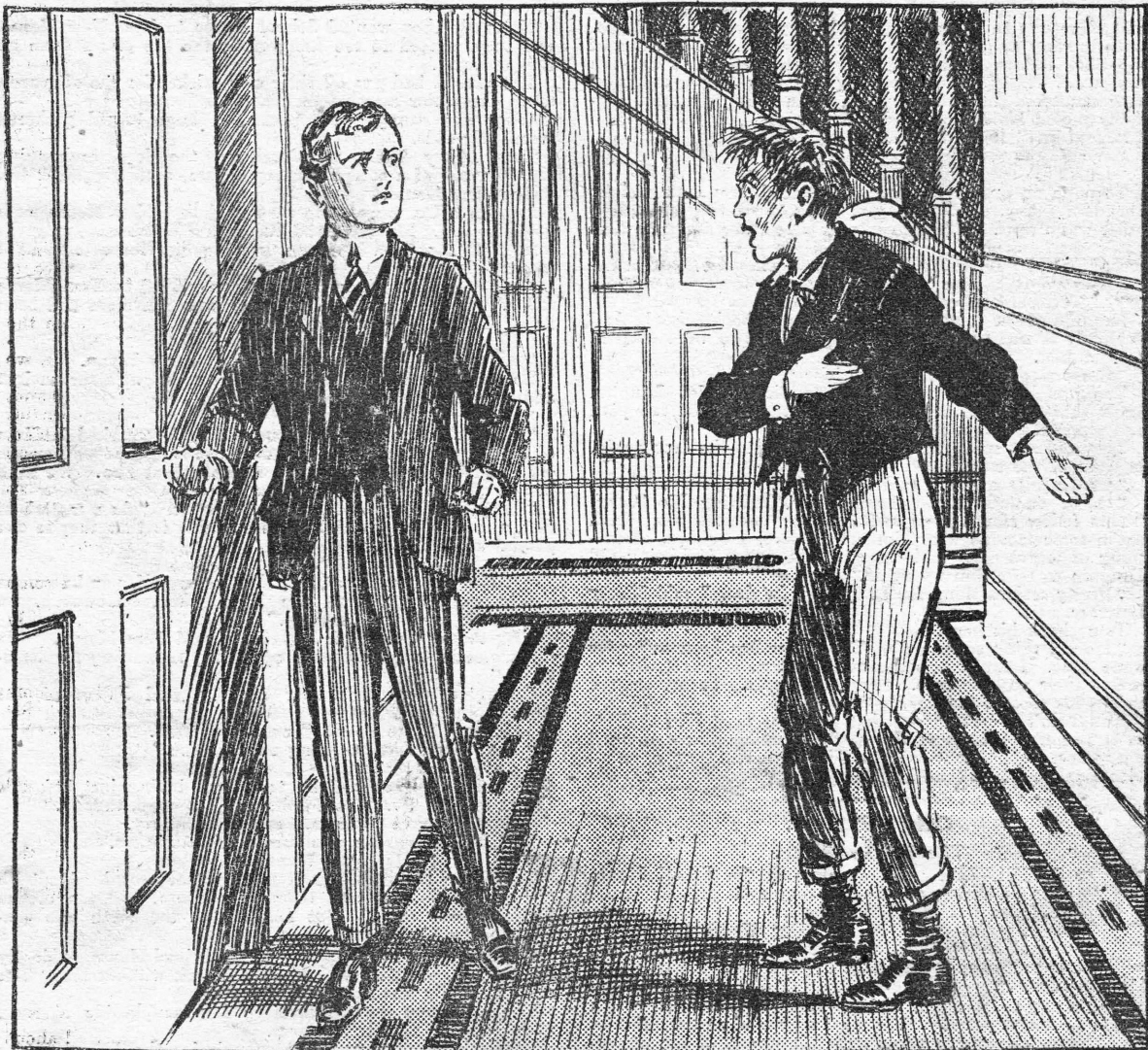
Mr. Selwyn looked astonished. It was evident that he had not looked for this very impressive greeting.

"Bless my soul!" he said.

"Thwee times thwee, deah boys!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Hurray!"

The new Housemaster laughed.



"I've been mobbed by a gang of juniors," said Cutts, between his teeth. "That's how you keep the rats in order, Langton." "I dare say you asked for it," said Langton tartly. "But if you make a complaint, I'll look into it." (See Chapter 1.)

"My dear boys!" he exclaimed.
 "Silence!" said Tom Merry. "Silence for Mr. Selwyn!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Speech!" howled the juniors.
 Mr. Selwyn laughed again. He was very much astonished by the enthusiasm on the part of the St. Jim's fellows, but he was taking it quite good-humouredly.
 "My dear boys, I thank you very much for this friendly greeting—"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "But please do not make a fuss."
 "Weally, sir, we are bound to make a fuss of a hewo from the Front, sir," said Arthur Augustus.
 "We know what you've done, sir, you see," said Talbot of the Shell.
 "I have done no more than any Tommy at the Front, my boys," said Mr. Selwyn. "However, I thank you for your friendly intentions."
 "I—I say, we're a guard of honour, sir," said Tom Merry anxiously. "You—you don't mind if we escort you to St. Jim's?"
 "Bless my soul, nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Mr. Selwyn. "I should recommend you to spend this fine afternoon in scout practice. I have really no need of an escort to the school. Good-afternoon, my boys!"
 The Housemaster saluted the scouts, and strode away down the High Street.
 "Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Blake dashed after the Housemaster.
 "Excuse me, sir; as you don't know the way to St. Jim's—"
 "I know it well," said Mr. Selwyn. "I—I mean, I can find it easily enough. Thank you all the same."
 He strode on, and Blake rejoined his comrades, looking rather glum.
 "The giddy escort is off!" he remarked.
 "Wathah a wotten fwoot!" said Arthur Augustus.
 "Well, I suppose a giddy hero really doesn't like being made a fuss of," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Never mind, give him a cheer, anyway. He can't grumble at a cheer."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 The School House scouts burst into a roar. It followed Mr. Selwyn down the street till he disappeared into the leafy lane, his ears burning a little.
 "Twue hewoes are always modest," remarked Arthur Augustus sapiently. "I am wathah a modest chap myself."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, deah boys, I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at in that wemark."
 "Well, the show's over," remarked Blake. "Who says ginger-pop?"
 "Ginger-pop!" said a score of voices.
 And there was a general adjournment to Mrs. Murphy's tuckshop in the High Street. The Terrible Three strolled away towards the school. As the grand reception was over,
 THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 434.

and there was to be no guard of honour, Tom Merry & Co. were anxious to get back to cricket practice. The chums of the Shell followed a footpath across the fields and through the wood. They were discussing the new Housemaster as they sauntered through the wood, when Monty Lowther suddenly pulled his companions to a halt.

"Hold on!" he murmured.

"What's the row?"

"Look!"

Through an opening in the wood two figures were visible, ahead of the juniors. One was Langton of the Sixth; the other was a squat, stubby man, with a red face and a bowler-hat cocked rakishly on one side of his head. The juniors recognised Mr. Banks, a disreputable bookmaker, who sometimes made Rylcombe his headquarters.

The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

Langton of the Sixth and Mr. Banks the bookmaker! And evidently it was no chance meeting. The two were deep in earnest talk.

"Come away!" muttered Tom Merry.

The juniors had a natural disinclination to let Langton know that they had seen him. They turned from the path and plunged through the wood.

They did not speak till they came out into the lane again, in sight of the school.

"That's jolly queer!" said Manners at last.

"Queer enough," said Tom Merry, knitting his brows.

"That fellow Banks is an awful rascal. Langton was mixed up in some trouble with him once before, I believe. Something of it got out. It looks as if the rotter is getting old Langton to take him up again."

"Pretty serious thing for Langton if he does," said Monty Lowther.

Tom shook his head.

"I don't think so, though. The rotter has been away for some time. I fancy he's spotted Langton, and is trying to revive their acquaintance. Langton wouldn't be ass enough to put his foot in it twice."

And Tom's chums agreed that that was most likely. But, as it was no business of theirs, the Terrible Three decided not to speak of the matter at St. Jim's. A still tongue, on all occasions, showed a wise head.

CHAPTER 3.

The House Match.

MR. SELWYN took his place in the School House at St. Jim's, and he was very soon popular in the House and in all the school.

Figgins & Co. of the New House pronounced that he was one of the best, and declared their willingness to "swap" Mr. Ratchiff, their own Housemaster, for him any day.

The young master took a keen interest in cricket, which added to his popularity. He was a keen cricketer, and as he had now almost recovered from the effects of the poison-gas attack, he was able to take his place on the playing-fields. He turned up at the nets sometimes with the First Eleven, and both his batting and his bowling elicited cheers from the fellows who went down to Big Side to watch his play.

The senior match between School House and New House was due about a week after Mr. Selwyn's arrival, and the School House master took a keen interest in it. In Kildare's absence, Langton was cricket captain for the School House. Langton at his best was a splendid cricketer, and the School House hoped to win, in spite of the loss of Kildare, their mighty batsman.

But some of the fellows had noticed that Langton seemed a good deal off-colour of late, and some of them were a little anxious about it.

Cutts of the Fifth, in especial, had an eye on Langton.

Although he was only in the Fifth, Cutts had hoped to take Kildare's place during his absence, and it was no secret that he resented Langton's getting ahead of him in that respect. Cutts was a first-rate cricketer when he liked, though, as a rule, he neglected the game. He was in the House senior eleven, and was second only to Langton and Darrel.

Tom Merry & Co. also noted the curious change in Langton. They could not help connecting it in their minds with his interview with the bookmaker. They liked and respected the cricket captain, and they hoped sincerely that he had not become entangled again with the rascally bookmaker. But not a word on that subject passed their lips outside their own study.

The juniors took a keen interest in the House match. It was not, as Lowther remarked, of quite as much importance as a junior House match, in which their noble selves played. But it was next in importance.

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Naturally they wanted School House to beat New House, and they wanted to see Langton at the top of his form on that occasion.

The juniors had put off their own cricket for the afternoon when the senior match took place.

When the stumps were pitched a huge crowd gathered round Big Side.

Tom Merry & Co. were well to the fore, exchanging remarks, not of a complimentary nature, with Figgins & Co. of the New House.

Figgins & Co. were quite convinced that New House were going to win. Monteith and Baker and Webb were in great form, and Monteith had been keeping his House team hard at practice.

"It's a giddy walk-over," Figgins confided to Tom Merry & Co. "You might have had a look-in if Kildare had been here. But now——"

"Now it's a dead cert," said Ke.r.

"All over bar shouting," remarked Fatty Wynn.

To which the School House juniors replied with the ancient and elegant rejoinder:

"Rats!"

"Kildare's gone, and Langton's seedy," remarked Redfern of the New House. "As for your man Cutts, he's all swank—a good bit more swank than cricket about him. We shall pull it off this time, my pippins."

"Wats, Weddy!" said Arthur Augustus. "As a mattah of fact, the only weak weakness in our side is that they're not playin' any juniahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If Langton would put in Talbot or myself, you know, we should walk wight ovah the New House. Howevah, we shall walk ovah you, anyway."

"By the way, where is Langton?" said Tom Merry. "He doesn't seem to have turned up. They're waiting for something."

"Langton went out after dinner," said Julian of the Fourth.

"My hat! Sure he did?" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes; I saw him wheeling out his bike."

Figgins gave a snort.

"Precious cricket captain, to go out biking just before a House match. Just like a School House chap, though."

"He must have come in," said Tom Merry.

"Might have had a puncture," said Manners.

"Bai Jove! He hasn't turned up, anyway."

There was a growing excitement in the crowd. Monteith and all the New House team were there, and ten of the School House team. But Langton of the Sixth was conspicuous by his absence.

Darrel and St. Leger hurried to the School House, evidently in search of Langton, but they came back without him. The cricket captain was not there.

The cricketers were discussing his inexplicable absence, with clouded and worried faces.

Kildare's absence was bad enough for the School House team, but if Langton had deserted them as well they had little hope of victory. And Langton's absence was simply unaccountable.

"Hallo, here comes Bertie!" said Jack Blake.

It was Mr. Herbert Selwyn whom Blake alluded to, in that rather familiar manner.

The Housemaster came down to the field, evidently to watch the match. He joined the senior cricketers as he noted their worried looks.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" he said, glancing from one worried face to another.

"Yes, sir, rather!" said Darrel. "Langton hasn't turned up."

Mr. Selwyn looked grave.

"That is extraordinary," he said.

"We can't make it out," said Rushden. "Somebody says he went out on his bike; a jolly queer thing to do just before the match. He may have got hung up somewhere and can't get back. I suppose we shall have to play without him."

"We've waited a quarter of an hour already," said Monteith, a little sourly.

"I suppose we can't wait any longer," said Cutts of the Fifth. "If Langton doesn't choose to come——"

"Something must have detained him," said Mr. Selwyn.

"But it is very unfortunate. Another player had better take his place."

Darrel looked hesitatingly at the Housemaster.

"Would you care to play, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Selwyn started a little.

"I should certainly like it," he said. "I think I am in pretty good form now. But what does Monteith say?"

Monteith nodded cordially enough.

"We'd be glad to see you play, sir," he said. "These chaps have lost both Kildare and Langton now, and we don't want the match to be a walk-over. If you play for them, it will level things up a bit."

"Then I will play with pleasure," said Mr. Selwyn.

The news soon spread that the new Housemaster was to play for the School House side.

Tom Merry rubbed his hands.

"That's ripping!" he said. "We shall pull it off now."

"Well, Selwyn ain't bad," Figgins had to admit. "But it won't make any difference."

"Bow-wow!"

Little more thought was given to the absent Langton. All eyes were on Mr. Selwyn when he turned out in flannels with the School House team.

The young master had almost recovered from the "gassing." He seemed in splendid form. In a few weeks he was to return to the trenches, and naturally he was glad to play the grand old game once or twice during his well-earned period of rest. It was the best way towards complete recovery.

The New House batted first, and Tom Merry & Co. cheered as Mr. Selwyn led his side into the field. And when Mr. Selwyn bowled they cheered louder yet. Langton was a great bowler, but the Housemaster was even a little better. In the innings five wickets fell to him. It was evident that the new recruit was more than equal to his task.

And when School House batted, the Housemaster's performance at the wicket brought a round of cheers. Wickets fell, but not Mr. Selwyn's. He seemed impervious to the New House bowling.

"By Jove, he's ripping!" exclaimed Knox of the Sixth enthusiastically. "Simply splendid! We shall knock the New House sky-high."

Tom Merry & Co. stared at Knox. Knox was not in the eleven, and he was not much of a cricketer at any time, and his enthusiasm astonished the Co. But an explanation very quickly occurred to their minds. Knox had "money on the game." The prefect had backed the School House team to win—strictly under the rose, of course. Tom Merry & Co. knew more of Knox's little ways than the Head of St. Jim's knew.

"Bai Jove, that wottah has been bettin' on the game, deah boys!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weally, he makes me feel wathah ill."

Knox strolled away, looking very gleeful. If he indeed had money on the game, his money seemed safe enough now. Mr. Selwyn was still batting, and had knocked up 60 of his own.

"Hang him!" muttered a savage voice near the juniors.

"Who is he? Hang him!"

Tom Merry looked round quickly.

A red-faced man, with a bowler hat cocked on one side of his head, was standing near him. He recognised Mr. Banks.

"Cheeky rotter, to come here!" muttered Tom.

"Let's shift him out," said Blake.

Tom shook his head.

"The public are admitted to see the matches," he said.

"I suppose he's a right to come if he chooses."

"Hang him!" muttered the bookmaker again, unconscious of the juniors.

"Hallo, chivvy!" said Monty Lowther disrespectfully.

"What are you burbling about?"

"Been putting money on the game?" asked Tom Merry,

with a curl of the lip. "If you have, the sooner you lose it the better."

Mr. Banks scowled. But he made an effort and answered civilly. It was not safe to say there what he would have liked to say.

"That's a good player, young gentlemen," he said. "A master—what?"

"Yes, our new Housemaster," said Tom.

"I've seen the gentleman before somewhere," said Mr. Banks, scrutinising the batsman from the distance. "Where does he come from, sir?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not likely you've seen Mr. Selwyn where he comes from. He comes from the trenches."

"By gad, does he?" said Mr. Banks. "Well, it wasn't in the trenches I've seen him, that flat. But—but I've seen him, I'll take my davy on that!"

The bookmaker moved away, still watching the game and the Housemaster with intent eyes.

It was "owing to the war" that the senior House match at St. Jim's was honoured by Mr. Banks' attention. Racing, as Mr. Banks often complained, had been knocked into a cocked hat by the war, betting, bookmaking, and black-guardism generally being quite out of public favour. If Mr. Banks could not make tenners or fivers on the racecourse, he was quite willing to make "quids" on a cricket match.

But his look showed that on this occasion his money was laid against the School House; and he was not likely to make anything but a loss, owing to Mr. Selwyn's splendid play. For reasons of his own the bookmaker had counted on a School House defeat. But the prospect of a New House win was further off than ever.

School House closed their innings with 160 against 90 of the New House. And struggle as they would, Monteith & Co. could not make up the leeway in their second innings. The School House did not have to bat a second time; they remained the victors with an innings to spare. And the crowd simply roared applause as Mr. Selwyn came off the field with his team. Mr. Banks strode away with a scowling brow; but nobody noticed Mr. Banks. Tom Merry & Co. followed Mr. Selwyn to the School House in a cheering crowd, and the old quadrangle of St. Jim's rang and echoed with their cheers.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Selwyn Is Suspicious.

HERBERT SELWYN sat in his study. The enthusiasm of the Saints had abated a little—though some excited and jubilant juniors were still "keeping it up." An occasional shout from the quadrangle reached Mr. Selwyn's ears as he sat in the quiet room.

The excitement of the match, the keen enjoyment of the game he loved, had brought a boyish brightness into the young master's face while he was in the cricket field; but now that he was alone his expression was serious enough. He had a book in his hand, but he was not reading. He glanced occasionally at the clock. Sometimes a little wrinkle of thought appeared upon his brow. There came a tap at the door of the master's study.

"Come in!" called out Mr. Selwyn, in his clear tones.

The door was opened somewhat timidly, and an athletic young fellow made his appearance. It was Langton of the Sixth whose unaccountable absence at the match had led to Mr. Selwyn taking his place as captain. He looked tired, dusty, and depressed. His eyes met the master's only for a moment, and then dropped. Mr. Selwyn did not appear to notice it.

"Tom Merry said you wished to see me as soon as I came in, sir," said Langton.

"Yes, I asked Merry to tell you," said Mr. Selwyn. "Sit down; you look tired."

Langton sat down.

"I am tired," he said. "I had a long spin, and had a puncture the other side of Rylcombe Wood. I had to walk my machine home."

Mr. Selwyn's keen grey eyes were upon his face, but the captain did not meet them.

"That was what I wanted to see you about. Everyone was surprised when you did not appear with the team, and the fact has excited a great deal of comment. Wasn't it rather reckless to go on a long cycle ride just before the match?"

Langton coloured a little.

"I suppose it was," he said. "Of course, one couldn't foresee the puncture. And I hadn't my outfit with me."

"How unfortunate," said Mr. Selwyn.

"But I wasn't much loss, as it turns out, sir," said Langton eagerly. "I have been feeling seedy for the past few days, and I doubt if I should have put up a very good game. And you filled my place splendidly, sir."

"Well, we succeeded in keeping our end up," said Mr. Selwyn. "But it was a hard-fought contest, and we missed you sorely. The House might have been beaten through your absence, and that would have been very awkward. The team cannot be expected to be satisfied with a captain who does not appear to lead them to the fight."

Langton coloured more deeply.

"I think I know what you mean, sir. If we had lost I should have been asked to resign?"

"It is quite possible."

Langton hesitated a few moments, more than once opening his lips and closing them again. It was evident that he had something to say, and did not quite know how to say it. Mr. Selwyn waited for him to speak.

"I—I shouldn't be wholly unwilling to resign, sir, if you thought it advisable," blurted out Langton, his face very red. "It might be for the good of the school for me to make way for a better man—like Cutts of the Fifth."

Mr. Selwyn looked at him steadily.

"I don't regard Cutts as a better man, either in cricket or in other respects," he said. "And I am far from counselling your resignation. I think you are fitted for the post you hold, if you make up your mind to stick to it and do your duty."

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That is the point, not to allow other interests to come between you and your duty."

Langton looked quickly at the Housemaster.

"I hope I shall always try to do my duty, sir," he muttered uneasily.

"I hope you will," said Mr. Selwyn. "And your first duty is to see that the School House Eleven gets a good record of victories this season. I do not wish to pry into your secrets—I should be the last to do that—but I cannot help remarking that during the past week you have not been quite yourself."

Langton did not speak. The master of the House waited a few moments.

"Very well," he said; "I take it that you have nothing to tell me, and if that is so I am glad. I need not repeat my advice to you. You have attained an honourable position. During Kildare's absence, you are head of the House, and your example influences a large number of your schoolfellows. You must always bear that in mind. And now you may go, for I see you are fatigued."

Langton rose.

"I sha'n't forget what you have said to me, sir," he said. And he quitted the room.

Mr. Selwyn shook his head sadly.

"What is the secret there?" he muttered. "What is wrong with him? Why did he miss the match to-day? The puncture was an excuse to account for his absence, not the cause of it. Why is he willing to resign his post, which so many others are eager to fill? I must see into this; and, if anything is indeed wrong, I will save him from the downward path which has led others to ruin."

And a dark shade crossed the master's face.

He left his study, and made his way towards the headmaster's quarters, a shade of thought still upon his brow. It was chased away by a smile as a voice fell upon his ears, coming from the open door of the junior Common-room.

"I told you that Selwyn would do it, kid"—it was Tom Merry's voice—"and he did it, did Bertie. Good old Bert, that's what I say!"

Mr. Selwyn walked in. Tom Merry looked inclined to fall through the floor when he saw who the visitor was.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir!" he stammered. "I didn't know—"

Mr. Selwyn concealed a smile.

"No, I suppose you did not," he said drily.

Lowther was grinning, but Tom was scarlet. He recovered himself, however, as he saw that the Housemaster did not look angry.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he said, in his frank way. "I shouldn't have spoken of you like that."

Mr. Selwyn nodded.

"I want to speak to you, Merry," he said. "On the cricket-ground to-day I noticed that you were talking with a certain bad character from Rylcombe."

Tom flushed again.

"Do you mean Banks the bookmaker, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Of course, I do not mean to imply that there was any harm in it," said the master of the Shell quickly. "You probably exchanged only a few casual words with him. But I want you to understand that that man is barred; that it is forbidden to any of the boys of St. Jim's to hold any communication with him. He is a bad man. An acquaintance, commenced in the most harmless way, may lead to disaster. You will bear that in mind, Merry?"

The Housemaster's tone was very kind and gentle.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry; "but—but I don't like you to think that I could ever have anything to do with such a howling outsider as that fellow. I just spoke a few words to him. He was growling because we were beating the New House."

"Oh, he was?" said Mr. Selwyn, with a look of interest. He turned to go. "That's all I wished to say, Merry. If my warning was unnecessary, so much the better."

And he quitted the study. The chums of the Shell looked at each other.

Lowther grinned.

"He's down on the bookie," he said. "I wonder—"

He paused reflectively.

Tom looked at him.

"You wonder what, Monty?"

"Why, you know about Langton meeting the bookmaker," said Lowther. "You saw him, didn't you?"

Tom nodded.

"I wonder what Mr. Selwyn would say if he knew that I say, do you think Langton can be mixed up with that rotter at all?"

"Shouldn't think so," said Tom, with a shake of the head. "Langton's too decent to get into anything like that, I fancy. But Mr. Selwyn certainly seems to have the idea in his head that Banks means some kind of mischief."

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While the chums of the Shell discussed the problem, Mr. Selwyn had gone on his way to the Head's study. In response to his tap the deep voice of Dr. Holmes bade him enter. The Head was seated at his desk, a pen in his hand. He laid it down as the Housemaster came in, and nodded to a chair. He looked at Mr. Selwyn over his gold-rimmed pince-nez.

"A rather unpleasant matter has been brought to my notice, Mr. Selwyn," he said; "it refers to a boy in the Sixth. You are aware that a disreputable character has located himself in Rylcombe—a bookmaker named Banks."

"I am aware of it, sir."

"Major Stringer called upon me to-day. As a governor of St. Jim's, he considered it his duty to call my attention to the fact that this bookmaker was seen to meet a St. Jim's lad. The meeting was not a chance one, but evidently a rendezvous, and, from the description of the boy, I am afraid that it is Langton of the Sixth."

Mr. Selwyn drew a quick breath.

"I have been afraid of something of the kind, sir," he said, in a low voice. "My attention has been drawn to Langton lately. But—"

He paused, and Dr. Holmes looked at him inquiringly.

"I shall, of course, see into this matter," said Mr. Selwyn; "but I trust that it is not your wish to be severe with the unhappy lad. Langton is one of the best, but he is unfortunately of a careless, generous disposition, which makes him an easy prey to the designing. I have not the slightest doubt that, at the worst, he will prove to have been more sinned against than sinning."

"I am far from wishing to be severe, Mr. Selwyn," said the Head. "Once, many years ago, I was severe with a culprit, one who had every right to expect mercy at my hands; but I have been punished for my severity."

Mr. Selwyn's face was disturbed for a moment.

"Indeed, sir?" he said, in a quiet voice.

The Head's eyes were moist. A dark and painful memory was stirring in his mind.

Although Mr. Selwyn had been but a short time at St. Jim's, a deep and sincere regard had grown up in the doctor's breast towards the young man.

In Herbert Selwyn, grave beyond his years, yet with a boyish and healthy love of athletic sports, the Head reposed complete trust.

"Frank was my nephew, and he was led away by evil associates—men like this Banks," the Head said, with a sigh. "Of course, he was to blame, but not so much as I deemed at the time. I was hard—very hard; but I was angered that he should have brought shame upon a name that was never sullied before. He was expelled from the school."

There was a long pause.

"You will understand, then," went on the Head, "why I wish to be as merciful as possible to this erring lad. I want to save him from his folly if possible, and only in an extreme case shall I resort to expelling him. The matter, therefore, had better be left in your hands, and need not come officially to my notice at all."

"I hope I shall be able to justify your faith in me, sir," said Mr. Selwyn, rising.

"I have no doubt of it," said Dr. Holmes cordially.

There was a strange expression upon Mr. Selwyn's face as he quitted the study. He paused once in the hall, but shook his head, as if dismissing a thought that had come to him.

CHAPTER 5.

An Unexpected Discovery.

"I SAY, it looks like rain, Tom," said Lowther, looking out of the window of the study in the Shell passage.

"Let it," said Tom Merry. "You aren't afraid of a little wet, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! I'm ready if you are!"

"Then come along, and don't croak."

"Hallo, there's Langton going out!" said Tom Merry, as the St. Jim's captain was seen crossing towards the big bronze gates. "Wonder where he's off to? He ought to be at practice now."

The Shell fellows were soon in their running-clothes, and they left the school and started off at a swinging trot in the direction of Rylcombe Wood.

The sky which had been overcast when they started, grew blacker, and a few drops of rain fell. Tom Merry gave a discontented growl.

"Hang it all, we shall be soaked!"

"What did I tell you?" replied his chum.

"Oh, rats! Don't start being a Job's comforter. Look here, it's going to pour."



The juniors ran down to the bank instantly. "Hallo! Plank slipped?" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Is it wet in there?" "Help!" gasped the man. "Oh, I'll help you!" laughed Tom. (See Chapter 5.)

"It looks like it."

The juniors paused. They were now about a mile from the school, and there was no shelter close at hand.

"Better keep on and get into the wood," suggested Lowther.

"That's better than nothing, I suppose," grunted Tom Merry. "Come on!"

They started off again, the rain falling faster and thicker, and suddenly Tom uttered an exclamation.

"There's the old barn over yonder behind the willows; we can get shelter there until this blows over."

"Right-ho! I never thought of that!"

"We can cut across this field," said Tom Merry.

And he vaulted over a fence and led the way. Lowther followed, glad of a chance to get out of the rain, which now threatened to become a regular downpour.

In a few minutes they reached the old barn.

It was a musty, old, half-ruined building, sometimes used as a shelter for cattle, but now quite deserted. The door was gone, and the window looked like an eyeless socket. The floor was all mud and puddles, and the rain dashed in with the wind at the many apertures.

Lowther shivered.

"What a beastly hole!"

"There's a loft up there," said Tom Merry, pointing to a rickety ladder in one corner. "That will be a bit more comfy, I fancy."

They ascended the ladder cautiously, for it was in the last stage of dilapidation. The loft was dry and sheltered from the wind, though dark and chilly. But they were glad of the shelter, for the rain was now descending in torrents.

Tom Merry looked out gloomily upon the falling rain from a gap in the wall.

For a good half-hour it poured down, and then the sun

showed through a rift in the clouds, with a far from cheerful gleam.

The rain slackened, and Tom gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"We shall be able to get out soon, Monty."

"I hope so," said Lowther, who was going through exercises with imaginary dumb-bells to keep himself warm. "I'm about sick of this. What an obstinate mule you were to come out and get caught in it!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom politely.

He gave a sudden start.

"Hallo, we're going to have company!"

"What do you mean?" asked Lowther, joining him at the gap in the wall where a plank had fallen away.

"Look there!"

"Cutts!" ejaculated Lowther, in wonder.

A figure was running swiftly towards the barn, and both the boys recognised Cutts at once. He stopped and turned his head, with a rapid glance over his shoulder, and then ran on again towards the barn. His action filled the two boys with amazement. The rain had now quite ceased, and why Cutts should hurry into the barn in that manner was a puzzle.

The chums, silent with astonishment, heard the Fifth-Former moving below. Then Tom Merry gripped Lowther's arm suddenly, and pointed. Two figures had appeared from beyond a row of drenched willows, coming from different directions, but both evidently heading for the barn. One was Mr. Banks, the bookmaker, the other Langton of the Sixth. As Tom sighted them, the bookmaker caught sight of Langton, and waved his hand to him.

Then both came on towards the barn. Cutts, below, was quite silent now.

"What's the game?" said Lowther, in a whisper.

Tom Merry's brow was dark.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"SKIMPOLE THE SPORTSMAN!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"It's plain enough," he answered, in the same tone. "Langton is meeting the bookmaker again, and this barn is the rendezvous. That's where he was going when we saw him leave the school; but the rain delayed him. He's been under shelter somewhere."

"I say, that's rotten of him, you know. He oughtn't to meet that horrid bounder," muttered Lowther. "But what is Cutty's little game, then?"

"Looks as if he was spying on Langton."

"Think he would do that?"

"Well, it looks like it. I imagine he's got an inkling of Langton's little games, and has come here to make sure."

"What the dickens are we to do, Tom?"

"Goodness knows! If we make a row, it may get Langton into trouble, and we don't want that. He's doing wrong, of course; but we don't want to give him away. We mustn't let Cutts know we are here. He'd never forgive us for seeing him play the spy, and he'd be all the more down on Langton."

Had not the chums seen Cutts enter the barn, they would never have guessed that anyone was in the apartment below, for he was perfectly silent. Langton and Banks met at the barn, and stopped. They did not enter it. As chance would have it, they stopped just below the gap at which Tom Merry and Lowther stood, in the loft. They were out of sight now, but their voices were plainly to be heard.

"I was near kept away by that blessed rain," said Banks' voice. "I see you've got wet, Master Langton."

"It does not matter. I got under a tree, but it wasn't much use. I'm glad I didn't miss you here. I had your note."

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Master Langton?"

There was a long pause.

Tom Merry and Lowther looked at each other in an extremely uncomfortable way.

The last thing they desired was to play the eavesdropper; but they seemed to have no choice in the matter. They had stepped back from the gap, but the speakers were still only a few yards away, and, believing themselves to be alone, had taken no care to moderate their voices.

While they hesitated, not knowing exactly what to do, the voice of the cricket captain was heard replying to the bookmaker.

"What am I going to do about it, Banks?"

"Yes, that's the question I asked."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you? Then I'll explain, Mr. Blooming Innocent!" sneered the bookmaker. "I had ten quid on the match yesterday trusting to you. Where is that ten quid now?"

"I suppose you lost."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the other sarcastically. "As I laid again the School House, I suppose so, Master Langton."

"Well, that wasn't my fault, was it? I stood out of the match, as I promised."

The chums of the Shell caught their breath. Here was a revelation with a vengeance.

"Wasn't your fault?" growled the bookmaker. "Yes, it was, for you led me to believe that your standing out of the match would give the game away. Instead of which, a chap plays in your place who is worth two of you any day."

"I couldn't foresee that Mr. Selwyn would play. I thought Cutts would take my place."

"Selwyn! Is that his name? Now, Master Langton, I asked you to lose that game in settlement of the six quid you owed me. I'd have taken that in full satisfaction."

"I told you I couldn't do it."

"Oh, yes, you could, if you liked! Why, what was your standing out of the game, except a roundabout way of doing it?"

Langton gave a groan.

"I suppose it was."

"You suppose?" snarled the bookmaker. "You know it was. But you've made a mess of it, and the House won after all, and I'm ten quid out of pocket."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" said Langton. "I'm getting about sick of this. I wish I had never seen you."

The bookmaker chuckled.

"Pay me up my cash, my boy, and you will see the last of me as soon as you like."

"You know I can't do it, or I'd have done it long ago."

"Then if you can't pay, you must make the debt good."

"What do you want?"

"St. Jim's play Rookwood next week. It's a big match, and there is a lot of interest taken in it. The school has a good cricket reputation, and I can find plenty of backers. You'll captain your side?"

"I suppose I shall."

"Then give me a promise that the School will lose—that's all I want, and the account between us is squared. Mind,

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no standing out this time; you're to play, and to lose fair and square. You can easily manage it."

"I can't!"

"What do you mean?"

"I can't do it!"

"You won't, you mean!" snarled the bookmaker. "More squeamishness—eh? Mind how you play the fool with me, Master Langton! To speak plain English, you've got to do it!"

"I can't! I won't!"

"Then look out for squalls!"

The bookmaker turned away. Langton sprang forward and caught him by the arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going up to the school to show you up."

"You beast! You hound! But they'll never believe you."

"Won't they?" sneered Banks. "Not when I've got your own fist to prove my words? Have you forgotten the I O U's, you young fool?"

"You—you cad! You said you'd destroy them if I stood out of the match," panted Langton.

The bookmaker laughed.

"Well, I didn't, and when Dr. Holmes sees them——"

"Wait a minute. Give me time to think. For Heaven's sake, don't be in a hurry!"

"I've no time for fooling around," said the bookmaker, in a surly tone. "I'll tell you what. The Rookwood match is on Wednesday. Let me know up to any time on Tuesday that you've decided to do as I ask. That will satisfy me. But if I don't hear from you, look out!"

And with that Mr. Banks jerked his arm loose from the other's detaining clutch, and stalked away.

Langton stood for some moments rooted to the ground, and then he hurriedly walked away in the direction of St. Jim's.

In the loft the two chums, who had heard almost every word, were very pale. They heard a sound of stirring below, and a few minutes later saw Cutts quit the barn and cross the field at a rapid pace.

"I say, this is a go!" muttered Lowther. "What a ghastly business, Tom!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Rotten! I thought there was something fishy about Langton's cutting the match as he did, but I never dreamed of this!"

"What are we going to do?"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"I think the most important thing is to make that mongrel Banks sit up. The hound! He's planned to get poor old Langton into this fix, of course, and now he's blackmailing him. He's going back to Rylcombe now."

"What of it?"

"Why, he'll have to cross the plank over the ditch, that's all. If we cut round we can get ahead of him, and——"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Come on!" he said.

The chums quitted the barn, and, sprinting at a good pace, they made a detour. The ditch swollen by the recent rain, was deeper than usual, and the water flowed only a few inches lower than the single plank which crossed it by way of a bridge. The bookmaker would have to cross the plank bridge to reach the village from the field where the old barn stood, hence Tom Merry's brilliant idea for discomfiting him. The juniors had made good time, and the bookmaker was not yet in sight when they reached the plank bridge.

"Now then, lend us a hand," said Tom, running lightly across the plank.

The plank rested upon two large flat stones, which raised it above the water, the banks being very low. Having crossed the bridge, the boys seized the end of it, and pushed it across so that only the extreme tip of the plank rested on the stone.

As the reeds grew thickly round the stone, the change in the position of the plank could not be seen from the opposite side; it presented its usual appearance, but it was certain that no one could cross it in safety. Before he had advanced to the middle, the plank was certain to slip and fling him headlong into the swollen stream.

"That's all right," said Tom. "Now to get out of sight, in case the brute suspects the little game."

A clump of willows afforded cover to the juniors.

There they watched for the bookmaker to appear.

He soon came down the opposite bank, and stopped to light his pipe before he stepped on the plank bridge. It was clear that he had not the slightest suspicion. He puffed out a cloud of smoke, and stepped on the plank.

Two steps he made, and then he staggered, as the end of the plank slipped from the stone, and he was hurled forward.

With a sounding splash he smote the water, sending the spray as far as the willows where the chums of the Shell lay hidden, choking with laughter.

Right under the bookmaker went, and came up again, gasping like a porpoise, and he struck out frantically while he gargled and yelled for help.

The juniors ran down to the bank instantly. "Hallo! Plank slipped?" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Is it wet in there?"

"Help!"
"Oh, I'll help you!"

The unlucky bookmaker had floundered to the shore, and was grasping at the reeds. Tom Merry stooped down and caught him by the collar and jerked him loose, and sent him floundering again.

"Want any more help?" he asked politely.
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.
The ditch was not deep enough to imperil the man's life, as Tom knew well. Banks, half choked, and mad with rage, splashed back to the other side and dragged himself out. He shook his fist fiercely at the chums of the Shell.

"You moved the plank, you whelps, I know you did!" he yelled. "I'll make you suffer for this!"

Tom Merry wagged his finger at the exasperated man. "Now, don't you get excited!" he exclaimed. "You've had a wash, anyway, which is bound to do you good. I am sure you wanted one."

And leaving the furious man raving and gesticulating across the stream, the chums turned their backs on him and sprinted away towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

Cutts Makes Terms.

"OH, what shall I do—what shall I do?"
It was Langton who uttered the words as he paced to and fro in his study at St. Jim's, his face pale and twitching, and untold misery in his eyes.

"What shall I do?"

Tap!
The cricket captain paused in his hurried walk, and glanced towards the door. In his excited and miserable state of mind he did not wish to be intruded upon. But as he paced, the tap was repeated, and then the door opened.

It was Cutts of the Fifth who entered. Langton gave him an irritated glance. "What do you want, Cutts?" he asked abruptly. "I want to speak to you."
"Will some other time do? I'm—I'm a bit worried just now, and—"

"I'd rather speak now, if you don't mind," said Cutts coolly. "It's important."

"Oh, you can go ahead, I suppose! What is it?"
Langton stood waiting, with a far from patient look.

Cutts looked him over before replying. Langton had not changed his things since coming in; his clothes were wet, his boots muddy. Cutts, on the other hand, was clean and neat. This was second nature with the dandy of the Fifth.

He could read in Langton's face the signs of mental stress and strain, but what he observed moved him very little. Cutts was not a sympathetic nature.

"Well, what is this important matter?" said Langton impatiently.

"It's a matter that has come to my knowledge," said Cutts quietly. "I hope you will believe that I am thinking of the good of the school, and not of myself, in what I am going to say."

Langton looked astonished. "I suppose I shall give you proper credit," he said. "But I can't imagine what on earth it is you are driving at."

"To put it in a nutshell, I think you ought to resign your position in the cricket team," said Cutts coolly.

"What are you talking about?"
"You understood what I said!"

"Why should I resign? What business is it of yours, anyway?" demanded Langton, with a flash in his eyes.

"It is the business of everyone who has the honour of St. Jim's at heart," said Cutts.

Langton clenched his hands.

"Do you know you are insulting me?" he said. "I give you a chance to explain yourself, Cutts, before I throw you out of my study."

"I have no desire to go into details, but if you insist, of course, I shall fully explain."

"Well, I do insist, confound you, so get on with the explanation."

"Very well. I am aware of your dealings with the bookmaker Banks. I know that you sold a match for School House and intend selling the next, on Wednesday."

The words seemed to strike Langton like a blow.

Langton staggered, and caught at the back of a chair to support himself.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, in a hoarse whisper. "What are you saying? How do you know anything about it?"

"I was present at your interview with the bookmaker to-day."

"You—you cur! You spied!"

"I considered that was justifiable under the circumstances," replied Cutts, with undiminished coolness. "I had reason to suspect what was your motive for deserting your side in the House match, and as I had learned of your rendezvous with the bookmaker, I determined to go there and ascertain exactly how matters stood."

"If you heard what we said, you must know that I refused the scoundrel's demand."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"That would be a broken reed to lean upon," he said contemptuously. "I do not think you would dare to disobey him. You obeyed him once, and would again."

Langton sank helplessly into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"What a mad fool I've been!"

"You can't expect me to stand idly by while you lose us matches," said Cutts. "You know very well that if the Head were informed you would be expelled. But I don't want to be hard upon you. If you choose to resign from the eleven, I am willing to give you a chance of turning over a new leaf."

"Resign! In whose favour?" asked Langton bitterly.

"That is for others to decide. The point to be settled now is, that you resign."

"I understand, Cutts. You have never forgiven me for becoming captain when Kildare went."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"You have no right to say so," he said coolly. "My personal feelings have nothing whatever to do with the matter. If I were not a member of the eleven at all, I should still consider it my duty to turn out a traitor in the ranks."

Langton started at the word, and clenched his hands convulsively.

"You had better take care!" he said hoarsely.

"I don't want to wound you, Langton, but that's what it amounts to. I have been kinder than you deserve in this matter. I might have brought it out before the cricket committee, and shown you up before the lot of them, instead of coming here quietly to talk it over with you."

Langton smiled bitterly.

"Yes, I suppose I owe you something," he said. "Very well, I agree. I would have resigned before, only Mr. Selwyn did not wish me to do so. There's a meeting of the committee to-night, and I'll place my resignation in their hands."

The surrender was so complete that Cutts' hard face softened a little.

"I don't see any other course you could follow," he said.

"It's the only thing you could do, Langton. I'm—I'm sorry you are in this fix."

"Oh, that's all right! It's my own fault, and I deserve to suffer for it," said Langton bitterly. "And now, Cutts, if there's nothing more you want to say, I'd rather be alone."

Cutts nodded, and left the room. When the door had closed behind the prefect, Langton resumed his restless pacing of the room.

"So that's settled," he muttered. "The question of winning or losing the match is out of my hands now. I'm glad of it. But what will Banks say? He'll think I've resigned on purpose not to do his dirty work. What will he say—what will he do?"

CHAPTER 7.

A Friend in Need.

THERE was a good deal of surprise at St. Jim's the next day when Langton's resignation became known. Cutts, of course, said nothing about the interview in the study. The act was supposed to be a voluntary one on Langton's part, and his friends were puzzled to account for it. But to all questioning Langton made the same reply, that he didn't feel equal to the position, and that the cricket team would get on better under a new captain.

"But that's all rot, you know," said Darrel of the Sixth. "The fact is, you've been seedy lately, and you've got the blues. Why don't you buck up, and withdraw your resignation? You ought to stick to the captaincy till old Kildare comes back."

Langton shook his head.

"You know we may have Cutts in your place, and he isn't nearly up to your form," went on Darrel. "You ought to think of that."

"I haven't acted without thinking."

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"Then there's something behind it," said Darrel. "Get it off your chest, old man. We've always been chums, and you can confide in me. What's bothering you?"

"Nothing."

"And you've made up your mind?"

"Yes."

And that was all Darrel could get out of him. In the School House at St. Jim's only the Terrible Three had an inkling of the truth.

"You've heard the news, Tom?" asked Lowther, when he met his chum during the morning. "Langton's given himself the sack."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; I suppose that's his way out of it," he said. "I'm glad of it, Monty. I don't know what we could have done, but we couldn't have left matters as they were, and risked getting sold out on Wednesday. This step of Langton's settles it."

"Do you suppose Cutts had anything to do with it?" Lowther asked thoughtfully. "He expects to step into Langton's shoes. It was between them when Kildare left."

"I shouldn't wonder; he's mean enough for anything."

Gerald Cutts was counting upon that himself, and it seemed likely that his ambition would be realised. With Langton out of the way, his path seemed clear. But he was destined to discover that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. He had reckoned without the master of the School House.

Mr. Selwyn had pursed his lips when he heard of Langton's retirement, but he said nothing. But he thought a good deal about it during the day, and after school he sent a fag to ask the Sixth-Former to come to his study. Langton came, with a decidedly uneasy expression upon his face. He guessed what the Housemaster wanted him for, and he did not know how to answer the questions Mr. Selwyn was sure to put. He dreaded the interview, but there was no avoiding it. Mr. Selwyn greeted him with a genial smile, and asked him to sit down.

"What's this I hear about your resignation?" asked the School Housemaster. "I hope you have not finally decided?"

"I have, sir."

"You know I take an interest in the cricket success of the school. I do not think you ought to resign. If only for the sake of St. Jim's, you ought to stick to your post. You are the finest cricketer in the House, and the captaincy is certain to fall into less able hands."

Langton was silent.

"I have sent for you to have a serious talk, Langton. I have some inkling of the reason why you have resigned."

Langton gave a violent start.

"Has Cutts—" he began, and then checked himself abruptly.

It was Mr. Selwyn's turn to look surprised.

"What has Cutts to do with it?" he asked sharply.

Langton did not reply. Mr. Selwyn's brow contracted slightly, but he did not pursue the subject.

"I take an interest in you, Langton," he said: "I will explain the reason. Years ago I knew a young fellow very

much like yourself—careless, of an easy and unsuspecting temper—who fell into bad hands, and drifted into wrongdoing."

Langton started again.

"He ruined his life, and brought shame and sorrow to others," went on Mr. Selwyn.

"Yet he was more sinned against than sinning; and if, when first he drifted into the downward path, he had had a friend at hand to warn him and help him, he might have been saved from the results of his own folly. He was not saved; he brought shame upon an honourable name. Like you, he was a scholar. He was expelled, and went from bad to worse."

Langton was very pale, and he did not dare to look at the Housemaster.

"For years," resumed Mr. Selwyn, "he was an outcast. Now he is seeking to atone for the past, but his life is shadowed by a memory of guilt, and by the knowledge of the suffering he brought to others. I knew him well; and

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when I see a lad likely to fall into the same errors, to share the same fate, I wish to stand to him as a friend in need, to help to set him in the right path before it is too late. Do you understand?"

Langton did not speak.

"I want you to confide in me freely, not as a master, but as a friend," went on Mr. Selwyn, his voice very kind and gentle. "I want to help you."

"You cannot help me," said Langton, in a stifled voice; "it is useless!"

"I can and will help you. It has come to my knowledge, Langton, that you have some relations with the bookmaker, Banks. Major Stringer learned that you met him; he thought it his duty to make the fact known to those who are responsible for your welfare. I want you to tell me exactly how you stand with this blackguard."

Langton seemed turned to stone. Expulsion was all that he expected if his secret came out at St. Jim's, and the kindness of Mr. Selwyn was a complete surprise to him. (He understood that the master's object was to help, not to condemn, and the tears came into his eyes.

"You may speak freely," said Mr. Selwyn. "Come, Langton!"

Langton hesitated no longer. The whole wretched story came out. How he had, by imperceptible degrees, as it were, fallen deeper into the clutches of the cunning bookmaker after he had once allowed himself to be drawn into a connection with him. When he told why he had stayed away from the House match, Mr. Selwyn's face was very grave; but Langton, having once started, concealed nothing.

"I couldn't lose the match, as the brute asked," said Langton miserably; "so I went on a long spin, and got a puncture on the other side of Rylcombe Wood, so that I had to cut the match. I suppose it came to the same thing in the end, but it seemed less mean. I would have defied him, only—he's got a paper of mine, and he threatened me—"

"I quite understand."

"But I was determined not to lose the Rookwood match, whatever he did," went on Langton eagerly. "I—I am sure I should have played up to win, sir."

"I hope so. But now that the matter is in my hands. I shall see you through: How much do you owe this man?"

"Six pounds," said Langton, in a low voice.

"My dear boy, how came you to owe so much as that?" "I—I betted on horses. He said they were sure to win, but they didn't."

"I am afraid he has taken advantage of your simplicity, Langton. That is the way such men live. He is, as a matter of fact, entitled to nothing at all from you, unless it is a thrashing," said Mr. Selwyn grimly.

"But he has my paper, sir; and—and I think I ought to pay him. Even if he has cheated me, and I suppose he has, I—I don't want to get out of it. I could pay him next term if he would give me time."

"Very good. It is not unjust that you should have to pay for your folly. The man shall have his money, and you shall break off all connection with him. You will give me your word of honour to that effect, and the matter will be ended."

"But—but—"

Mr. Selwyn smiled.

"I shall advance the money, Langton, and you will repay me next term."

"Oh, sir! You—you are too good to me; I don't deserve it." There were hot tears in Langton's eyes. "I will pay every penny, sir; but I can never repay your kindness."

"If you are careful never to get into such a position again, I shall consider myself repaid," said the Housemaster. "That is all I ask."

"You may rely upon me, sir. I have had a lesson that will last me all my life, I think." And there was no doubt that he meant it.

"Very good. I do rely upon you."

"I shall be only too glad to pay the man and get my paper back, sir; and I promise that I will never speak to him again."

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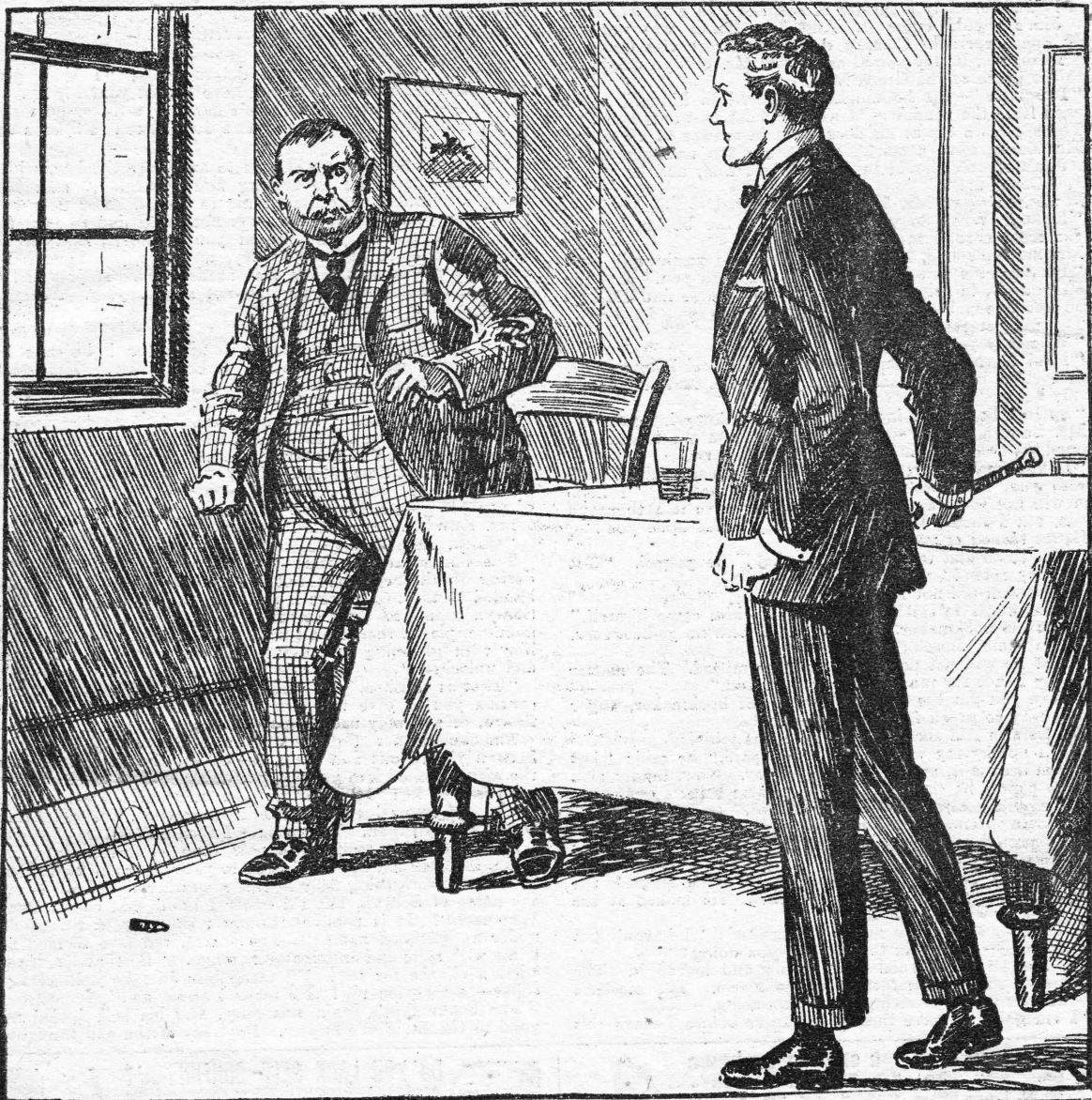
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The bookmaker eyed Mr. Selwyn nervously. "Suppose I don't?" "Then," said Mr. Selwyn, "I shall give you the soundest thrashing you have had in your life!" (See Chapter 8.)

"I do not think he would lightly part with the paper," said Mr. Selwyn, with a smile. "He would take your money, but you would find that he had mislaid the IO U's, or something of the sort. He would not let you go out of his power, if I know anything of the man's character. You are too valuable to him."

Langton's face fell.

"You must not expect a man of that kind to play the game," said Mr. Selwyn. "He does not know what is meant by a sense of honour. But he will not find it easy to play a sharp game with me. I will go to him with the money, and I think I shall succeed in getting back the paper you so rashly placed in his hands. He will not dare to deal with a master as with a boy. The man is to be found, I believe, in Rylcombe."

"Yes, sir—at the Green Man."

"Then I will go there this evening. Meanwhile, there is the question of your resignation."

Langton coloured.

"Could I withdraw it now, sir? Cutts is counting upon becoming captain, and it would be a bitter disappointment to him."

"He has no right to count upon it. The position naturally goes to the man who is most fitted for it. In my opinion,

you should withdraw your resignation, and leave the matter in the hands of the cricket committee to be decided."

"I will take your advice, sir."

"Very good!"

And Langton left Mr. Selwyn, with his face brighter than it had been for many a long day. Ten minutes later, Mr. Selwyn donned hat and coat, and left the school. There was rather a grim expression upon his face as he walked down the lane towards Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 8.

Mr. Banks is Discomfited.

"HALLO, there's that chap again! I wonder where I have seen him before!"

Mr. Banks, the bookmaker, was seated at the window of his room at the Green Man, smoking his pipe, and looking out into the village street. He uttered the words as he caught sight of the athletic figure of Selwyn striding towards the inn. The bookmaker's eyes rested upon the St. Jim's master with a good deal of interest. His bushy brows were puckered with a puzzled expression.

"Hallo! He's coming here!" Mr. Banks ejaculated, in amazement, a few minutes later.

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The Green Man did not bear a very enviable reputation, and it was certainly a matter of surprise that a master from St. Jim's should enter it. And Mr. Banks was not the only one surprised. Coming down the street was Cutts of the Fifth, and he too stared as he saw Mr. Selwyn disappear into the porch of the Green Man.

"I wonder"—the bookmaker muttered to himself, as he turned from the window—"I wonder what he wants here?"

There came a tap at his door, as if in answer to his query. Mr. Banks gave a start. But it was too unlikely that a St. Jim's master should be there to see him, and he jerked out, "Come in!"

It was, however, Mr. Selwyn who entered. "Hallo! What do you want?" said the bookmaker, in a far from cordial manner.

Mr. Selwyn's cold, keen glance seemed to go through him. "I have come to settle a little matter with you," said the Housemaster, in calm, even tones. "You have had dealings with one of my boys, named Langton."

The man started. "Who may you be?" he said insolently. "I am Herbert Selwyn, master of the School House at St. Jim's. The boy in question has placed the matter entirely in my hands."

"So he's been blabbing, has he—the whimpering rascal?" Mr. Selwyn took a step towards him, and the bookmaker started up from his chair with a look of alarm.

"If you speak of your dupe in that manner again I shall thrash you, Mr. Banks!" said the Housemaster. "I hope you will not force me to do so. You deserve it a thousand times, but I should be sorry to soil my hands upon you!"

Banks turned crimson with rage. "You come and talk to me like that!" he gasped. "Get out o' my room!"

Mr. Selwyn did not move. "If he wants to settle the matter, let him come himself," went on the bookmaker. "I don't deal with no go-betweens. Let him come himself!"

"That he will not do, as it is not permitted. The matter is in my hands for me to settle it with you."

"Have you got the money?" asked the bookmaker, anger giving way to greed for the moment.

Mr. Selwyn laid six pound notes on the table. "It is not by my wish that you are paid," he said; "but Langton desires it, and here is the money. Now, kindly give me the papers he signed, and my business here is ended."

"I haven't got them by me at present," said Banks. Mr. Selwyn smiled contemptuously. "I expected something like that, my man! I shall not leave this room without them!"

Banks had gathered up the money, and slipped the Currency notes into his waistcoat-pocket. He looked at the Housemaster with an insolent smile.

"I'd better send them on," he suggested; "I haven't got 'em by me—What in thunder are you doing?"

Mr. Selwyn had turned to the door and locked it. The bookmaker rose to his feet in vague alarm. The master's face was far from reassuring in its expression.

"I am going to have those two papers before I leave this

room," said Mr. Selwyn calmly. "Are you going to hand them over quietly?"

The bookmaker eyed him nervously. "Suppose I don't?"

"Then," said Mr. Selwyn determinedly, "I shall give you the soundest thrashing you have had in your life!"

"You—you hound! You don't dare lay a finger on me!" said the bookmaker shrilly. "You don't dare! I'll have the law on you!"

"I do not think you will care to appeal to the law, which you spend your life in defying and outraging," said Mr. Selwyn. "But I am quite willing to risk it. You have had your money, the money that was not fairly due to you, for I am certain that you cheated your victim. But, at all events, you have had the money, and now you must hand over the papers signed by that foolish boy. If you had a grain of decency left you would not need urging. Are you going to give them to me?"

"No, I ain't!" Mr. Selwyn took a tighter grip upon the light cane he carried, and stepped towards the bookmaker. The stout man dodged round the table, panting.

"Help!" he yelled. "Hel—" A grip on his collar cut him short. A stern face looked down into his, and his fat cheeks were a quiver with terror. The cane whistled in the air.

"For the last time, Mr. Banks!" "Lemme go, you beast! I'll give you the blooming bits of paper!" gasped the man. "Lemme go, can't yer?"

Mr. Selwyn released him. "Quick, then!"

The bookmaker, panting with rage and fear, no longer daring to disobey, took out his pocket-book, and sullenly handed to the master the I O U's signed by Langton. Mr. Selwyn examined them closely, and, satisfied that they were genuine, placed them in his pocket. The bookmaker watched him with gleaming eyes. Mr. Selwyn crossed to the door and unlocked it.

"That is finished," he said, opening the door. "Let me caution you to give the boys of St. Jim's a wide berth in future, or you may not escape so cheaply next time!"

The bookmaker replied with a sullen curse, and Mr. Selwyn passed out and down the stairs. From the window the man watched him go with glistening eyes of hate.

"Who is he? Hang him!" he muttered, between his teeth. "I know his face, or I knew it once, and his name wasn't Selwyn then. Where have I seen him before?"

He clicked his teeth as a new thought flashed into his brain, and jumped up, and began to pace the room excitedly.

"There's something fishy in this somewhere. I don't know the name of Selwyn, but I'd swear I know that chap's face. Who is he? Is it possible that he's skulking at St. Jim's under an assumed name?" The coarse, red face seemed to flame with spite and anticipated revenge. "By thunder, if so, what a chance for me! I'll teach him to take hold of my collar—to threaten me! I'll make him sit up!"

The bookmaker's brain was busy, and his look boded no good to the St. Jim's master. Ignorant of the evil thoughts

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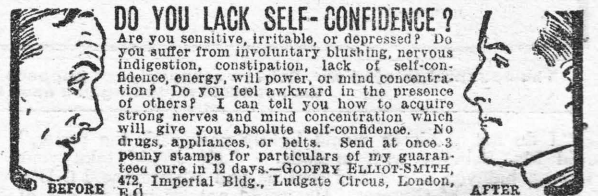
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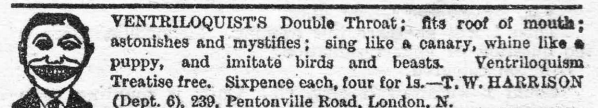


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in his enemy's mind. Mr. Selwyn strode on towards the school, satisfied with the result of his mission. He went to Langton's study as soon as he reached the school. Langton was waiting there for his return, and he looked eagerly at the master. Mr. Selwyn placed the papers in his hand.

"Oh, thank you, sir—thank you!" cried Langton.

"You had better destroy them," said the Housemaster.

"Yes—yes; at once!"

Langton lighted a match and held the papers in it, and in a few moments they were reduced to ashes.

"That is a load off my mind!" he said. "But was he willing to give them up, sir?"

"He was not willing," said Mr. Selwyn, "but I persuaded him."

Langton smiled; he could smile now. He guessed what the persuasion had been like, but he made no remark.

"And now about the cricket?" said Mr. Selwyn. "Have you acted?"

"Yes, sir. When the committee met I stated that I withdrew my resignation, but wished them to settle the question of the captaincy afresh, and without consulting me."

"That was right. I have no doubt how it will be settled. You will lead the team to victory next week, Langton."

Langton's eyes glistened. He had the feeling of a slave newly escaped from thralldom. In his satisfaction he had forgotten Cutts. But soon after Mr. Selwyn was gone there came a tap at his door, and the dandy of the Fifth came in.

CHAPTER 9.

Bitter Blood.

THE sunny expression faded from Langton's face as he saw the Fifth-Former. But he faced Cutts calmly, and waited for him to speak. There was a sullen look on Cutts' face, a cold glitter in his eyes. It was evident that he was angry.

"I want to know what is the meaning of this last move of yours," he said abruptly. "After our talk last night, I didn't expect anything of the kind."

"Circumstances have changed since then," replied Langton quietly. "I am no longer under the thumb of that rascal Banks."

"Then you are in earnest about withdrawing your resignation?"

"Quite."

"You think you are a fit person to captain the team?"

Langton kept his temper with difficulty. Cutts' manner was most provoking, but Langton did not wish to quarrel with him if he could help it.

"Yes, I think I am a fit person, as I am now free from that entanglement," he said calmly. "Mr. Selwyn thinks so, too."

"Mr. Selwyn does not know the circumstances," said the Fifth-Former tartly.

"You are mistaken. Mr. Selwyn knows everything."

Cutts stared at him in astonishment.

"Do you mean to say that you've told your Housemaster of your dealings with that blackguard Banks?"

"Yes; I have made a clean breast of it, and I'm jolly glad I did."

"And you're not to be expelled?"

"Apparently not," said Langton, with a curl of the lip. "I fancy Mr. Selwyn's standard of morality is quite as high as yours, Cutts, only he doesn't believe in giving a fellow a kick when he is down."

Cutts flushed.

"I said you ought to resign for the good of the House," he replied hotly, "and I still think so. You have palmed off on Mr. Selwyn some tale of turning over a new leaf. But I know your sort. I know exactly how long your reformation will last."

"Indeed?" said Langton, his eyes beginning to glitter.

"Yes. It will last till you've got over this fright, and then you'll be at the game again," said Cutts, with a sneer. "You cannot pull the wool over my eyes, even if you can fool Mr. Selwyn."

Langton breathed hard.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Cutts," he said, in a low voice. "I think this interview had better end."

Cutts did not move.

"I want to come to an understanding first," he said. "I must know what to expect. Last night you agreed to resign the captaincy; this evening you reclaim it. I don't believe you are any more fit for it now than you were then. I believe that you ought to give it up in the interests of the first eleven, as I said yesterday."

"I have told you that circumstances are altered. My connection with Banks is ended for good. I shall never speak to him again," said Langton. "I suppose you have a right to

preach at me, if you choose, after what has happened. But if, as you say, you are thinking of the good of the school, you cannot have any objection to the question being left in the hands of the committee, for them to choose the man they consider fittest. I am no longer in Banks' power, and what is past will not influence me in the slightest degree in the future. Even if you do not trust me, you might be willing to rely upon Mr. Selwyn's judgment."

"As I have said, you have pulled the wool over his eyes." Langton clenched his hand. But he still controlled his temper.

"Well, it is useless to argue upon that point," he said. "Time will show, and, after my weakness in the past, I suppose you have a right to be down on me; though you might give a fellow credit for good intentions."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"I've no doubt about the goodness of your intentions," he said; "it's your performance that I am doubtful about. I repeat that I do not consider you are to be trusted as captain of the St. Jim's team. That's flat!"

"And I tell you that I don't care two pins for your opinion!" cried Langton.

Cutts drew a deep breath.

"Then you leave only one course open to me."

"Take any course you like," said Langton disdainfully.

"Wait a bit. You say the committee are to choose the man they consider fittest. You will acknowledge that they cannot choose properly unless they know all the facts."

"Do you mean that you are going to give me away after all?"

"I mean that I shall certainly acquaint the committee with the fact that you deserted your side on the occasion of the House match, for personal reasons."

"You can't make allowance for the state of mind I was in at the time?" said Langton. "I was not myself; I was worried almost to distraction by that demon—"

"Of course, you can explain all that to the cricket committee," said Cutts coolly. "It is for them to decide."

"You—you cad! You know I couldn't explain; I should be sent to Coventry. Do you know what you are doing?"

"I am doing my duty, as I understand it."

"You are blackmailing," said Langton bitterly. "Yes, that's what it amounts to. That's what your precious concern for the good of the school comes to in plain English. You're going to drive me out of the team because you know about this rotten business."

"Well, there's no need for us to bandy words about the matter," said Cutts, snapping his teeth; "I've told you what I am going to do."

He turned to the door. Langton stood still, not speaking. Cutts opened the door and looked back. He seemed to hesitate.

"Then you're resolved, Langton?"

"Yes. Do your worst."

"Very well. You have only yourself to thank for what happens now," said Cutts; and he strode from the study, his teeth set hard. The next moment he ran into someone who was coming along the dusky corridor.

"Confound you—I—I beg your pardon, sir!" stammered Cutts, in confusion, as he recognised Mr. Selwyn.

"Is that you, Cutts?" said the Housemaster cheerfully. "Will you come into my study for a few minutes? I want to have a little chat with you."

"Certainly, sir!" said Cutts, wondering uneasily what Mr. Selwyn could have to chat to him about. It was pretty certain that the Housemaster had heard the last words spoken after the door was opened. Had they given him an inkling of what had been passing between Cutts and the cricket captain?

Cutts was very uneasy. He stole a glance at Mr. Selwyn's face as he followed him, but the master's features expressed nothing. Not till they were in his quarters, with the door closed, did the Housemaster speak again. His first words confirmed Cutts' uneasy fears.

"I couldn't help hearing a few words just now," he said, looking directly at Cutts. "From them, and from some words Langton let drop when he made his confession to me, I gather that you are in possession of his secret, Cutts. I presume, as you did not acquaint the Head or myself with your discovery, that you decided that Langton had better be given a chance."

"Ye-es."

"I am glad of that. It shows that you can feel sympathy even towards wrongdoers," said Mr. Selwyn calmly. Cutts shifted uneasily. "You will be glad to hear that I have succeeded in extricating Langton from that wretched entanglement, and that I am assured he will never fall into anything of the kind again."

"So he said, sir."

"That being the case, it is, of course, incumbent upon us both to keep his secret. My lips are sealed, and it will be the same, of course, with you."

Cutts smiled in a bitter way. He thought he could see now what the Housemaster was driving at. Mr. Selwyn did not appear to notice his expression. He waited for his reply.

"You have kept the secret for some time, Cutts," added the master, as Cutts did not speak; "it cannot be your intention to disclose it now. You cannot think that honourable."

"I kept the secret, Mr. Selwyn, on condition that Langton resigned from the team," replied Cutts. "I did not consider that he was to be trusted. He resigned, and I considered that he was entitled to have a chance to reform. But I don't think I ought to keep silence and allow him to captain us again, considering the probability that he may at any time turn traitor."

Mr. Selwyn's eyes gleamed for a moment. "Don't you think you are hard upon him, Cutts?" he asked. "Traitor is a very hard word. He certainly showed great weakness upon one occasion, but the cause of it is now removed. That he will ever get into such a difficulty again I do not think for a moment."

"I don't feel so sure about it, sir."
 "Then what are your present views, Cutts?"
 "I think that the cricket committee ought to know the true circumstances before they make him captain again," the prefect said doggedly.

Mr. Selwyn's lips tightened. "That will be equivalent to turning Langton out of the team, and making it impossible for him to ever play for St. Jim's again," he said. "Now, frankly, Cutts, do you think that he deserves that?"

Cutts did not reply.
 "Do you really think it will be for the best interests of the school?"

"Well, yes, sir, I do."
 "I cannot agree with you. More, I will say that our cricket record will suffer this season if you carry out your intention." The Housemaster laid his hand upon Cutts' shoulder. "Will it be asking too much if I ask you to trust my judgment instead of your own in this matter? If I ask you to keep silent about Langton, I am willing to take all the responsibility."

Cutts made an uneasy movement. It was not easy to refuse a request made by a master. The request was in effect a command, and Cutts did not know how he could elude it.

"I ask this as a favour," said Mr. Selwyn. "I take all responsibility. You will not refuse me?"

"If you put it like that, sir—"
 "I do put it like that."

"Then, I suppose, I must do as you wish; but—"
 "Thank you, Cutts!" said the Housemaster, without seeming to observe Cutts' sullen discontent. "I don't think you will regret it, my boy."

He shook hands with Cutts, and Cutts left him, his heart full of bitterness. It had been impossible for him to refuse, but his heart was not in his consent. He could not speak now, and he could not realise his ambition, under the pretext of being deeply concerned for the honour of the school. He felt a bitter sense of defeat, and a feeling very like hatred towards the Housemaster—a feeling that was to bear fruit.

CHAPTER 10.
 The Rookwood Match!

"NO cricket on Wednesday!" Jack Blake remarked in the Common-room on Monday. "I suppose we're going to honour the giddy seniors by watching the match with Rookwood?"

Tom Merry nodded.
 "Certainly—just to encourage them," he remarked.

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"Pewwaps I shall not be watchin' the match, Blake."
 "What will you be up to?" demanded Blake. "If you've fallen in love with one of Blankley's girl-porters again—"

"Weally, Blake—"
 "If you're going to buy a new topper, you can put it off. We've got to turn up and cheer Langton, just to show him what we think of him, and to show Cutts of the Fifth what we think of him, too!"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass loftily on Blake.
 "I may be playin'," he said.

Blake gave a yell.
 "Playing! In a first-eleven match?"

"Yaas."
 "Fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Blake! I wegard it as highly pwob. Levison says Langton is goin' to play one juniah. He heard Langton say so to Dawwel!"

"Levison hears lots of things!" grinned Tom Merry. "But he's off the wicket this time!"

"Well, Kildare played Talbot once in a first eleven match," said Blake thoughtfully. "And we know that three of the first are crooked, and Langton's had to fill their places, besides old Kildare being away. They can't have Selwyn playing against Rookwood, as he did in the House match. Langton might pick out a junior. But what makes you think you're the man, Gussy?"

"Langton is bound to pick out the best cwicketah in the Lower School if he plays a juniah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I fail to see any cause for mewwiment, Blake!"

"Of course you do!" grinned Monty Lowther. "By Jove! If Langton's got his eye on a junior for the Rookwood match, I'd like to know who's the lucky bargee! Must be a Shell fellow!"

"Wats!"
 "Well, Langton wouldn't be ass enough to play a kid in the Fourth!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"
 "Sure to be a Shell chap," said Manners decidedly. "Might be Talbot or Tom Merry—one of the two, anyway!"

"Wubbish! If Langton's lookin' for a good juniah cwicketah, he's bound to look into Studay No. 6!"

"That's right enough," said Blake cordially. "Right, as far as it goes. If Langton asks me, I sha'n't say 'No'!"

"Weally, Blake—"
 "What he really wants is an Australian chap," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "I think I'll mention to him that I'm quite at his service!"

"Wats! I feel quite suah that Langton has his eye on me! He may have noticed my wippin' late cut!"

"I've noticed it," said Lowther, with a nod.
 "Bai Jove! Have you weally, Lowthah?" asked Arthur Augustus, somewhat flattered.

"Certainly. It's sometimes a very late cut, isn't it?" said the humorist of the Shell blandly. "Sometimes so late that it doesn't come till the wicket's down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You uttah ass, Lowthah!"

Tom Merry sauntered out of the Common-room, with a slight wrinkle in his sunny brow. He had been thinking a good deal lately about the Rookwood senior match.

Tom Merry and his team had played Rookwood juniors—Jimmy Silver & Co.—and they had seen Rookwood seniors play. It was a hard match, and it would be a tremendous distinction for a junior to be included in the St. Jim's team on that occasion.

But Tom was not thinking of his chance in that direction. He was thinking of what he and Lowther had accidentally heard in the old barn.

It was not exactly the business of the captain of the Shell, but he could not help thinking about it.

Langton had "cut" the House match at the orders of the bookmaker, and Mr. Banks had ordered him to lose the Rookwood match. The cricket captain could easily have contrived a defeat for his side, if he had been base enough.

What was likely to happen?
 Tom Merry asked himself that question very uneasily.

He was thinking the matter over, when Langton of the Sixth stopped to speak to him in the quadrangle.

"Hallo! You're looking very thoughtful, kid," said the prefect.

Tom coloured a little.
 "We shall want you on Wednesday afternoon."

Tom Merry started.
 "You'll want me?"

"Yes. Baker is too much off his form, and I have noticed lately how well you have shaped. I've had an eye on you for some time, as a matter of fact."

"I'll do my best, Langton." Tom's face became crimson as he went on, but he was resolute to speak out. "There's—there's another matter I—I ought to mention to you while we're on the subject."

"Go ahead!" said the captain tersely.

"The other day Lowther and I were on a sprint, and we got into the old barn for shelter from the rain." Langton turned deadly pale. Tom Merry went on: "We didn't want to play the spy, but there was a reason why we couldn't show ourselves, and so we saw you, and heard something."

It was out now, and Tom Merry did not dare to look at the cricket captain. Langton breathed hard.

"So you know all about it, Tom Merry?"

"Not all about it, but more than I like to know. I hope you believe that we didn't play the spy intentionally?"

"Yes, I believe that. I know that Cutts was in the barn listening," said Langton bitterly. "Have you spoken about this to anybody?"

Tom flushed indignantly.

"Of course not! Do you think I'm a sneak?"

"Why do you speak of it now?"

"Because—because— Don't you see?" broke out Tom Merry desperately. "When you resigned I thought it would be all right. Now you're going to captain us against Rookwood on Wednesday, and I know what that blackguard wants you to do!"

Langton smiled grimly.

"And you're afraid I may sell out the match?"

Tom Merry became scarlet.

"No, I'm not; only—only—"

"You're quite right to speak out, Merry," said Langton quietly. "If my resignation had held good, I suppose you would have said nothing?"

"Nothing," replied Tom Merry promptly. "I didn't want to let you know I knew about it, you know; only—only—"

"I understand. Now," said Langton, "if I assure you that my connection with that man is ended, and that I am no longer in the least in his power, will that reassure you?"

Tom Merry brightened up at once.

"Of course it will."

"Well, it is so. I have been got out of that scrape by Mr. Selwyn. He saved me from the ditch I was fool enough to stumble in, and there will never be anything of the kind again. I've done with that for ever. Are you satisfied?"

"I'm jolly glad!" said Tom Merry. "It was just like Mr. Selwyn; he's a jolly good sort!"

"He's the noblest fellow in the world," said Langton.

"Of course, you'll say nothing about all this?"

"Of course not. But what about Cutts?"

"He is going to keep quiet; Mr. Selwyn asked him to."

"That's all right, then. But, I say, you—you don't mind my having spoken out, do you?" said Tom Merry. "I—I was worried about it."

"I'm glad you spoke out, and got it off your mind," said Langton. "That's all right!"

"And—and it won't make any difference to—"

Tom Merry haltingly.

"How could you think so? You'll have your cap on Wednesday."

"Right you are!"

And Tom Merry hurried off to tell his chums the good news.

The chums of the Shell—and, indeed, all St. Jim's—looked forward eagerly to the Rookwood match. Rookwood were generally a hard nut to crack.

"I think we shall do it, sir," Langton said to Mr. Selwyn, when the match day arrived. "We are very strong this time. I am sorry that you will not be playing, though."

"It is better for me to stand out," said Mr. Selwyn. "But you have a fine team."

"Yes," said Langton, looking with an eye of pride over his men, who were waiting for the brake to take them over to Rookwood; "a fine lot!" Then his brow clouded for a moment. "There's only one I am a bit doubtful about."

"You are referring to Cutts?"

"Yes. It's a hard thing to say of a fellow, but I don't think he's forgiven me for keeping him out of the captaincy. He's sulked ever since. I've tried to get on good terms with him, but it's no good. He just answers when I speak to him, and that's all."

Mr. Selwyn nodded without speaking.

The brake came round, and the team clambered into it. Several other conveyances arrived for the fellows who were desirous of following the St. Jim's champions to the Rookwood ground.

Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, gave the St. Jim's team a hearty greeting. A greeting equally hearty was bestowed upon the St. Jim's juniors, who had followed the team, by Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

Mr. Selwyn had accompanied the team, and with him had come a bronze-complexioned old gentleman—Major Stringer. Major Stringer was a governor of St. Jim's, and he was regarded with some awe by the St. Jim's juniors. His grim look and martinet manners were what chiefly impressed them. But it was easy to see that he was on the most cordial terms with the young Housemaster. They had faced the German shells together on the fields of Flanders, and the major still carried his arm in a sling.

Mr. Selwyn and the major stood together watching the opening innings. Rookwood batted first, and there was a cheer from Tom Merry's friends as he went into the field with the seniors. Tom Merry was feeling naturally elated. He was playing in the St. Jim's First because men were short, but it was a great distinction all the same. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head rather doubtfully; he could not quite understand why Langton had selected the captain of the Shell when he had Study No. 6 to choose from.

But he waved his eyeglass encouragingly to Tom Merry. "Go it, dear boy!" he called out.

"Look at Cutts!" remarked Monty Lowther. "Looks as cheery as a funeral, doesn't he?"

Cutts of the Fifth did not look very cheery. He was in a black humour.

His little plans had completely failed. He had hoped to step into Langton's place till Kildare's return to St. Jim's; but his plans had not stopped short at that.

Somehow or other, he had hoped to contrive matters so that when Kildare came back, the captaincy would no longer be open to him.

Cutts' plans were far reaching—if he could only have taken the first step. But the first step was not to be taken. Langton was still cricket captain, and Cutts was disappointed and savage.

He was not in a mood to play a good game.

When he chose, he was first class; but on this occasion, apparently, he did not choose.

He missed the easiest catches, and when he bowled his bowling gave a good number of runs to Bulkeley and Knowles of Rookwood.

Langton had relied on Cutts as a bowler, and it did not dawn upon him for some time that the dandy of the Fifth was not doing his best.

But at last it was borne into his mind, and he frowned. After that the ball was not given to Cutts of the Fifth.

He continued to make blunders in the field, but that could not be helped. He had already done sufficient damage to the St. Jim's cause, however. The runs for the Rookwood first innings totalled a hundred and twenty.

When St. Jim's went in to bat, Cutts was dismissed for a duck's egg by Knowles, who was bowling for Rookwood. Langton compressed his lips as he saw it.

"Man in!" he said briefly, as Cutts came back to the pavilion.

Cutts gave him an insolent smile in passing.

"Hold on a minute, Cutts," said Langton, in a low voice. "This won't do!"

"What won't do?"

"You're playing for St. Jim's. Do you want to give the match away to Rookwood?"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm doing my best," he said.

"Is your best a duck's egg?"

"Well, the Rookwood bowling is jolly good."

"I know that; but—"

"Are you thinking of making accusations against me?" said Cutts, sneeringly. "I can make them against you just as easily!"

Langton bit his lip, and said nothing further. Talking to Cutts was not of much use.

He was in the team now, and it could not be helped. But Langton inwardly resolved that Cutts should not play for St. Jim's again so long as he was captain.

His thought was easy enough for the dandy of the Fifth

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to read, and a very bitter look came over Gerald Cutts' face. He could hardly have expected anything else, after the show he had made; but that made no difference to Cutts.

St. Jim's took sixty, and were all down. In the Rookwood seconds innings Bulkeley & Co. piled up the runs. Tom Merry took the great Bulkeley's wicket amid a roar of cheering.

Cutts was not put on to bowl. Langton had counted upon him, and Cutts' deliberate bad play left him in a difficulty. Langton's own bowling, however, was first-class, and he changed with Monteith and Tom Merry. Rookwood were all down at last for a hundred.

When St. Jim's second innings commenced, all the fellows realised that their chance was decidedly slim.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head sadly over their prospects.

"I'm afraid it's not much use, deah boys," he remarked. "Did you evah see any ass play like that wottah Cutts befoah?"

Jack Blake gave a snort. "Blessed if I don't think he's giving the game away!" he growled.

"Bai Jove!" "Dashed if it doesn't look like it!" said Monty Lowther. "If he gets another duck's egg this time— My hat! There he goes!"

Cutts' wicket was down for nil. There was a laugh from some of the Rookwood fellows, and a shout of indignation from the St. Jim's crowd.

"Yah! What price duck's eggs?" "Yah! Go home!"

Cutts' face was flushed as he took his way to the pavilion. He had determined to do his worst for St. Jim's, but it was not pleasant to be howled at on the cricket-field.

Langton gave him a grim look. But he did not speak.

The St. Jim's innings went on, every batsman putting up a good fight. Tom Merry was last man in, with Langton at the other end. There was a shout of encouragement from the St. Jim's juniors.

"Go it, Tommy!" "Stick it out!" "Play up!"

Tom Merry did not need telling to play up. He stood up at his wicket, prepared to do or die.

The Rookwood bowling was good, but the captain of the Shell lived through over after over, and runs piled up. Langton's hopes began to rise. The fall of a wicket meant the end now, but there were already a hundred runs for the second innings.

There was a chance—a slim chance! Crash!

It was Langton's own wicket that went down, stumped in a gallant attempt at four. And the Rookwood fellows cheered. Rookwood had won the match by a wide margin of runs.

Langton compressed his lips as he came off the field. He was a sportsman, and could have stood a defeat on fair terms. But he knew that the match ought not to have been lost.

If Cutts had played up, the balance would have been the other way. Tom Merry, a junior in the Shell, had done well for his side. Cutts had failed so flagrantly that it was scarcely possible to conceal that his failure had been dictated by ill-humour and perverseness. All the St. Jim's cricketers looked grimly at Cutts in the dressing-room.

Cutts smiled as he glanced at Langton's frowning face. "We've had bad luck," he remarked. Monteith of the New House sniffed.

"I don't call it bad luck!" he said savagely. "Nor I," said Langton, with a gleam in his eyes. "You will not play for St. Jim's again so long as I am captain, Cutts!"

"Why?" "You know why. You threw away the match!" Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"No use for me to deny it, I suppose?" he sneered. "None."

"Well, you ought to be an authority on that subject," said Cutts, with a bitter look. "After our experience with you in the House match—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Tom Merry. "You ought to be ashamed to show your face at St. Jim's after this!"

Cutts' eyes blazed, and he swung round savagely at the junior.

"Take that, you cheeky young hound!" He struck at Tom's face, but Langton grasped his shoulder and swung him back just in time.

"None of that!" said Langton sternly. "You— Ah!" Smack!

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Cutts' fist struck the cricket captain full in the face. "Take that for meddling!" Langton staggered for a moment. Then he sprang towards the dandy of the Fifth, his fists clenched and his eyes blazing.

"Stop!" exclaimed a sharp voice. Mr. Selwyn, the School House master, stood in the doorway, his brows knitted. Langton's hands dropped to his sides.

CHAPTER 11. An Old Acquaintance.

MR. SELWYN looked over the circle of flushed faces with a sharp glance. It was clear that for once the Housemaster was angry.

"What does this unseemly brawling mean?" he said sternly. "Do you want to make your school an object of contempt and derision to Rookwood? Some of them already know that a quarrel is going on here."

Langton hung his head. "I am sorry, sir. It would have been better to say nothing till we were back at St. Jim's."

Cutts was silent, but his look was still truculent. "You were certainly wrong, Langton!" said Mr. Selwyn. "I myself observed the conduct in the game which will have to be inquired into, but this is not the place for it."

Cutts started. It had not occurred to him until now that the keen eye of the Housemaster had been on him all the time.

"Are you alluding to me, sir?" he asked boldly. "Is it my conduct that will have to be inquired into?"

"Since you ask me, it is!" said Mr. Selwyn sternly. "You will be required to make an explanation to the cricket committee, but for the present—"

"Oh, I might have known you would side with Langton!" said Cutts. "You always take the part of your favourite!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when he would have given anything to recall them. He knew he had gone too far, and all the others knew it, too! A kind of shiver ran through them for a moment, and they did not dare to look at Mr. Selwyn.

"Do you know what you are saying, Cutts?" said the Housemaster in an altered voice.

Cutts was silent. He kept his eyes sullenly on the ground. "Your words cannot be overlooked, Cutts," said Mr. Selwyn quietly; "but this is no time to speak of that. Let me recommend that you return to St. Jim's, my boys, without any further recrimination. I shall speak to you again later, Cutts." And the Housemaster walked out of the dressing-room.

A painful silence followed his departure, and no one cared to break it. Cutts' face was darkened by a sullen scowl. When he had finished, he walked out by himself. He was in too bitter and unsociable a mood, and too keenly conscious of the hostile feelings of his fellow-players, to wish to drive back with them to St. Jim's in the brake."

He strode away from the cricket-ground with black thoughts in his mind, his heart full of hatred, more against Mr. Selwyn than against Langton. It seemed to his obstinate mind that the master was against him in everything, and he was less disposed than ever to admit himself at all in the wrong.

Mr. Selwyn's brow was clouded as he walked away. There was trouble ahead now, for Cutts' insolent words could not be overlooked; and, at the same time, it was in Cutts' power to make himself extremely disagreeable by revealing what he knew of Langton's transactions with the bookmaker. The situation was altogether an extremely awkward one, and the outcome might be unpleasant. In the midst of the Housemaster's meditations, he felt a touch on his elbow. He turned his head, and saw Mr. Banks at his side, an insolent grin upon his fat face.

"How dare you touch me?" exclaimed Mr. Selwyn angrily. "Oh, get off!" exclaimed Banks. "You can't come that dodge over me any longer, my boy! I've spotted you!"

"You must be intoxicated, I think! You had better take yourself off!"

"All right, Mr. Selwyn!" The bookmaker placed a peculiar emphasis upon the name, and the Housemaster started. "Shall I go to Dr. Holmes, and tell him what I know?"

"I have not the faintest idea what you are talking about." "Then I'd better explain. The first time I saw you I said to myself that I knew your face. I couldn't place you. But after your visit to the Green Man I kinder tumbled. See? Your name ain't Selwyn any more than mine is Brown!"

He chuckled as he saw the colour waver in the master's cheek. "Oh, I've got you down fine, my chap," he said. "I'll make you sorry yet that you meddled with Jimmy Banks, by James!"

"You must be dreaming!" said the Housemaster calmly.

"Whom do you take me for, may I ask?"

"For a cove who wouldn't be admitted to St. Jim's if the truth was known! I have got something to say to you, Mr. Blooming Selwyn, and it's got to be said to-day, if you don't want me to say it in public!"

Mr. Selwyn's eyes glittered, and his hands clenched. It was only with difficulty that he restrained himself from laying the ruffian upon his back there and then.

"Very well," he said. "The cricket team does not immediately leave for St. Jim's, and I can get away for a short time. Where can I see you?"

The bookmaker reflected for a moment.

"In the beech-plantation down the road," he said. "That's a short walk, and we won't be seen there, as you're so pertickler about not being seen with me. You wouldn't have been so particular once upon a time," he said, with a sneering laugh.

"I will be there in half an hour," said Mr. Selwyn. "Now go!"

In spite of his assurance, the rascal was somewhat abashed by the look of the Housemaster. "Contempt," says the Eastern proverb, "will pierce the shell of a tortoise"; and even Mr. Jimmy Banks' thick skin was not wholly impervious to it. He nodded shortly and walked away.

The defeated team was entertained by Rookwood previous to its return home, and it was not difficult for Mr. Selwyn to slip away unnoticed for the meeting in the beech-wood. Cutts was also absent, but no one was in the least concerned about him. His comrades thought he had gone home without waiting for the brake, and they were content to be rid of the "slacker" who had lost them the match.

Leaving the Rookwood ground, Mr. Selwyn walked away rapidly, and reached the beech-plantation bordering the road at the appointed time. A stile gave admittance to it, and at the stile the bookmaker was lounging, smoking a cigar. He nodded familiarly to the Housemaster. Mr. Selwyn crossed the stile, and stopped under the trees. These were thick enough beside the footpath to make a screen from general view.

"Now, what do you want with me?" he said sharply.

"Don't come the high hoss with me," grinned Banks; "it won't work! I've got you down fine, my beauty!"

"Explain yourself! You apparently take me for some person other than I am. Tell me exactly what you mean, and what you want with me, before I lose patience with you!"

"I'll tell you fast enough. You call yourself Herbert Selwyn at St. Jim's, but the last time I saw you—I mean afore I saw you round here—you was called by another name."

"What name?"

"Brown," said Banks. "Dick Brown was the name."

The look of relief which had puzzled the bookmaker before reappeared upon Mr. Selwyn's face.

"Do you mean to deny it?" exclaimed Banks. "'Cause if you do, it won't be difficult for me to prove it to the satisfaction of Dr. Holmes. I can get you kicked out of St. Jim's with two words, and you know it!"

"I deny nothing and admit nothing," said Mr. Selwyn calmly. "But, assuming that your supposition is correct—"

"You know it's correct!"

"Assuming that it is, what do you want with me?"

"Now we're coming to business," said the bookmaker, in a tone of satisfaction. "This ain't a matter that can be settled with a five-pound note. If Dr. Holmes knew that one of his blooming masters was a racing tout from Newmarket—"

"Get to business!"

"Certainly," grinned the other. "Well, then, I don't want any of your beggarly screw, whatever it is. Anyway, not now."

Mr. Selwyn looked at him in surprise.

"If you do not want money, what do you want?"

"There's another way you can square me."

"Explain yourself!"

"You can let me alone, stop your rotten meddling, and leave me to turn an honest penny in my own way," said Mr. Banks.

"I don't quite understand you."

"I'll make it clear. I can make a pretty good thing out of the Upper Form boys at St. Jim's. Some of the richer sort have fivers and tenners to chuck away, and if I wasn't interfered with I could get a decent little harvest. You've interfered with me once, and crabbied it for me. You won't do it again. You'll stand out, and close one eye to what goes on."

"Hold your tongue! Listen to me, you cowardly, contemptible rascal! The proposition you make is one I might have expected from one so base, so despicable as you are."

Mr. Banks spluttered with rage, but the Housemaster went on unheeding. "If you were worth it, I'd thrash you within an inch of your life for daring to speak such words to me. As it is, I will keep my hands off you; you are too vile for me to touch. Now get aside, and let me go!"

"You—you dare to defy me?" gasped Banks.

"Yes, you rascal!"

"I'll show you up! I'll have you kicked out of the school!"

And Mr. Banks, beside himself with rage, was flourishing a grimy fist in the Housemaster's face. Mr. Selwyn brushed him aside, and stepped into the footpath. The bookmaker, mad with rage, struck at him furiously. The next moment he felt as if an earthquake had occurred. He lay on his back in the grass, staring dazedly upward, blinking his eyes. He rose slowly to a sitting posture, and rubbed his nose. He saw the stalwart form of the St. Jim's master striding rapidly away, and hurled a string of curses after it.

"Hang him! Hang him!"

"Let me help you up, my man!"

A form stepped from the trees, and Mr. Banks blinked at it doubtfully. It was Cutts, an old acquaintance of Mr. Banks.

"Hallo! Have you been listening?"

"I certainly heard your talk with Mr. Selwyn. He seems to have used you pretty roughly, and no mistake."

Jimmy Banks grinned his teeth.

"I'll make him sorry for it yet!"

Cutts smiled grimly.

"I was curious to know what there might be between you and Mr. Selwyn," he said. "I saw him meet you, and I determined to find out. Now, tell me, is there anything in the cock-and-bull story you were telling just now!"

"It's gospel truth," said the bookmaker sullenly. "I saw that feller on the racecourse, and he had another name then. It was two years ago, but I know his face, though he's changed a good deal."

"It seems impossible. Mr. Selwyn has always been so strict and correct; nobody's ever had a word to say against him," said Cutts musingly. "Are you sure you're not making a mistake? It seems impossible."

The bookmaker looked at him shrewdly.

"I take it that you don't love him any too much, Master Cutts. You wouldn't be sorry to see him kicked out of the school?"

"I have no cause to love him," said Cutts, between his teeth. "I should be glad if he left St. Jim's, and if you can prove what you say, there would be no doubt about that. But Dr. Holmes trusts him, and you would have to bring pretty strong proof to make your story believed. But it can't be true. How could he have got his present position? One of the governors of the school introduced him there, and answered for him. How could he have deceived Major Stringer?"

"Who did you say?"

"Major Stringer, one of the governors. He has always been Mr. Selwyn's friend, and I happen to know that he strongly recommended Mr. Selwyn when Railton went on his holiday. He certainly wouldn't recommend a man who was unfit for the post; and how could Selwyn have deceived him?" Cutts shook his head. "It sounds like a ghost story. But if you had any proof—"

"You'd be glad to hear it?" suggested the bookmaker.

"Yes, I would! Look here, if you like to look up some particulars of this affair, and let me have something tangible," said Cutts, lowering his voice, "I'll make it worth your while. Only, remember, it must be something I can go upon."

"I'll do it, and glad!" said Banks viciously.

"Jump in with me, Selwyn, my boy!" said Major Stringer. "I'll drop you at the gates of St. Jim's."

Mr. Selwyn seemed to hesitate for a moment.

"It will take you out of your way, sir."

"Very little; and it does not matter, anyway. Jump in!"

The major was not to be denied. And so when the St. Jim's party left Rookwood, the Housemaster was seated beside the major, who "tooled" the trap along the lane in the growing dusk. Mr. Selwyn sat silent, his face clouded. The major looked at him once or twice, and at length spoke.

"You can tell me what's the matter, my boy. You can rely upon me."

"I should be an ingrate indeed if I did not rely upon the man to whom I owe everything," said the St. Jim's master, in a low, earnest voice.

"Nonsense! What I did was my bare duty," said Major Stringer hastily. "Never mind that. I can see that something is amiss, and that it is in connection with the low individual I saw you speaking to on the cricket-ground. Am I right?"

"You are, sir," replied Mr. Selwyn.

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"What is he—some shady acquaintance of the days that are gone for ever?"

"No; I never knew him, and had not the slightest recollection of him; but he must have seen me. He remembers me at a time when I was not known as Selwyn."

"He knows all, then?"

"He recognised me as Dick Brown."

The major smiled.

"And what does he want?"

"He deems me an impostor at St. Jim's; he threatens me with exposure, and he demands a peculiar kind of blackmail. My salary is not large enough to excite his greed, but he has hit upon another method of paying himself for his silence. I am to stand quietly by while he inveigles my boys into betting transactions, and swindles them. He has even offered to pay me a percentage of his profits."

The major made his whip whistle in the air.

"The scoundrel! What did you say to him?"

"I left him lying on his back."

Major Stringer chuckled.

"Then it will be war?"

"Assuredly. He will make it his business to make things as unpleasant as possible for me. He cannot harm me in the way he supposes, but in another way he can ruin all my plans," said Mr. Selwyn gloomily. "I see nothing for it but an exposure."

The major laid a hand upon his arm.

"And you are not ready for that, my boy? Is it not time?"

The Housemaster's face was strangely pale and strained.

"I shrink from it," he said. "Sometimes the thought of speaking out has come to me, and then I have wavered; but always I have decided to wait. I have so much to lose by haste, by being over-hasty. I dare not risk it. But now it is inevitable. I shall be driven to do what I dread, I fear."

The major was silent.

The trap stopped at the gates of St. Jim's. Mr. Selwyn went on:

"I have been thinking over it, and trying to nerve myself to face it out. But the nearer the disclosure comes, the less I feel prepared to face it."

"Yet," said the major thoughtfully, "I am certain you have little to fear. You were forgiven long ago."

"It is not that. I want to make him respect me, feel that I am worthy of confidence and regard. I want to prove that I have repented."

"You have proved it. And he already respects you, he already esteems you. I think you are too exacting to yourself, my boy. You have nothing to fear."

"The time has been so short," said the other sadly. "It needs years of reparation to wipe out the stain of the past."

"You have made reparation," said the major. "I'll answer for it, my boy, that when Dr. Holmes knows the real identity of the master of the School House—"

He broke off abruptly. Cutts of the Fifth had stepped out of the gateway. He walked away down the lane without a word.

The major turned back to Mr. Selwyn, frowning.

"Do you think he heard what I said, my boy?"

Mr. Selwyn's face was troubled.

"I fear so. I am afraid he listened. But it matters little."

But the major's face was troubled as he drove away; and after he had gone Mr. Selwyn paced his study with wrinkled brow. He knew that Cutts had heard, and he felt that something would come of it. He was right.

CHAPTER 12.

Cutts Speaks.

CUTTS hurried away, with his heart beating hard, his face flushed with excitement. He had heard little, but he had heard enough. The bookmaker had told him the truth. There was a secret in Mr. Selwyn's past—a secret that was known to the major, who was the master's confederate in keeping it. There could be no further doubt now that he had heard their own words.

A "stain," Mr. Selwyn had said. What was it—what had he done? But whatever else was doubtful, one thing was clear. Mr. Selwyn was at St. Jim's under an assumed name, under a fictitious identity. There was no doubt whatever upon that point, and Cutts felt that he had the master at his mercy.

However plausible a tale Mr. Selwyn might tell, whatever explanation he could make, he could not escape from the fact that he was an impostor, that he had deceived the Head and everybody else. Cutts' heart beat faster.

This was the man who had preached to him, who had ridden the high horse, who had more than once made him

feel uncomfortably small and mean. This man—and he was a common cheat!

Cutts shut himself up in his study to think it out. He knew it now for a fact. Between what he had just heard and what the bookmaker had told him, he felt that he was acquainted with the whole story. Mr. Selwyn had certainly not been a reputable character in the past. It was a mystery how one of the governors of St. Jim's came to be his accomplice in an imposture. But there was no doubt about the fact. He was not what he seemed.

"I will expose him" muttered Cutts. "I will give him his choice. He shall leave St. Jim's, or the Head shall know all. That is the utmost mercy I will have on him."

And when he heard the major drive away, Cutts went to the Housemaster's study. Mr. Selwyn's clear, strong voice bade him enter.

Cutts entered, cool and self-possessed. There was something about Mr. Selwyn that usually made him feel ill at ease. But now he felt master of the situation. This man, before whose steady glance his own had often dropped, was a cheat! There was a sense of exultation, of complacency, in Cutts' breast.

"I expected you, Cutts," said Mr. Selwyn quietly. "You have been unfortunate enough to hear words that were not meant for your ears."

Cutts bit his lip. Then a wave of anger surged through him, that this man, whom he now knew in his true colours, should dare to lecture him.

"You are not the one to preach to me," he said, between his teeth. "What are you?"

"I am a master in this school, Cutts, and entitled to respect when I am addressed," said Mr. Selwyn sternly. "This is the second time you have forgotten yourself."

Cutts laughed sneeringly.

"I do not think you will be a master in this school long," he answered. "As for respect, I cannot consider that any is due to an impostor."

The Housemaster drew a sharp breath.

"Cutts!"

"What else are you? You are here under an assumed name. There is some disgraceful secret in your past which makes you afraid to have your name known. You have come here under an alias. You have deceived Dr. Holmes. You have deceived the whole school. And you talk to me of respect!"

There was a short, tense silence, and their glances met like rapiers. Something vaunting had come into Cutts' manner. He felt more and more the master of the situation.

"You speak very bitterly, Cutts," said the Housemaster at last, and his tone was very quiet. "Are you sure you have your facts correctly?"

"I am sure! I have them from more sources than one. Do you venture to deny the truth of what I have said?"

"I deny nothing; yet I do not understand why you should take so keen a pleasure in unearthing matters to my discredit in hunting me down like this."

Cutts' eyes glittered.

"You have always been against me," he said. "You have been against me, now I am against you. One good turn deserves another, you know." And he gave a laugh.

"You are mistaken. I have never been against you, as you term it. I have tried to do my duty to all."

"At all events," said Cutts, "I have found you out, and your game here is up."

"Am I to understand by that that you intend to publish to the school this discovery that you have made?" asked Mr. Selwyn, with a calmness that puzzled Cutts.

"Yes!" he answered sharply. "Can you ask me to hide it, to become your confederate?"

"It would be useless to ask, I presume; and I never felt less inclined to ask anything at your hands. You have, then, resolved?"

"Yes! Either you leave St. Jim's, or I shall expose you. You can take your choice."

"You are very kind."

"You brazen it out well!" said Cutts scornfully. "You will look a little differently when the whole school knows you in your true colours."

"You have finished here," said Mr. Selwyn; "you need say no more. You have been very insolent—"

Cutts laughed.

"Insolent! To you?"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Selwyn. "I repeat, you have been insolent, but I shall not enter into that now. Tomorrow morning I shall see Dr. Holmes, and make a full explanation to him, and it will be for him to decide whether I leave St. Jim's. Till then you will be silent."

"It is not for you to dictate."

"I repeat, you will be silent," said Mr. Selwyn, with an ominous look. "Can I depend on you or not?"

"Oh, I suppose I can allow that much!" said Cutts, with an assumption of carelessness. "But I shall want to be satisfied that—"

"You shall be satisfied. Now go." Cutts walked out of the study. He had the best of it, he said to himself; yet he could not feel as if he had won a victory. Mr. Selwyn's manner was not that of a convicted cheat. Was it possible that there was something wrong somewhere, that he had jumped to conclusions too hastily? That uneasy doubt spoiled Cutts' satisfaction.

CHAPTER 13.

The Housemaster's Secret.

DR. HOLMES looked up, as Mr. Selwyn entered his study, and gave the young Housemaster a kindly nod. There were traces of emotion in the kind old face of the Head.

"You received my note, sir?" said the Housemaster.

"Yes. You told me that you could give me news of my nephew."

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Holmes motioned him to a seat. "You wish to have news of Frank Holmes?" asked Mr. Selwyn, his eyes upon the Head's face.

"Can you ask, Mr. Selwyn? Yet, of course, you know little of the matter," said the Head. "I have told you little, and you are a stranger here. It is many years since I have seen my nephew. He was a boy at this school, under my charge. To others, I could easily justify the sternness with which I treated him—but to myself, not so easily."

"You had little choice, sir," said Mr. Selwyn quietly. "In your position, you were called upon to show strict justice, all the more to one of your own family, whose example was a pernicious one to the rest of the school. Your nephew was foolish and reckless, though I verily believe more sinned against than sinning."

"You knew him?"

"Yes."

"I was not aware of that. I had no choice but to compel him to leave St. Jim's," said the Head, with a sigh. "But I would have cared for him after that. I would have prevented him from falling further. But he was proud and headstrong; he refused my help, and disappeared. I have never seen him since."

"But you wish to?"

"I should give a great deal, Mr. Selwyn, to hear news of him—especially news that he had seen his errors, and ceased his follies," said Dr. Holmes. "But in any case, I should stand a friend to him, and if he cared to come here, I should receive him with open arms, and give him every chance."

Mr. Selwyn's lips opened, but he did not speak.

"And you tell me you have news of him?" said the Head, looking at the Housemaster. "I shall be more glad than I can say to hear it. Do you know what became of him, after he left me?"

Mr. Selwyn nodded.

"Yes. He went from bad to worse, sir; he became a hanger-on of the racecourse, partly from recklessness, partly because he had no resources."

"I feared it."

"But then there came a change," said the Housemaster quietly. "The change came with the war. When the war broke out he saw his chance—a chance to escape from the vile surroundings that had become a horror to him, and a chance of redeeming the past. He joined the Army."

Dr. Holmes drew a deep breath.

"My brave lad!" he said. "There was always more of good than of evil in him—I never made sufficient allowance for the evil companions who had their influence upon him. And then, Mr. Selwyn?"

"He was given promotion at the Front—chance favoured him, and he saved the life of his officer during a gas attack—it was Major Stringer—"

"The brave lad!"

"He was serving under another name. He took his commission under that name. He was invalided home, suffering from the poison-gas. And then—"

The Housemaster paused. Dr. Holmes was looking at him very strangely.

"When he was at St. Jim's," resumed Mr. Selwyn, "he had been trained with a view to becoming a master in the school. During his years of idleness he had forgotten nothing. As he lay convalescent a new plan came into his mind, and as soon as he was able he resumed his studies. Major Stringer, as a governor of the school, gave him a recommendation to you—"

"To—me!"

"To you, sir. Major Stringer entered into the plan heartily—he had every faith in the young man's repentance. And—Frank, sir, came to St. Jim's—Mr. Railton's absence was the opportunity—"

"Mr. Selwyn!"

The Housemaster rose to his feet. Dr. Holmes was deadly pale.

"He came, sir, hoping to prove to you, in daily contact, that his character had changed, that he had sincerely repented. He did not intend to reveal his identity until the day came for his return to the Front. But a discovery has been made which compels him to change his intention. That is why I have come to you, sir! Uncle, you know me now!"

The Head of St. Jim's rose, his lips trembling.

"Frank! My boy! Is it possible?" he faltered. "And I did not know you."

"Years have changed me, uncle, in more ways than one—and the trenches have left their mark, too. In a fortnight more, uncle, I go back to my regiment—shall I go with your blessing?"

Dr. Holmes placed his hands on the young master's shoulders, and looked into the grave, handsome face.

"My boy!" he said. "You have come back at last! Heaven be praised!"

There was a tap at the door.

Cutts opened it.

Dr. Holmes turned towards him. There were tears in the old gentleman's kind eyes.

"I—I hope I am not interrupting, sir," said Cutts, with a venomous look at the School Housemaster. "I feel it my duty, sir, to give you certain information respecting Mr. Selwyn. His name is not Selwyn—"

"You need say no more, Cutts. This gentleman is Frank Holmes, my nephew."

Cutts staggered.

"Your—your nephew, sir," he gasped.

Dr. Holmes smiled slightly.

"Yes, Cutts. He enlisted under another name, as it happens."

"Oh!" stammered Cutts.

The dandy of the Fifth almost limped from the study. Uncle and nephew dismissed him from their minds as soon as he was gone. Gerald Cutts went down the passage like a fellow in a dream. He had struck his blow—and it had missed. Cutts' game was evidently up.

"Bai Jove!"

That was what Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said, when he heard the news. And the rest of the St. Jim's fellows shared his astonishment.

Some of the seniors had heard a little of Frank Holmes. But very little had been known about him.

The story was out now. All the facts were not told—it was wiser to let the old scandal sleep. The St. Jim's fellows only knew that the Head's nephew had been a rolling-stone for many years; that he had enlisted under another name as a Tommy, that he had won promotion at the Front, and that he had kept to his new name when he came back to St. Jim's. But it was revealed that he was the Head's nephew, and he took his own name again.

Langton of the Sixth understood more the story than the other fellows. He realised why Mr. Selwyn had taken so kindly an interest in him, and had striven so hard to save him from the downward path. Langton said nothing of what he knew. The following day, too, there was a great satisfaction for the prefect—Mr. Banks arrived at St. Jim's to "give away" Mr. Selwyn to the Head. Mr. Banks' interview with the Head was brief—very brief—and Langton saw him out. He saw him out of gates by the simple process of planting a heavy boot behind him—and Mr. Banks departed from St. Jim's a sadder if not a wiser man.

When Mr. Railton returned to St. Jim's, and the time had come for Lieutenant Holmes to return to Flanders, the St. Jim's fellows gave him a tremendous send-off. Herries took his cornet—though, fortunately, it turned out that somebody had poured gum into it. Thunderous cheers followed the young man in khaki as the train rolled away.

"Well," said Tom Merry, when the juniors came back to St. Jim's, "I'm glad to have Railton back. But Selwyn—I mean young Holmes—was a real ripper."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

And School House and New House both agreed on the point.

THE END.

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Mr. THOMAS WHITTAKER, accompanied by his son REGGIE, JIMMY REDFORD, LARRY BURT, a Chinese servant named SING LOO, Dr. PHENNING, and a party of natives, of whom Phwa Ben Hu—nicknamed TOOTHY JIM—is leader, sets out to explore Patagonia in search of a specimen of the giant sloth, which is believed to be still existent there.

The party reaches Patagonia, and eventually discover a number of llamas.

Sing Loo lassoes one of the strange creatures; but the animal suddenly turns on the Chinaman and sends him to the ground.

(Now read on.)

Captured by Pigmies.

But Sing Loo held on to the line like grim death.

A howl of ironical laughter and cheers left the throats of the onlookers.

"Gollée gollushee!" cried out Sing Loo. "This Chinaman no likee this velly bad beaste. But Sing Loo finish him velly quick timee!"

With a frantic rush the llama was suddenly off. Sing Loo tightened the line, but the sudden pull on it jerked the Chinaman off his feet again, and he crashed with terrific force to Mother Earth.

A yell of uproarious mirth greeted the Chinaman's acrobatic feat, but Reggie and Jimmy ran to the rescue and held the rope. After a good deal of trouble, and with the help of the natives, all the captured llamas were firmly secured, fastened together, and tied to two of the mules.

The animals that were shot were collected for stocking the larder. The expedition then moved on towards the hills.

Soon they entered the fringe of a dense jungle, pretty much the same in character as the former one.

The three boys, full of ardour and the spirit of adventure, went first with Sing Loo, hacking and cutting a path for the rest of the party. They had been at this work for a good hour or more, while the doctor had gone off or lagged behind to collect botany specimens, and Mr. Whittaker and Toothy Jim were overhauling the animals and examining the state of some of the goods damaged by the rain.

"This Chinaman he never workee so muchee!" said Sing Loo, as, bent almost double, he dexterously applied his chopper.

"Do you good, Sing Loo!" said Reggie, who was streaming with perspiration.

"There's worse to come!" laughed Larry. "You've got to learn how to ride a llama—hasn't he, you fellows?"

"Rather!" they chorused.

"No, no, no!" cried out Sing Loo, in a great state of agitation. "This Chinaman no ridee that velly bad animal. He velly nearly killee Sing Loo."

"But you've got to ride him, Sing Loo," protested Larry. "We three boys are going to teach you!"

"Me likee mulee now," replied Sing Loo, with a proud, bland smile. "Me ridee mulee velly muchee gland."

"But you don't ride him!" grinned Jimmy. "You've always got your arms round his neck!"

"For becoss this Chinaman velly fondée mulee," replied Sing Loo glibly.

"Rot, Sing Loo!" grinned Larry. "Anyhow, there's going to be a new riding-school opened by the Patagonian Exploration Party to-morrow, and you're going to be the first pupil!"

"Me thinkee there'll be velly little piecee left of this Chinaman with more bumpee-bumpee!" sighed Sing Loo woefully.

"Better to wear out than rust out!" yelled Jimmy, which remark was accompanied by a yell of delighted laughter.

"Come on, Jimmy!" cried Larry suddenly. "I'm going ahead a bit to see what lies beyond that thick clump of trees and tropical ferns over there!" And he pointed towards a great dense cluster of trees and undergrowth about four or five hundred yards ahead.

Slyly, Sing Loo, with his sharp little eyes, watched the boys as they disappeared, marking every yard of their way.

Jimmy and Larry, picking their way carefully, ready for snakes that might come darting across their path, armed with their hatchets, rifles, and sheath-knives stuck in their belts, reached the mass of thick brambles and undergrowth. Peeping through the few small cracks and crannies of the closely-climbing branches, they saw that beyond lay a small clearing of about three hundred yards in diameter. But what struck them as peculiar was that here and there, scattered about the open space, were tall trees with all the lower branches, bare of foliage, within reach of the ground. The upper part of the trees were thick with tropical foliage.

"By golly!" whispered Larry excitedly, piercing the distance with keen eyes. "There's something moving up in one of those trees, and look, Jimmy!" he added. "Surely that's a little rough, rude hut or nest of some kind in the fork of the tree right in our line of sight?"

"Yes, it is!" whispered Jimmy. "And, oh, Larry," he muttered, "there's gorillas or big monkeys!"

As he spoke two figures slid quickly down the tree, catching on from branch to branch with the agility of monkeys. Then they commenced to run along the ground, with incredible speed, their long arms flung out in front of them, and in somewhat of a stooping posture. The height of the creatures was not more than three to four feet.

"They're men—not animals!" whispered Barry. "They're pigmies!"

As he spoke there was a noise of a crackling bramble behind them. Quickly Larry turned. A cry half of horror, half of amazement escaped him. Closing round the boys, with quick, stealthy movements, were a dozen or more of the pigmy men—horrid-looking little creatures, with deep, copper-

(Continued on page iii. of the cover.)

coloured skins and black hair, and almost destitute of clothes.

Before the boys had time to shout or act, the dwarfs leapt on them, seizing them with iron grip, stuffing dried leaves and grass into their mouths, and binding them with some thick, fibrous cords.

Then Jimmy and Larry saw many wooden spears raised, directed right at them.

Together both boys prepared for death, their stout, courageous hearts almost failing them.

Sing Loo's Smart Rescue.

The suddenness of the little men's appearance momentarily took the boys off their guard.

Before Jimmy had time to level his rifle and fire, he saw one of the dwarfs swiftly and deftly throw out a lasso, and the noose fell over Reggie's head, the cord was drawn, and the boy fell to the ground. At the same instant another noose dropped over Jimmy's head, but like lightning he whipped out his knife with his left hand, and severed the noose. He heard a cry from Larry, and saw that his chum was being bound to a tree, and that there was a crowd of little copper-coloured men closing round him. And then two of the dwarfs leapt upon Jimmy. But, before they could lay hands on him, with incredible agility Jimmy seized his rifle by the butt, and, swinging it round his head, brought it down crash on to the skull of the first dwarf who tried to seize his arm. Down went the little, ape-like creature in a moment.

Jimmy's second antagonist hesitated, then ran back a few yards. There was a savage cry, half snarl, half shriek, from the dwarfs as they saw their comrade fall.

Jimmy, just before he brought his rifle to his shoulder, caught a glimpse of Reggie and Larry; Reggie was lying prone on the ground, and Larry was bound to a tree.

For a moment Jimmy paled as he saw one of the dwarfs taking steady aim at Larry with bow and arrow.

And at that instant a shot rang out.

The little man with the bow and arrow fell like a stone.

There was a howl of terror and dismay from the dwarfs, then, with shrill, harsh cries of fear, the whole crowd of them suddenly took to their heels, dashed through the undergrowth, and disappeared.

As Jimmy saw them bolt through the trees he gave them both barrels of his rifle, and, judging by the cries of fear and pain that came to him, he gathered that his bullets had found their mark.

Jimmy was just going to spring forward to Larry and Reggie, when a voice close by his ear made him start.

"Sing Loo, he makee velly goodee shot, Massa Jimmy."

And then Jimmy turned, to find the faithful Chinaman by his side.

"My golly, Sing Loo," he cried, "it was a shot and no mistake! You've saved Larry's life. The little, apish man would have twanged his bow-string in another fraction of a second, and poor old Larry would have been no more."

Then, while Jimmy went to Larry's rescue and unloosed his bonds, Sing Loo tended to Reggie, who was still prone on the ground.

If Larry looked a little pale, there can be no wonder, for the boy had realised how close he had been to death.

"Back up, old chum!" said Jimmy kindly, supporting him with his arm. "Nearly did for you, by Jove, and I'm blowed if I didn't have a nasty turn, too! I thought both you and Reggie were done for."

"Touch and go that time!" murmured Larry. And then the boys went over to Sing Loo and Reggie.

Reggie's face was a sort of mottled blue, and the boy was quite unconscious. The deadly noose had been drawn so tight that it had almost done its work, but the Chinaman was already desperately trying artificial respiration, and, with the help of the two boys, Reggie soon showed signs of returning animation.

Presently he opened his eyes, smiled faintly, looked round, and murmured:

"Jolly nearly choked me into Kingdom Come that time!" Then he closed his eyes, breathing rather heavily, and remained very quiet.

Then suddenly Larry and Jimmy and Sing Loo heard the welcome sound of a shout in the far distance. Help was coming either from the doctor or Mr. Whittaker. All three shouted back in answer, and before very long they saw the doctor, who had rifle at half-cock, coming through a clearing. He came up to them with a run, and quite breathless.

"Everyone all right?" he gasped. "We heard your shots, and Mr. Whittaker and I hurried in the direction from whence the sounds came, but we found we were much further away than we thought. You couldn't have heard our cries. Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he went on, catching sight of Reggie. At once his professional instinct was all on the alert, and in another moment he was kneeling beside the boy.

"Ah! Choking," he murmured. "But we'll soon have him quite all right again." And the three others silently watched him whilst he exerted his medical skill and knowledge on Reggie. It was not long before the patient was sitting up, and then they told the doctor the whole story.

"It was Sing Loo who saved my life," said Larry, with great gratitude. "I didn't know he was such a good shot."

"Bravo, Sing Loo!" said the doctor.

"Me plenty brave Chinaman, and me thinkee those smallee men muchee too little for their size. This Chinaman he no likee dwarfee."

Then the party returned to the camp, which lay about a mile to their rear, and found Mr. Whittaker was just about to start a search, not only for the boys and Sing Loo, but also for the doctor.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Whittaker, when he had heard their adventure, "I'm jolly glad to think that you've all come out of it with whole skins. It might have ended in disaster."

"Next time allee boys go out alone, I take velly goodee care I go with them," chimed in Sing Loo, with a bland smile, and entirely in ignorance of his "Irish bull."

"We won't push on any more to-day," said Mr. Whittaker. "I think you boys have had enough adventures for one day."

At this there was a lively chorus of protest at Mr. Whittaker's apparent failure to gauge their capacity for adventure, but as Mr. Whittaker said "No," there was an end to the matter.

It was Larry who suggested that Sing Loo should take a lesson in learning to ride one of the llamas without delay.

"But me velly good liden on horsebackee," protested the Chinaman. "Me no wantee liden on old llama. Me plenty muchee to do, gettee ready for chop-chop."

But all the Chinaman's excuses were laughed at and ridiculed, and finally Toothy Jim was requisitioned to bring out the biggest llama and hold it, together with another native, while Sing Loo, with about as much humour in his face as an animated coffin, was urged by Larry, Reggie, and Jimmy to mount his new steed. The llama showed every desire to kick Sing Loo whenever the Chinaman got within reach—which was not very often.

"Go it, Sing Loo!" cried Larry. "You'll look no end of a toff on its back, and if it does throw you you haven't far to fall!"

"Tie yourself on to its neck by your pigtail," suggested Jimmy.

"Set on backwards," shouted Reggie, "and then the llama'll think you're getting off."

But even this brilliant proposition failed to comfort the Chinaman, who was excitedly dancing round the llama.

"Me takee velly quick leapee, and—plumpee, rightee on."

"Well, plump it, quick, and do it man!" grinned Reggie.

"Come on; it's waiting for you!"

"It'll see me," said Sing Loo woefully.

"No, it won't, if you do it from behind," laughed Larry.

"Alee lightee," replied Sing Loo. And then he made a desperate run towards the llama, who evinced a remarkable desire to periodically dash its head on the ground and throw its hind legs into the air.

Just as it was in the graceful attitude of standing on its hind legs, Sing Loo made one frantic leap on its back; and at the same instant it bucked, then threw its heels in the air. The Chinaman described a beautiful semicircle in space, and descended over the animal's head, landing with more force than comfort on the hard, hard ground.

"You heathenée, foreign devil!" cried Sing Loo, lunging out with his fist at the animal's head. Sing Loo missed; but not so the wily llama, who butted at the Chinaman with deadly certainty.

By this time the boys, Mr. Whittaker, and the doctor were reduced to a state bordering on hysteria.

"Why don't you try and hit back?" asked Reggie, in a weak gurgle.

"Me velly hard tlying to," said Sing Loo woefully; "but llama he hitee out of turnee."

The Chinaman had another try at mounting. This time he was more successful, and, winding his pigtail round the animal's neck, and putting the end of the pigtail in his mouth, he made a noose round the brute's neck. Besides this, he had the additional support of both arms which also affectionately encircled the llama's neck.

Desperately the animal plunged and kicked, but Sing Loo clung to his back like a snail to its house. Then into the middle of the clearing sprang Toothy Jim, with a stout wooden peg and a mallet. He approached the llama as near as he could, and tied the long rope to the peg and sprang away. Suddenly the llama shot forward, but after proceeding for about twenty yards, was brought up by the cord, almost throwing the Chinaman from his seat by the jerk. Then suddenly the llama began tearing round and round the peg with the rope stretched to its fullest extent. Sing Loo clung to his steed, yelling like mad.

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

"Go it, Sing Loo!" yelled Jimmy.

"Two to one on the winner!" cried Larry.

"You'll win by a pigtail yet, Sing Loo," said Reggie.

Then all of a sudden, Sing Loo, gaining confidence at the easy steady pace, freed his pigtail and arms from the animal's neck, and, pressing his knees to its sides, rode in an upright position. But only for a second or two, for the llama was not in an accommodating mood. Suddenly it stopped dead, throwing the Chinaman over its head—wallop!

Even the serious Toothy Jim showed every molar in his head and laughed immoderately—rather like a hyena.

"Never mind, Sing Loo," cried the doctor, as the Chinaman very quickly crawled away from the llama, "you've done very well, and after once or twice more on his back, you'll break him in."

"Once, twice more," echoed Sing Loo ruefully, "this Chinaman already had plenty velly too muchee devil llama." And off went the faithful servant to prepare the evening meal, while Toothy Jim and his native assistant tethered up the llama with its brethren.

After as much good and well-cooked tuck that they could eat, everyone felt A 1. Not a leaf stirred in all that vast primeval forest. The tense, heavy silence was almost uncanny. None of them knew what hidden, unexpected dangers lurked near. The darkness was so thick and impenetrable beyond the glare of the camp-fire that it seemed as if it were a solid chunk of utter blackness.

Everyone started as Mr. Whittaker broke the silence.

"Well, boys," he said, "we shall be on the move at day-break. To-morrow we'll cross the valley where we saw that monstrous Tapir Megathorus. I climbed a tree this morning and saw in the very far distance—what do you think?"

"Mountains," suggested Reggie.

"Yes, mountains," agreed Mr. Whittaker, "but something else besides."

"Smoke from volcanoes?" suggested Larry.

"Smoke, certainly," agreed Mr. Whittaker, "but it did not come from mountains, I don't think. There were several little spirals of smoke from different places."

"You mean—" put in the doctor.

"I mean that such smoke came from the fires made by human beings. Some unknown tribe, I'm sure."

"How stunning!" cried Reggie. "Pr'aps they'll help us to get the giant sloth."

"Well," said Mr. Whittaker, "whoever they are we're prepared to tackle 'em—eh, boys?"

"Rather!" they chorussed.

"Is the giant sloth bigger than that huge brute we saw tearing up the valley to-day?" asked Larry.

"I should think it is," said Mr. Whittaker quietly.

"Too big for its size, I expect," murmured Jimmy happily, but rather sleepily.

And very soon the whole party were wrapped in slumber, their ceiling being the night clouds and stars, their bed, the hitherto untrodden ground of unknown Patagonia.

The Rock City.

They were up at the first hint of dawn and hours before the sun had risen, the long cavalcade, with the remainder of the mules, natives, and baggage that were left them, was trekking through the dense jungle, much of the undergrowth of which had to be hacked away by the boys and Sing Loo.

Slowly and laboriously they descended the Monster Valley, as they termed it, proceeding cautiously, and with every rifle at half-cock. Skirting the horrid, stagnant pools near which they had first seen the mighty Tapir-like creature, they entered more undergrowth, and began to ascend the opposite slopes of the vale.

There was a damp, clammy heat which was most trying, and the ground was very rough and uneven.

Jimmy and Reggie were ahead with the doctor, while Mr. Whittaker and Larry brought up the rear.

Suddenly there broke upon their startled ears the most appalling series of elephant-like trumpeting and screams. These cries went echoing and echoing through the primeval forest, reverberating till they died away. The silence that followed was terribly accentuated.

"More of the Giant Tapir tribe," whispered Reggie.

"Probably," whispered the doctor, "wish we could bag one."

Again the horrid cries broke out, and went echoing away to the distance; but this time the sounds came from much further away.

"Going from us, and not towards us," said the doctor.

"Worse luck!" put in Reggie.

"I should like to bag one of those brutes," chimed in Jimmy.

"I dare say you would," remarked the doctor, with a smile. "If you did, you'd be famous for all time."

"Perhaps it's the giant sloth," suggested Larry with eagerness.

"Anything seems possible in this part of the world," answered the doctor; "but I should think the quarry we're after would shun all haunts of human beings—the pigmy tribe, from what you said, live somewhere about here, I think, their rough huts or nests being built up in the trees."

As the doctor spoke he glanced round him. A few hundred yards to his right he espied a rude structure half-way up one of the trees.

"Is that like one of the tree dwellings you saw yesterday, Reggie?" he asked, indicating the same to the boy.

"That's it!" replied Reggie. "We saw them swarming down the stem, and they were on us before we knew where we were."

"There are no traces of the Tree Dwellers now," said the doctor, "so I'll go and take a photograph of their houses." So saying, he left the head of the party with his camera, and presently rejoined the boys, having, as he knew, succeeded in taking a most interesting snapshot of the pigmies' homes.

The cavalcade proceeded cautiously onwards, for none knew from one instant to another whether some gigantic monster might come rushing from the thickets and charge the leading horse and mules.

They had gone eight miles in about as many hours, when Jimmy and Reggie, having spotted some small species of buck in the distance, went ahead on their mules to have a shot, while Sing Loo, by the doctor's orders, followed close behind.

Just as the boys reached the top of the slope, which abruptly ended in a fairly level plateau, covered with dense trees and gigantic rocks, Reggie, spying a big, gaping black aperture in a solid wall of stone, ran forward to enter it, calling out to Jimmy to follow him.

The aperture led to a small tunnel. The boys passed through this quickly. Suddenly they came out into broad daylight. And what they saw revealed before their startled eyes made them cry out in amazement.

They appeared to be on the fringe of a nearly filled extinct volcano crater. It was almost oval in shape, with a depth of thirty to forty feet. The sides were of rock, hardened pumice-stone and scoriae, which reached to the rough, uneven floor almost sheer. But the most wonderful part of the whole thing was that right round the crater or cup were carved rough pillars and doors hewn out of the solid rock.

They were gazing at a rock city of unknown age.

For a few seconds the boys waited in breathless excitement, half-expecting to see some strange primitive man emerging from one of the doorways. But there was no sign of life. The silence of the place seemed to tell of vast ages that had passed without the footsteps of either man or beast to awaken the dead city from its long sleep.

It was Jimmy who broke the silence.

"I'm going to fetch the doctor!" he cried, and, followed by Reggie and Sing Loo, he ran out to rejoin the head of the procession, which by this time was almost up to the top of the plateau.

Excitedly Reggie and Jimmy told of what they had seen, and the cavalcade halted whilst Mr. Whittaker, the doctor, Larry, Jimmy, and Reggie visited the dead city.

"It's impossible to estimate its age," commented the doctor—"fifty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty thousand years, perhaps. Some of the buried cities of Mexico remind me of this, but I've never seen a city hewn out of the sides of an extinct crater before."

Then they started on a thorough investigation. Reggie, the doctor, and Larry took one side, while Mr. Whittaker, Sing Loo, and Jimmy searched the other.

The apertures which led to the rooms or chambers were about six feet high by four feet broad, and all the doorways were adorned with rough carvings, vaguely representing men, beasts and trees. There were some curious hieroglyphics in a dead language which completely baffled the doctor.

The chambers were about twenty feet square and a foot higher than the doorway.

While the doctor and his little party were examining the walls of the dwellings, an excited cry suddenly escaped the former, who was busy scrutinising the rock-hewn sides. His voice brought Reggie and Larry to the spot. The doctor had his electric torch centred on a rough drawing chipped in the rock, of a very strange-looking animal. Although the drawing did not measure more than about fifteen inches long, by about twenty in its longest part, there was no mistaking what it was meant to be.

"That," said the doctor, in a sort of awed voice, "is the crude drawing of a giant sloth, executed by the primitive man who once dwelt in these caves."

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand serial story next Wednesday. Order your copy of the GEM LIBRARY early.)