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THE SNEAK OF ST. JIM'S!



A BATH FOR BARTHOLOMEW RATCLIFF!

(A Screamingly Funny Scene in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

The SNEAK of St. JIM'S

A Magnificent, Long, Complete School Tale of
TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER I.

Mr. Ratcliff makes Complaints!

"WATTY looks watah 'waxy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form was undoubtedly right. Mr. Ratcliff looked "waxy" as he strode into the School House at St. Jim's. His brows were knitted, and his little sharp eyes gleamed under them—"like a waxy," as Arthur Augustus further remarked to his chums.

Mr. Ratcliff paused and looked round him on his way to the Ration's study. His glance fell upon the Terrible Three of the Shell, who were chatting with Blake & Co. And he rapped out sharply: "Merry! Manners! Lowther!" Tom Merry & Co. looked at him.

"Follow me to your Housemaster's study at once!" commanded Mr. Ratcliff. "You also, D'Arcy!" And he whisked on.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "It is weally watah cool of Mr. Watecliff to svot ovah heah and give ordahs to School House chaps. He has no right to give ordahs outside the New House." "Don't go!" suggested Jack Blake. "The Terrible Three hesitated. Mr. Ratcliff was really exceeding his rights, as he often did. But, after all, he was a Housemaster, and a Housemaster was an important personage.

So after a moment or two of reflection Tom Merry & Co. decided to follow in his wake, and Arthur Augustus, still more slowly, followed in theirs.

The New House master rapped sharply at Mr. Raitton's study door and entered. The three Shell fellows stopped in the doorway, awaiting their own Housemaster's commands to enter. Mr. Raitton rose from his chair and glanced at his visitor, and then at the juniors in the doorway, and then at his frowning visitor again. He laid down his book with something like a sigh. Evidently his colleague had come to make a complaint; and Mr. Raitton's complaints were "frequent and painful and free."

"Mr. Raitton," rapped out the New House master, without wasting any time in preliminary greeting. "I have a very serious complaint to make regarding certain boys in this House!"

Fourth. The boys are here, I think." Mr. Ratcliff glanced round at the doorway. The Terrible Three stood in a neck row there, and behind them gleamed the celebrated eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You may enter, my boys," said the School House master quietly.

The four juniors entered. "You are doubtless aware, Mr. Raitton, that my nephew, Bartholomew Ratcliff, arrived at the school to-day," continued the New House master.

"I was not aware of it, but—"

"You are, then, aware of it now, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "My nephew, sir, was treated with the utmost discourtesy on his arrival by these boys. He has had the matter before me, as his uncle and as his Housemaster. Certain boys of my own House who were concerned in the matter I have punished—severely. It remains, sir, for these delinquents to be punished in the same manner."

"Quite so, if they have been guilty of discourtesy to a new boy, the nephew of a Housemaster!" assented Mr. Raitton.

"I have already assured you on that point, sir."

"It is necessary for me to know the circumstances before administering punishment."

"I should imagine, sir, that my assurance was sufficient."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I must allow me to speak, sir!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "Mr. Watecliff is labahly undah a vevy sevius misapprehension. I am uttaly incapable of displav'nt discourtesy towards a new chap. I should weard it, sir, as bad form—vevy bad form."

"I must hear the circumstances," said Mr. Raitton, quietly but firmly. "Pray be silent, D'Arcy, for the present."

"Certainly, sir! But I couldah—"

"Silence, please! What have these boys done, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"D'Arcy has committed a violent assault upon my nephew at the railway-station!"

"Bliss my soul!"

"One of the others—I think, Lowther—took my nephew's bag; from him and kicked it along the road for a great distance, considerably damaging the bag, and actually impairing its value." The others said and shotted him.

Mr. Raitton looked sternly at the four School House juniors. "You hear what Mr. Ratcliff says, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Weally, Mr. Waitton—" "I am speaking to Merry, D'Arcy. Kindly be silent 'till I say you, Lowther, who treated Master Ratcliff's property in the way described!"

"I'm the chap, sir!" answered Monty Lowther cheerfully.

"You admit it!"

"I think we ought to explain, sir—"

"Yess, watah!"

"I am waiting for you to explain," said Mr. Raitton, taking up his cane.

"Well, sir, we met young Ratcliff on the road," said Tom Merry. "We didn't know then that he was Mr. Ratcliff's nephew—not that it would have made any difference if we had. He ordered us to carry his bag!"

"What?" "Told us to lag for him!" said Manners, with a sniff. "As if we were going to lag for a new kid!"

"He ordered us to bring his bag to the school, sir," said Lowther meekly. "So I obeyed orders—only kicked it along instead of carrying it, I thought he wanted a lesson for his cheek."

"This is very extraordinary," said Mr. Raitton. "Surely a new boy—a junior in a lower Form—would not have the impertinence to order other boys to carry his bag!"

"My nephew, sir, is not precisely an ordinary new boy," said Mr. Ratcliff. "No doubt he expected to be treated with respect—as the nephew of a Housemaster."

Mr. Raitton raised his eyebrows. "If the account I have just heard is correct," he said, "your nephew appears to have been entirely in the wrong. Will you send for him, and let me hear what he has to say on the subject?"

"Quite unnecessary, sir."

"Then I must conclude that the statement I have heard is correct. Lowther, you show me, you really not really kicked the bag about, and you will take a hundred lines for doing so."

"A hundred lines, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff. "Is that a sufficient punishment for such insolence?"

"Your nephew appears to have pro-

roked it, Mr. Ratcliff. Merry and Manser appeared to have been simply lookers-on, and I see no reason for punishing them. What is the complaint as regards D'Arcy?"

"The Terrible Three smiled softly. Mr. Manser's tone was very quiet, but very firm, and the matter, so far as they were concerned, was at an end. The New House master realised that, and his thin lips smiled slightly.

"D'Arcy assaulted my nephew at the railway-station," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Bartholomew still bears about him the signs of ill-nature!"

"I punched his nose, sir," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Aftah warnin' him, I swack him with considerable violence upon the nose. Undah the same cove, sir, I should feel obliged to act in the same mannal again."

"What were the circumstances, D'Arcy?"

"The howwid wotah—"

"What!"

"I—I mean, young Watchif, sir, sniggahed. He had the fearful impertinence to sniggah—"

"He did what?"

"Sniggahed, sir—sniggahed in a vewy diawntoolful way at a chap I was with—a chap named Babbage, sir, who turns out to be a Gwammah School chap. This chap Babbage, sir, is afflicted with a stuttah, and that howwid cad—I—I mean, young Watchif, sir, actually sniggahed at the chap on the railway platform out of sheer widness and ill-breedin'. I warned him, sir, and as he persisted in sniggahin', I felt that I had no weseource but to punch his nose, sir."

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff.

"I am suah, sir, that you would have done the same undah the same cires!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"The Terrible Three nearly exploded at the bare idea of their Housemaster punching a junior's nose on a railway platform. Mr. Ratcliff gave them a stern look, and they suppressed their feelings.

"Has your nephew acquainted you with these circumstances, Mr. Ratcliff?" asked the School House master.

"No, sir, he has not; and I do not believe a word of D'Arcy's statement."

"Bai Jove!"

"Let the boy be sent for, then," said Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Ratcliff sniffed.

"I see no necessity for it, sir. D'Arcy having committed a violent assault upon him—"

"Nothin' of the sort!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "I simply punched his nose, sir. And he certainly saked for it."

"D'Arcy admits it, and I demand—"

"But if D'Arcy was defending his companion from violence, his action was justified," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Let your nephew give his account of the affair, and we shall see."

"If you refuse to punish D'Arcy, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"I certainly refuse to punish him unless it is made quite clear that he is to blame," explained the School House master tartly.

"Very well, sir, in that case, as the boy belongs to your House, I have nothing more to say!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

And he whacked out of the study in high disgust. Mr. Ratcliff wore a worried look. It was pretty clear, from the New House master's refusal to send for his nephew, that he suspected that D'Arcy's account of the affair was correct enough. What Mr. Ratcliff wanted was plenty of punishment with a very slight admixture of justice—while it was Mr. Ratcliff's aim to

hold the balance of justice evenly. Naturally, therefore, there was not likely to be complete agreement between the two Housemasters.

"The four juniors were smiling now. "Ratty" had been defeated for once, and that was all they cared about. Mr. Ratcliff made them a gesture of dismissal.

Tom Merry & Co. quitted the study with the deepest respect.

"Licked!" asked Blake. "Ratty's just gone out looking like a Hum!"

"Like a merry Turpits!" grinned Cardew of the Fourth. "Looks to me as if he's been robbed of his prey."

"Just so!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Ratty's a brick!" Lowther's got a hundred lines, that's all!"

"Bravo!"

"It is wathah a facah for Watty!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "That howwid boundah of a nephew of his has been sneakin', you know—he is that kind of a cad! Young Watty is awfully like old Watty. I wathah wewget now that I did not give him snobah punch on the nose!"

"He will get a good many if he goes on as he's started!" growled Blake. "Thank goodness he's out in the New House, and not on this side!"

"It is wathah wuff on Figgins & Co., dear boy."

"Might have been worse, though," said Blake angrily. "Might have been worse than this."

And the School House juniors agreed on that point.

CHAPTER 2.

Nice for Figgins & Co. I

THREE thoughtful faces were bent over the study table in Figgins' study in the New House.

Figgins & Co. were at prep.

But they were giving less thought than usual to their work—thoughtful as they looked.

Master Bartholomew Ratcliff weighed upon their minds.

The Housemaster's nephew had turned out to be so like the Housemaster that Figgins & Co. wondered how they were going to stand him in the study—and he had been assigned to their study.

They had already been caned in connection with the mishaps that had attended the arrival of Master Bartholomew at the school. The effect of the caning had worn off at last—but the effect of Master Bartholomew himself was not likely to wear off.

Every moment they expected to hear the footsteps of Bartholomew outside, and to see his thin, cunning face looking in at the door.

"It's rotten!" said George Figgins, raising his head from his work at last. "Rotten!"

"Rotten isn't the word!" said Fatty Wynn gloomily. "The study won't be long in coming in when that worm crawls into it!"

"It's hard cheese," said Kerr, with a sigh. "Why couldn't they plant him on Redfern—or Chowle—or somebody? Lots of other studies!"

"Why couldn't they plant him in the School House?" growled Figgins. "That's the place for the worm. Why couldn't he have been Ratcliff's nephew instead of Ratcliff's. Isn't it just our luck!"

And Figgins & Co. went on with prep, having a little relieved their feelings by those remarks.

They were still at work when a step was heard in the passage, and the door opened. Figgins & Co. looked up, and saw the thin figure and unpleasant, thin

face of the Housemaster's nephew framed in the doorway.

Bartholomew Ratcliff was not handsome. That, of course, was not against him, if that had been all. Figgins would not have been called handsome by his best friend; but Figgins was no more like Master Ratcliff than cheese was like chalk. "Ratty junior" was unpleasant.

There was no other word for it. Sharpness and suspicion looked out of his eyes. There was always a lingering sneer about his thin lips. His very nose, which was long and thin, seemed to have a sort of suspicious, knowing, sniffing keeness about it. Sharpness is not a pleasant trait in youth—and Master Bartholomew seemed to be all sharpness.

He grinned a little as Figgins & Co. looked at him, remembering the caning he had witnessed in his uncle's study. Even his grin was sharp and unpleasant. "This Number Four Study!" he asked.

"Yes," answered Figgins.

"My study, then?"

"Yes. Come in!" said Figgins, as cordially as he could.

Bartholomew Ratcliff came in.

He looked round the study with rather a disparaging air. Considering that three—and now four—fellows inhabited it, it was not, perhaps, roomy. But Figgins & Co. were satisfied with it.

"Bis poky here—what?" remarked Ratty junior.

"I'm sorry you find our study poky," answered Kerr, with elaborate politeness.

"You three fellows dig here!"

"Yes."

"Not much room for four, I should say."

"That's just where you're right," said Fatty Wynn eagerly. "Why not ask your uncle to put you in another study, Ratcliff?"

"Rot!"

"Eh!"

"I understand that this is the best study in the passage. Rather cute of you fellows to beg it, in that case. You're not getting rid of me as easily as all that!"

"Oh!"

"I've got some books and things that will have to be put somewhere—"

"We'll make room for your things somehow," said Kerr.

"You'll have to!"

"Oh!"

There was a pause, as Master Bartholomew noised about the study in his nose. Figgins & Co. looked at one another eloquently. They understood that Bartholomew regarded himself as a person of consequence as the Housemaster's nephew, and expected to be treated accordingly. He had come to Figgins' study with the idea of being monarch of all he surveyed. That thought put Figgins & Co. into a rather dangerous mood.

But they were patient. They did not want trouble with Ratcliff on his first evening at the school. They did not specially want trouble with his uncle.

They resumed their work, while the new junior noised about the study. He threw himself into the armchair at last.

"Had any supper?" asked Figgins at length, glancing round at him.

Master Bartholomew grinned.

"Yes, bet!" he answered. "Topping, in the House-dame's room! She knows she's got to keep in with me."

"Oh!"

Figgins went on with his prep.

"It's a bit cold here," said Ratcliff.

"Don't you have a fire here in the evening?"

"We generally let it out after tea,"

explained Kerr. "We have to be careful with the coal."

"Ain't you allowed enough coal?"

"Yes," allowed a certain amount, that it is."

"It's soon after that!" said Bartholomew confidently. "I'll speak to my uncle about it."

"That wouldn't be much use," said Figgins. "You see, the coal's allowed, and one study can't have more than another. If we had an extra lot, another study would have to go short."

"What does that matter?"

"Ed!"

"Chop has to think of himself in this world!" remarked Rattiff. "Look after Number One, and let everybody else look after himself. That's my motto!"

"Jolly good motto for a Prussian, at least!" greeted Patsy Wynn. "It won't do at St. Jim's!"

Master Bartholomew looked at him.

"That's cheek!" he said.

"Is it?" asked Patsy, in a deeper growl than before.

"Yes. You fellows may as well understand, to begin with, that I don't want any such chat!" said Rattiff. "I'm in a rather special position in the Fourth Form, and you'd better recognize the fact!"

"What is there special about your position more than any other fellow's?" asked Kerr quietly.

"I'm the Housemaster's nephew."

"What difference does that make?"

"A whole lot," said Rattiff. "I've got my uncle's ear, you see, and a word or two from me will make a lot of difference to any fellow I happen to dislike."

"George Figgins does a deep breath."

"You're now to our whole hoo!"

"I think, Rattiff," he said slowly. "As a new chap, up from an old hand may be useful to you. I recommend you not to put on too much about being the Housemaster's nephew, and all that. The less you say about it the better. If there's any farce about it, it will make you unpopular."

"Really," answered Rattiff. "I think I shall get my own work all the same, and that's what I want."

"You're most likely to get your head punished!"

"I don't think it will pay anybody to punch my head!" smiled Master Bartholomew.

Figgins eyed him.

"You don't look much of a fighting man, at all events!" he observed.

"Not at all. But my uncle—"

"There's a rub against speaking in the school, whether your uncle happens to be Housemaster or not!"

"One of the written rules!" asked Rattiff.

"No; but it's understood."

"It won't make much difference to me. If I'm not satisfied with anything, or anybody, I shall certainly complain to my uncle."

"That's speaking!"

"You don't say so!" smiled Bartholomew.

George Figgins breathed hot through his nose. He really did not know how to deal with this exceedingly unpleasant young person.

too, that this study is favoured—in the matter of coal, for instance."

"We don't want to be favoured!"

gaped Figgins. "And what's more, we can't have it!"

"I'll see to it, and I shall have it!" answered Rattiff calmly. "About the fire—I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll see that plenty of coal is provided, and you fellows will undertake to keep the fire going. I can't bother with that. I shall expect some consideration to be shown to me in this study—in fact, a certain amount of attention."

Figgins & Co. gazed at him. They could scarcely believe their ears. Bartholomew rattled on cheerily:

"Now you fellows see how matters stand. Nothing like having it out plain, is there?"

"Yes—you want per-per-personal attention in this study!" muttered Figgins.

"Exactly!"

"You're going to set up as the Housemaster's favourite, and you expect fellows to take notice of it, and ker-ker-ker!"

"Something like that!" asserted Bartholomew.

"Perhaps you would like us to say for you, as if you were in the Sixth?"

repeated Kerr, with deep sarcasm.

"I don't think that at all a bad idea!"

"Yes—you don't!" gaped the Scottish janitor.

"Not at all. In fact, I'm glad as well as you that I shall expect some favouring service. I shall make it worth your while, of course—I don't expect to get anything for nothing. I know I jolly well shouldn't give anything for nothing!"

"I'll see that this study is favoured in every way, and—"

"You won't!" roared Figgins.

"Oh, yes, I will! Don't provoke me, and make me unpleasant!" implored Bartholomew.

"When I'm unpleasant, I'm dashed unpleasant. I assure you! Leave my friends!"

"Figgins!" repeated Figgins, in a voice that was something between a growl and a snort.

"Certainly. I feel quite friendly so far. I hope, for your sake, that I don't get very unfriendly!" Bartholomew went on in his jest. "I suppose there's some coal in the other studies?"

"I—I don't say there is."

"I'll see that some is brought here, then. Then you can light the fire. I shall want a fire."

With that Bartholomew stalked out of the study. He left Figgins & Co. staring at each other dumbly. They had not expected that Mr. Rattiff's nephew would be nice; but this was far, far beyond their very worst expectations.

Bartholomew had gone, apparently, to beg somebody else's coal—because he was the Housemaster's nephew. He was coming to be lagged for—because he was the Housemaster's nephew!

And, so proud of fact, all Figgins & Co. felt inclined to do was to administer unto him a terrific hiding—because he was the Housemaster's nephew!

CHAPTER 3.

Coal!

"GOOD man, Raddy!" said Tom Merry approvingly.

And Manners and Lovelace chimed in:

"Tip-top!"

There was supper in Redfern's study in the New House. Redfern, Owen and Lawrence were the hosts; Tom Merry, Manners, and Lovelace were the guests. On occasions—festive occasions—the rival juniors of St. Jim's forget that they were deadly foes. This was one of the occasions.

Redfern & Co. were not over-blissed with such, and their study was not a land flowing with milk and honey. They could not afford the expensive food that were seen in Champa's study in the Old House, or Raddy's ever in the Fifth House. But the hospitality was for them. And Raddy's great heart was not ungenerous. He had turned up a couple of herrings that were really tip-top, and the Terrible Three did not hesitate to say so.

Raddy's study was very cosy, too; a bright fire burned in the grate, and there was a large, clean cloth on each table, and enough forks to suit the need. And what better supper could be wanted than beautifully grilled herrings, with bread-and-margarine galore—and beaming friendship and hospitality!

Six chummy juniors were sitting down to supper, the guests from the School House being accommodated at a table, while stocks or boxes served the turn of the New House boys—when the door opened without a knock, and an unexpected face looked in.

"Hallo!" said Redfern, looking round.

"You can come in, whoever you are! Oh, yes, I'm Raddy's nephew!"

"I'm Mr. Rattiff's nephew," answered the new-comer.

"'Trot in!" said Lawrence hospitably.

The invitation was superfluous; Bartholomew was trotting in. The Terrible Three examined him with some interest.

Redfern hesitated a moment or two. He did not much like Raddy junior's looks, and he did not want the security of the boys' study, but he was not to be balked that it was up to him to be civil to the stranger in the land, and he spoke:

"If you haven't had your supper, Rattiff, we'd be glad if you'd join us."

Rattiff glanced at the grilled herrings, and gave a hearty cheer to the command of Redfern & Co.

"I've had my supper," he answered.

"Oh, all right!"

"I shouldn't care for herrings, anyway!"

"Oh!"

"I came to see if you had any coal here."

"Oh!"

Redfern & Co. seemed unable to make any remark but "Oh!" This peculiar young gentleman had almost taken their breath away.

"How do you get some coal?" remarked Owen, looking at the stranger in his mazy way. "That'll do. Take it along to my study, one of you, please—Number 4!"

"Is that a joke?" asked Redfern.

Bartholomew stared at him.

"Joke! No!"

"Then what do you mean?" asked Raddy, rather warmly.

"I think I've told you what I mean. I want a fire in my study, and Figgins is waiting to light it."

"Is—is it he?"

"Yes; so take the coal along at once!"

Is there tansany in your family? asks Owen.

"Eh! No! Certainly not! What do you mean?"

"Oh, I thought there might be," said Owen. "It's rather hard to account for you otherwise."

Tom Merry & Co. smiled. But they made no remark. It was for the crux of the study to chat with the intruder.

"I don't want any such chat here!" said Bartholomew dully. "You know that I'm your Housemaster's nephew, I suppose!"

"What does that matter?"
 "You'll find that it does matter. One of you carry this scuttle along to my room at once!" said Rattiff, in a ringing tone.
 Redfern glanced at his chums, and they went down again.

The herrings were served, and the half-dozen juniors began their supper as usual. Bartholomew Rattiff was in the study, of course, in existence at all. Rattiff seemed a little nonplussed, and he stared at them.

"Did you hear me?" he exclaimed.
 "Pass the salt, Reddy!" remarked Lawrence. "Salt for you chaps!"
 "Thanks!"

"Do you fellows hear me?" roared Bartholomew.

"If there's a thing I really like," said Monty Lowther blandly "it's a really well-grilled herring. This is really a gift of yours, Reddy."

"I always could grill a herring," said Redfern modestly.
 "I've told you," said Bartholomew Rattiff, "to take that scuttle of coal to my study!"

"I suppose you'll be playing Levison in the Abbotsford match?" Redfern remarked to the captain of the Shell.
 Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, I think so. Levison's coming on jolly well as a bowler. Clive will be in at eleven, too."

"You'll want plenty of New House, though, if you want to beat Abbotsford," observed Lawrence. "Don't forget that!"

"Will you take those coals to my study?" shrieked Bartholomew.

"Well, there's going to be four New House," said Tom—"Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and you, Reddy. That's a good dose."

"Good—but too little," said Redfern, with a smile. "You can't have too much of a good thing."

"I suppose you think this is funny, you chapsy rotters?" shouted Ratty junior. "It jolly well isn't, as you'll find!"

"You see, both Houses must have a look-in," said Tom; "and as School House is twice as many—"

"But New House is twice as good!" suggested Redfern.

To which the Terrible Three replied together:

"Bow-wow!"
 Bartholomew had realised by this time that he was expending his breath in vain upon fellows who were determined to remain unconscious of his existence.

He strode to the table, and caught Redfern by the shoulder.

"Look here—" he began.
 Redfern looked up quietly.

"Let go of my shoulder!" he said.
 Reddy's tone was very quiet, but there was something in it that made Ratty junior obey. He released Redfern's shoulder.

"I'll remember this!" he said, with a scowl. "You can cackle now, but I'll make you cackle another way. I can tell you I'll take the coals myself, but I'll remember this!"

Redfern looked round as Bartholomew stooped to take up the coals.

"Let that scuttle alone!" he said.

"What?"
 "If you'd asked civilly I'd have given you the coal. As you didn't, I won't! Let it alone!"

Bartholomew's reply to that was a scolding laugh, and he started for the door with the coal-scuttle. Redfern jumped up from the table, and strode after him with a very rapid stride. He caught Ratty junior by the shoulder and swung him round.

"Put that scuttle down!" he said.
 "Let me go, hang you!"

"Put it down!"
 "I won't!" roared Bartholomew.

"Then I'll jolly soon make you!"
 Bartholomew Rattiff's eyes glittered, and as Reddy's grip tightened he swung the scuttle round. Redfern uttered a yell as it came into violent contact with his legs.

He staggered back.
 "Have some more like that!" jeered Ratty junior.

"Squash him!" yelled Lawrence.

"Punch him!" shouted Owen.
 Redfern made a jump at Bartholomew, his quick temper fully roused now. He grasped the scuttle, wrenched it away from Ratty junior's grasp, and up-ended it over Ratty junior's head.

"Gug-gug! Gug-gug! Oooooooh!"
 "Talking of cricket—" remarked Redfern calmly.

"His, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to my—groooh!—uncle!" shrieked Ratty junior. "Ooooooh! I'll show him this! Grooooooh!"

"Talking of cricket, I really think—"

A black and furious fist was shaken at the study generally, and Bartholomew Rattiff tramped out, leaving a black trail behind him as he went. And loud howls of laughter from the passage showed that Bartholomew was adding to the gaiety of the New House as he proceeded to the Housemaster's study.



Ornison and dusty and perspiring, Bartholomew crawled out at the Housemaster's feet. Mr. Hamilton stared at him blankly. "Rattiff! Boy! What are you doing here?" (See Chapter 11.)

There was a sudden rush of coal upon the hapless Bartholomew.

Unfortunately for him, it was mostly "slack," and the coal-dust smothered him from head to foot, and went down his neck, and into his hair and his ears and his eyes and his nose and his mouth. In the twinkling of an eye Bartholomew was transformed into a Christy Minstrel. "Grooooooh! Gug-gug-gug!" came in a wild splutter from under the coal-dust. "Mmmmmmmmmmmmm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Redfern replaced the scuttle by the grate cheerfully, and went back to his seat at the table. The study carpet was in a rather deplorable state; but not nearly so deplorable as the state of the unhappy Bartholomew. He stood and gaped at his eyes and his nose, and spluttered and gurgled in a frenzy of wrath.

CHAPTER 4.

Ratty Senior Takes a Hand!

"PHEW!" murmured Tom Merry. The Terrible Three were serious enough now.

Bartholomew's astounding nerve in thinking that he could do as he liked because he was the Housemaster's relative appeared to Redfern & Co. as sheer, unadulterated cheek, which required drastic treatment. But the Terrible Three had seen something of that nice young gentleman already, and they realised that the matter was serious.

For Bartholomew was, after all, Mr. Rattiff's nephew; and Mr. Rattiff was not a man to hold the balance of justice even. Ratty junior must have some reason for thinking that Ratty senior would show him favouritism or he would

not have acted as he had done. And if the Housemaster backed up his nephew, it was surely a serious look-out for anyone who quarrelled with the excellent Bartholomew.

"He asked for that, didn't he?" remarked Redfern.

"He did—most emphatic!" agreed Monty Lowther. "But—"

"He—murmured Manners."

"Did you hear of such cheek—in a new kid, too?" exclaimed Redfern hotly.

"Nover! But—"

"I'm afraid he's gone to Ratty!" said Tom.

Redfern shrugged his shoulders.

"Let him go," he answered.

"He'd hardly be a Housemaster's study in that state!" grumbled Owen.

Tom Merry shook his head. "He was, in fact, opposing to boss Mr. Brantley's tread in the passage."

And he was not mistaken. Supper in Redfern's study was not nearly finished when there was a quiet and heavy tread outside. The door was thrown open, and Mr. Brantley strode into the room.

Behind him, black but not comely, was his hopeful nephew, Bartholomew, remained in the doorway, crimson with rage and with the blackness of the coal-dust. The two men rose to their feet as the Housemaster entered.

"Which one was it, Brantley?" asked Mr. Rattley.

"Rat?" pointed with a black finger.

"Yes, Redfern?"

"I proposed the suitable one, sir, certainly, sir," answered Redfern. "He fairly asked for it."

"You have dared to treat my nephew in this manner?" thundered the Housemaster.

"I've treated him as I should treat any other fellow who checked the admittance to study me, sir," answered Redfern quietly.

"That is enough! Hold out your hand!"

Redfern set his lip. Bartholomew was grinning under the coal-dust now.

"I'll give you this, sir," ventured Tom Merry. "He—"

"Nonsense!"

"We did not suggest that Rattley was a privileged person, sir," said Redfern, in a low voice.

"Rattley! You will understand, Redfern, that my nephew is to be treated with consideration."

"He will be treated like any other fellow in the Fourth Form, sir."

"What!"

"Otherwise, it will be favouritism, and that's not fair play!" said Redfern, fearlessly.

"Hold out your hand," Redfern!" thundered Mr. Brantley.

Redfern obeyed, and the cane came down with a terrific crash.

"Now the other hand!"

Swish!

"Now you, Lawrence—"

"What have I done, sir?" asked Lawrence quietly.

"You have looked on at this assault upon my nephew without interfering, and with approval."

"He laughed, uncle!" put in, Bartholomew.

"Hold out your hand, Lawrence!"

Swish!

"You, Owen—"

Swish!

"And now you, Merry!"

Tom Merry put his hands behind him. "Do you hear me?" thundered Mr. Rattley.

"I hear you, sir," answered the captain of the Sixth. "I shall certainly not be caught in this House. You can report me to my own Housemaster, if you choose."

"I—I—I—"

"And if you do, sir, I shall tell him what has happened—or the Head, either," said Tom steadily. "I'd like to have a chance of letting the Head know."

"What!" gasped Mr. Brantley. "What? What do you mean, Merry?"

"I mean that I shall not be cowed here, and I'm ready to go before the Head, answered Tom Merry; and if you take me before the Head, I shall say what you want to come me and have asked Redfern, because your nephew behaved like a low cad, and got what he deserved!"

Mr. Brantley stared speechlessly at the captain of the Sixth. He pointed to the door with his hand.

"Leave this House at once, Merry! And you others! I forbid you to return!"

"Very well, sir."

The New House-master was within his rights in giving that order, and the terrible scene observed. They left the study without another word.

"It appears, Redfern," said Mr. Rattley, "that you refused to lend a little coal to my nephew—"

"Did he tell you how he asked for it, sir?"

"That is of no moment. Gather up the spade with an ounce, and take it to my nephew's study."

"It's absurd, sir."

"Do you wish me to cane you again, Redfern?" asked Mr. Brantley harshly.

Poor Redfern certainly didn't; his pants were selling already. He did not answer, but stooped to gather up the coal, helped by Lawrence and Owen.

"Now take it to my nephew's study, Redfern, and return here."

Redfern obeyed.

Figgins & Co. blasted when Ratty dived in with a scud of coal, set it down, and then went out.

Redfern returned to the study, his face pale, and his lip set.

"Very good," said Mr. Brantley. "You three fellows will now take my nephew to a bath-room, provide him with all that he needs, and help him to clean himself."

That was a moment's hesitation. The New House master was obtaining his authority very near the limit. But the hesitation was only momentary.

"This way, Rattley!" said Redfern, in a very low voice.

But Bartholomew grinned through the coal-dust, and followed Redfern & Co. down the passage.

CHAPTER 5.

Getting on with the Washing.

As Rattley's nephew in at the doorway of Figgins & Co.'s study. The chime of the New House did not observe it. They were staring caressly at the coal-scuttle Redfern had planted by the hearth. Bartholomew Rattley had told them that he was going for anything up, dear boys! had been that he was going for trouble. The sight of Redfern, with a pale, set face, carrying in coals at Bartholomew's order, dazed Figgins & Co. The sight of the Kaiser carrying in the coals could not have astonished them more.

"Anything up, dear boys?" murmured Arthur Augustus d'Arcy.

Then George Figgins looked round.

"A beast me!" he said. "Ratty fagging for that young biglitor!"

"Hullo!" said Fatty Wynn.

"I have just passed Tom Merry and Manners and I couldn't in the case," said Arthur Augustus. "They were lookin' awfully waxy about something. Has there been a row?"

"I think there's been some trouble

along the passage; but we were doing our prep," said Kerr.

"I trust you have finished, dear boys!"

"Nearly. Why?"

"It is sorry to see, dear boys, perwags you might care to see."

To Study No. 6 for supper," said Arthur Augustus, with a smile. "I did not think you would be enjoying the society of your new study-mate. I regard him, personally, as a wit, if I may make the remark."

"Old scout, that remark shows your usual tact and judgment," answered Kerr. "Reptile 'is the word!"

"Yes, I wathah think that I can judge a chap's character," assented Arthur Augustus. "I am glad he is not boss at the present moment, as I have not, of course, come even for a row. I trust you fellows will honour us by comin' to supper. Hewins has received a cake to-day."

"Good old 'Heerles'!" said Fatty Wynn heartily. "We'll come with pleasure, old chap! Sit down a minute or two, while we finish the prep."

"Certainly, dear boys!"

Arthur Augustus dropped into the arm-chair, and crossed one elegantly-tanned leg over the other. It was really a kind thought of Guany's to receive Figgins & Co. from their new study-mate, and the new fellow shows some possibly greater. Arthur Augustus had just risen into the armchair when a remarkable figure appeared in the open doorway. It was the figure of Bartholomew, comely and dusty.

Figgins & Co. stared at him. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence waited in the passage.

"You haven't started that fire," said Ratty junior.

"Rat!"

"I'm going to get a wash. Have the fire going when I come down."

"Who's it?"

"Shary's the wench," said Ratty junior.

And he walked on with his companions, and disappeared upstairs.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

"What evah does that mean, you fellows?"

"It means that that cad is making for a thrashing, I think!"

There was a quick step in the passage, and Redfern came to the study. His face was set and sombre.

"I've got a tip for you fellows," he said. "Be careful how you handle that young cad. We've got locked for giving him what he asked for in our study. Old Ratty is going to back him up through thick and thin. He's a sneak, an' a cad, and an unspeakable worm, and his merry uncle be backing him up! Keep off his horns if you can!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I coaled him!" said Redfern. "Now we're ordered to take him to a bath-room and clean him. Fagging for a far, you know—like. My hat at that! There will be trouble if this goes on."

And Redfern hurried away.

"I—I see," murmured Figgins, and his lips set. "That young cad wasn't simply swanking; Ratty is really going to back him up, and he thinks he can bully anybody like him. My hat at that! There will be trouble if this goes on."

And Redfern hurried away.

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he's cheeky. Do you mind waiting a few minutes, D'Arroy?"

Arthur Augustus grinned, and would wait any length of time, with a smug, for such a reason, dear boy—amid me."

Figgins & Co. left the study. They needed upstairs, and a sound of running water guided them to the particular bathroom selected for the cleaning of Bartholomew.

Water had turned on the electric light, and Bartholomew had already made black stains all over the tiled floor. He was speaking sharply to the juniors as Figgins & Co. came along.

"I shall want clean clothes. I suppose my box is in the dormitory by this time. Here's the key, Redfern—if that's your name. Fetch me a change of clothes!"

Redfern looked at him.

"Can't you get myself?" he inquired.

"Do as I tell you, and shut up! Here's the key."

"I'm obeying my Housemaster's orders," remarked Redfern. "He told us to bring you here and clean you. I'm not obeying your orders, my pippin. You can wait for your clothes!"

"Exactly," said Figgins, looking in with a grin. "Whistle away, Bartholomew."

Bartholomew looked round.

"You fetch them, Figgins," he said.

"I shall report Redfern to my uncle."

"You can report me at the same time, then."

Ratty junior scowled.

"These fellows can tell you what they got for being cheeky," he said.

"And I'm going to tell you what you'll get," said Figgins. "It seems that you sneaked to Mr. Radcliff, and brought him down on these chaps. Sneaking is barred in this House, young Ratty."

"Quite!" assented Kerr. "You've got to look that you won't!"

Bartholomew's eyes glittered.

"You're calling me names!" he said.

"I shall report every word to my uncle."

"Then we'll give you some more to report," said Fatty Wynn. "Sneak! Worm! Hun! Prussian! Reptile!"

Figgins & Co. came into the bath-room and closed the door. Bartholomew eyed them miserably.

"Look here——" he began.

"This is the first lesson in sneaking," explained Figgins. "You were brought here to be bathed. I understand. Well, in you go!"

"I've not undressed yet, you idiot!"

"That doesn't matter. Collar him!"

Bartholomew, in his present state, was not nice to touch. But Figgins & Co. did not mind. They touched him with a grip of iron, swept him off the floor, and plumped him bodily into the bath.

Splash!

"Gurrgrrrrrh!"

A wild, gurgling yell came from Bartholomew. Radcliff, who accompanied in the water, which was blackened by his coat-stain, and his head came up again, with a series of terrific gasps.

"Ooooh! Oooonch! Groooonch!"

"That's by way of a beginning," remarked Figgins. "How do you like it?"

"Groooch! I'll tell my uncle!" shrieked Bartholomew.

"I'll say, Figgins, this means another licking for the lot of us," murmured Lawrence.

"Then we may as well have our money's worth," remarked Figgins. "This fellow has got to be cleaned, hasn't he? You'll see him."

"In, in, in!"

Ratty & Co. ventured into the spirit of the thing. As there was certain to be trouble anyway, there was no need to have mercy on Bartholomew—and they

had none. Figgins took a scrubbing-brush, and Redfern the soap, and they cleaned Bartholomew, as he sprawled and splashed and wriggled in the big tub.

Wild and wild sounds came from Ratty junior as Redfern soaped and Figgins scrubbed.

There was no doubt that Ratty junior was cleaned. The real dust came off to the last speck. The real dirt was that his skin did not come off too, so thoroughly was he washed.

When Figgins and Redfern were tired, Kerr and Lawrence took a hand, and when they were tired, Fatty Wynn and Owen continued the good work. Ratty junior was more tired than they were; but his tired feeling did not count. He was there to be washed, by the Housemaster's orders—and they washed him. His clothes were washed, too, but they certainly needed it, so that did not matter.

When the six meditative juniors struck work at last, Bartholomew sat in the water and spluttered. His face was crimson instead of black. He gasped, and gasped, and gasped, as if he were gasping for a wrager.

"I think I will go," said Figgins, cheerfully. "Now we'll get you a change of clothes, Ratty, if you ask nicely. Not otherwise."

"I'll tell my uncle——"

"More scrubbing! Right-ho!"

"Yooch!" snarled Bartholomew, as Figgins restricted with the scrubbing-brush. "Scrape off, you beast! Yooop! I'll tell my uncle!"

"Fog's better!"

"Take some more slobber!" asked Redfern, smiling.

"Owl! You! You!"

"Say please, nicely."

"Pip-please!" gasped Bartholomew.

"Good! Now a good learning manner," said Redfern admiringly. "You'll get quite decent if you keep on like this. That was really a bright idea of yours, Figgins. I'll get the cad his clothes, as he's asked so nicely."

"He, ha, ha!"

Redfern obligingly brought the clothes, and Bartholomew Radcliff was left to his own devices. Arthur Augustus smiled as Figgins & Co. came back to their study. The Co. was smiling, too.

"Just Gem left for vappah, if we hurry," he remarked.

"Ready, old son!"

Arthur Augustus attended his friends across to the School House, and up to Study No. 6 on the Fourth. "Make and Digby were there a warm welcome, and Herrig's cake was distributed with great appreciation on all sides. But the cake was barely finished when the door opened and Elders of the Sixth looked in.

"Oh, you're here!" he said. "Your prefect's come for you—you three. Go down at once."

"Oh, you!" said Figgins.

"Figgins & Co. went down. Meanwhile the Sixth was waiting for them below."

"Come with me," he said.

"Mc. Radcliff!" began Kerr.

"You, he's out for you—some trouble with his nephew, I believe," said Radcliff. "Get a move on."

"I've a new No. 6. These juniors got a move on—hardly. After the last was coming the reckoning, suddenly!"

"I would just as willingly written!" said Arthur Augustus in Study No. 6.

"Old Waddy is not again the game."

"He never does!" cried Elders.

"And he's in the line," said Digby.

"An' he's in the line, he's in the line!" commented Jack Blake. "We afraid these chaps are booked for a licking."

"I would just as written!"

Arthur Augustus' chums agreed that it was rotten. To the unfortunate New House junior, a second still worse rotten. Figgins & Co. had aching pains when they went to their dormitory that night.

CHAPTER 5.

Nice Boy!

TOM MEHRY looked for Figgins & Co. in the quad on the following morning. The Terrible Three found the New House chums taking a next round the quad before breakfast, and joined them. Figgins & Co. did not look quite their usual cheery selves.

"How goes the merry Bartholomew?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"We're trying to forget the beast's existence," answered Figgins. "I wish you fellows would persuade him to change into the School House."

"I never heard of such a wrenn," remarked Ratty Wynn. "We were thinking of dragging him in the dorm last night; but no more thought we didn't. We haven't quite got over the last licking yet. He seems to glory in sneaking. My belief is that old Ratty is going to make a regular spy of him, to take in sneaking reports about the other fellows."

"What a nice youth!" said Tom.

"The only thing is, to keep clear of himself as much as possible," said Kerr. "It's a bad way, as he's in our study. He's a good sizer, as well as a sneak, and Ratty snipes it 'pint to take his margin. He doesn't seem to care about fellows being down on him. He's made some friends, though——"

"And Champs of the Sixth—follows like that!" Kerr's lip curled. "No decent chap will have much to do with him. But he doesn't mind."

"He does seem rather a cough-shop!" agreed Tom Merry. "If Ratty knew how to play the game he wouldn't make a favourite of him. It's bad for the kid himself in the long run, too."

"Oh, it snips him to have a sneak about to carry tales to him," growled Figgins. "That's the sort of snip he is. Hallo! Here comes the merchant!"

Ratty junior came out of the New House, and his sly, sharp eyes wandered round, and fixed upon Figgins & Co. He came trotting towards them.

"Get a move on!" said Figgins.

"Please don't," said Radcliff, as the New House Co. moved on.

"Don't run away from me, please!" Figgins looked round, uttering a sound like an angry bear.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Only your company for a pleasant little walk to the beach," answered Bartholomew cheerfully.

"The want's all on your side. We don't want your company!" answered Figgins bluntly.

"Straight from the shoulder!" murmured Lowther, and he looked at Radcliff to see how that young gentleman liked it.

Ratty junior did not seem to mind; he only smiled.

"But we're study-mates, Figgins," he urged. "We ought to be friends, you know."

"With my fault we're study-mates. You're a bad fellow in a study, and you know it!" retorted Figgins, with the same charming candour.

Bartholomew looked pained.

"I hope you're not going to be unfriendly," he said.

"We jolly well are!"

"I've studied my uncle will be angry if I mention to him that my study-mates

unfriendly," said Bartholomew, shaking his head.

Figgins drew a deep breath. "Does that mean that you're going to take up smoking as a regular business?" he asked.

"You are calling me names again!" murmured Bartholomew. "My uncle has told me always to mention to him if I am called names."

"Then you can mention that I called you a sneaking rat, and a worm, and a rotten outsider!" said Figgins recklessly. "Come on, you chaps! That fellow makes me sick!"

Figgins & Co. trotted off, and Bartholomew looked after them, still smiling. But his smile was catlike, and not agreeable.

The Terrible Three regarded him with a curious interest. They had never encountered anybody quite like Bartholomew Ratcliff before. There were fellows at St. Jim's who had mean propensities, like Trimble and Mellish of the Fourth, and Chowie; but this cheery young gentleman seemed to be all meanness, and to revel in it, as it were. He seemed to be wrapped in meanness as in a garment.

"Do you really think I give you a tip, young Ratcliff?" asked Tom Merry. Bartholomew smiled at him.

"Pray do!" he answered. "Well, as you're a new fellow, I think I ought," said Tom. "It's this: You're making a bad beginning here, and it would be better for you, in the long run, to change your tack. A sneak doesn't have a happy time of it in a garment. Fellows are down on him. Favouritism is considered no-class. Try to forget that your uncle is a Housemaster, and act as if you were on the same footing as other fellows. It will be better for you in the long run."

"So kind of you to give me advice!" answered Bartholomew. "I'm so sorry you'd think it sneaking to speak to my uncle in a confidential way! I don't. I think it is my duty."

"It's no fellow's duty to be a tale-bearer," said Tom Merry. "Mr. Ratcliff ought not to listen to you."

"Do you really think so?" "Yes, certainly."

"I'm sure my uncle will be pleased to know your opinion. I shall certainly mention it to him."

Tom Merry set his lips. "Mention it, and be hanged!" he said. "If you were in the School House you'd give you something to cure your sneaking. Go and eat coke!"

And the Terrible Three walked away in great disgust. Bartholomew smiled again, and joined the girls of the Fourth in the quad. Chowie appeared to have no distaste for his company, perhaps because Chowie was a fellow for whose company most of the other fellows had a strong distaste.

Tom Merry speedily forgot all about Bartholomew and his veiled threat; but the Housemaster's nephew had not forgotten. When the Shell went into their Form-room that morning Mr. Lintot called to Tom.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir!" answered Tom, wondering what was the matter.

The master of the Shell was looking very severe.

"Mr. Ratcliff has spoken to me."

"Oh dear!" murmured Tom.

"Mr. Ratcliff complains that you spoke of him with great want of respect, Merry," said the master of the Shell severely. "You passed strictures upon his conduct, it appears, in the presence of his nephew."

Tom Merry coloured.

"I said he oughtn't to listen to young Ratcliff's tale-bearing, sir, certainly," he answered.

Mr. Lintot coughed.

"You had no right to pass an opinion upon the Housemaster or his methods, Merry. Mr. Ratcliff is very much annoyed. You will take two hundred lines."

"Very well, sir."

Tom Merry went to his place with a gleam in his eyes. His feelings were deep, and they were shared by most of the other fellows. Master Bartholomew had evidently set up in business, as Figgins expressed it, as the sneak of the school; and it was rather difficult to know how he was to be dealt with.

CHAPTER 7.

Trying It On!

"WATTY junicah is wataah late!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The Fourth Form of St. Jim's had gathered in their Form-room, and Mr. Latham was there to take his class; but there was one place empty. The new junior, Bartholomew Ratcliff, had not turned up for classes yet.

Mr. Latham had had the pleasure of making Bartholomew's acquaintance the previous day, and he had expected to find the new boy in the Form-room with the rest. He did not find him, however.

"Figgins," began the Form-master, after glancing over the class through his

spectacles—"Figgins, I think I asked you to inform Ratcliff, the new junior, of the hour for classes."

"Yes, sir; I told him," answered Figgins.

"Yet he appears to be late. Please go and look for him, Figgins, and tell him to come here at once."

Figgins suppressed a grunt. He did not want to have anything to do with Ratty junior. But his nose from his place still left the Form-room.

Why Ratty junior had not turned up was rather a puzzle. He certainly knew the time for classes. The juniors wondered whether he supposed, as a privileged person, that he could suit himself about classes.

Figgins looked for him in the quadrangle in rain, and then went over to the New House. Ratcliff was not to be seen about the House downstairs, so Figgins went up to the study.

There he found the pleasant youth. Master Bartholomew was sprawled in the armchair, with his feet on another chair, and a cigarette between his lips.

Smoke was curling up from the cigarette. Master Bartholomew appeared to be enjoying himself in his own way.

Figgins stood in the doorway staring at him blankly.

"My hat!" he murmured.

Ratcliff glanced at him through the curling smoke.

"Hallo! What are you doing out of class?" he inquired.

"Mr. Latham sent me to look for you!" growled Figgins.

"Who's Mr. Latham?" yawned Bartholomew.

"Our Form-master."

"Oh, yes! I remember. I'm late, I suppose!"

"You're a quarter of an hour late already."

"You don't say so? Well, you can cut off! I'll come when I've finished my smoke."

Figgins blinked at him.

"You're to come at once," he said. Bartholomew went on smoking, and did not heed. It appeared that his after-breakfast cigarette was a more important matter than classes.

"Well, I've told you," said Figgins. "Am I to tell Mr. Latham you won't come?"

"Tell him I'm coming."

"Oh, all right!"

Figgins returned to the Form-room. Mr. Latham seemed surprised to see him come in alone.

"Have you not found Ratcliff, Figgins?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; he says he's coming."

"But why has he not come?" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

Figgins could not very well answer that question. He did not want to inform the Fourth Form master that Bartholomew was smoking in the study.

"This is very extraordinary!" said Mr. Latham, blinking at the confused junior over his glasses. "Is Ratcliff ill, Figgins?"

"I—I think not, sir."

"Very well. You may go to your place, Figgins," said the Form-master, compressing his lips.

Lessons were resumed, with some suppressed excitement in the Form-room. The juniors wondered what would happen when Bartholomew put in an appearance at last. It was pretty clear by this time that Bartholomew considered himself a privileged person who could do as he liked. Mr. Latham's expression indicated that Bartholomew, sharp as he was, had made a mistake upon that point.

The first lesson was finished before a step was heard in the corridor, and Ratty junior came into the Form-room.

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Mr. Latham fired a very stern look upon him.

"Ratcliff, come here!"

Bartholomew came up to his desk.

"You are more than half an hour late, Ratcliff!" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

"You have missed the whole of first class."

"How I really, sir!" asked Bartholomew.

"You have! What is your explanation of this conduct!" exclaimed the Form-master.

Bartholomew looked at him with his sharp eyes. He was evidently taking Mr. Latham's measure, to ascertain exactly how important his mistake was to be.

The Fourth Form watched him in silence.

"I—I forgot, sir," he said at last.

And he turned to go to the form.

"Stop!" rapped out Mr. Latham.

Bartholomew turned back.

"I do not desire to be handily stick with a new boy," said Mr. Latham mildly.

"But you were told the time for classes, Ratcliff. And I sent Figgins to fetch you. Even if you forgot the time for classes, why did you not come back with Figgins?"

Bartholomew looked dogged. It was clear that if he was going to have his privileged position acknowledged at all, now was the time.

"I wasn't ready, sir," he answered.

"What?"

"I had several things to do," murmured Arthur Augustus. "Jevrah leah of such a foolish nerve, deah boy?"

"You had several things to do?" repeated Mr. Latham, in jerks, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"That's it!" said Bartholomew.

There was a moment or two of silence.

Mr. Latham looked at Bartholomew, and Bartholomew looked at Mr. Latham, and the Fourth Form stared fixedly at both of them.

Then the Form-master picked up his case.

"This is sheer impertinence, Ratcliff!" said Mr. Latham. "Bless my soul! I can make allowances for a new boy, unaccustomed to our ways; but I can only consider this, Ratcliff, as sheer impertinence—infantional impertinence, sir!"

added Mr. Latham, raising his mild voice a little.

"Not at all, sir," answered Bartholomew cheerfully. "I was rather occupied this morning, that's all. I hope, as a rule, to be in time for classes."

"As—as as a rule!" stuttered Mr. Latham.

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"Do you not understand, Ratcliff, that you must be in the Form-room at the proper time every day?"

Bartholomew looked more dogged.

Mr. Latham's mild patience had made a false impression upon him, sharp as he was. Indeed, Bartholomew was like many very sharp people—quite liable to make the most egregious mistakes. He was quite mistaken in his locality.

That usually mild and benevolent little gentleman had a temper, when it was provoked; and Bartholomew had succeeded in provoking it now.

"I fall to comprehend this conduct, Ratcliff," said Mr. Latham. "Why you should suppose yourself entitled to neglect classes, and to be guilty of impertinence towards your Form-master, passes my understanding. I feel compelled, Ratcliff, to administer a severe warning. Hold out your hand!"

Ratcliff breathed quickly and hard—and did not obey.

"Do you hear me, Ratcliff?" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

"My uncle would not like me to be camed, sir," said Bartholomew sullenly.

It was out at last!

Mr. Latham understood now—what the Fourth Form had understood from the beginning.

The Housemaster's nephew was expecting to be treated in a privileged way—not at all like a "common or garden" Fourth Former. His relationship to a St. Jim's master was to stand between him and anything he did not like, and to protect him from punishment!

This dawned rather slowly upon Mr. Latham's astonished mind. When he fully comprehended his expression became simply terrific.

"Your uncle!" he repeated slowly.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Ratcliff."

door. Apparently the thought of seeking Ratty senior's protection crossed his mind. But the folly of such a step was clear enough, and Ratty junior decided to obey. His hand came out at last.

Swish!

"Yow!" roared Ratty junior as the cane came down. It was delivered with a vigour which showed that the little Form-master was more athletic than he looked.

"The other hand, Ratcliff."

"Look here——" began Bartholomew sullenly.

"The other hand!" thundered Mr. Latham.



There was a sudden rush of coal upon the hapless Bartholomew. In the twinkling of an eye he was transformed into a Christy Minstrel. "Gug-gug-gug!" came in a wild splutter from under the coal-dust. (See Chapter 2.)

"Mr. Ratcliff is master of the Fifth Form," said Mr. Latham. "You must be aware that his authority does not extend to this Form-room."

"Yes, sir; but——"

"But what, Ratcliff?"

"He would not like me to be camed."

"I have no reason whatever to suppose, Ratcliff, that your relative would not wish you to be punished for astounding impertinence. But, be that as it may, it makes no difference whatever in this Form-room. I shall punish you most severely, Ratcliff!"

Bartholomew bit his thin lip hard. He had tried his luck—and failed. There was no doubt that he had face. Mr. Latham came round from behind his desk, came in hand, his plump cheeks pink with wrath.

"Hold out your hand, Ratcliff!"

Ratty junior cast a glance towards the

Ratty junior gritted his teeth, and obeyed.

Swish!

"Wow-wow-wow!"

"Now go to your place, Ratcliff," said Mr. Latham, breathing hard. "I trust, my boy, that this lesson will not be lost on you."

"Yow-ow! I'll tell my uncle of this!"

wailed Bartholomew.

"What?" shrieked Mr. Latham, petrified.

"Ow! I'll tell—— Yaroooh!"

Mr. Latham's patience—which was really great—was exhausted. He took Ratty junior by the collar and laid the cane across his shoulders.

Whack, whack, whack!

The whacking of the cane was accompanied by loud yells from Bartholomew.

The Fourth looked on breathlessly.

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Never had they felt in such loyal accord as their Form-master.

"How go to your place, Ratcliff," said Mr. Latham, breathing hard. "Get! Not another word! Another word, sir, and I will take you to Dr. Holme, and request him to administer a flogging!"

And Bartholomew went to his place without another word. Crouching and gasping, he sat down amid a smiling Form!

CHAPTER 8.

The Sneak's Progress!

TOM MERRY & CO. saw little of Matty junior during the next few days. They avoided coming in contact with that pleasant young gentleman as much as possible.

Ratcliff found a good deal of him. Matty junior was, in fact, becoming quite a habit of paven in the little world of the "Juni."

Nearly all the Lower School agreed that they had never seen such a sneak. They agreed that he was only seen about in connection with the sneaking.

It was not only that he was a sneak and a young rascal, unpleasant in his manners, and disagreeable in every way. But he seemed almost to glory in it. Fellow like Trimble might talk tales occasionally to prefects who would listen to them; but if left they tried to keep it dark that they did so. They took the ground to be advanced of it. But there was no chance about Bartholomew. He did not even attempt to keep it secret that he made it his business to take reports to the New House master.

He was openly a sneak, and he had not even the sneaking game of being advanced of it.

Diplomacy. Mr. Ratcliff found his services all value. Certainly the New House juniors walked in fear and trembling, so to speak, never knowing what would reach the ears of the House-master. A pair of eyes like the eagle's, his keen observation out of bounds—nothing that interested, however slightly, was the rule, was sure to come to Mr. Ratcliff's knowledge, and to be followed by punishment.

Mr. Ratcliff was a man without a discipline, and discipline, to his manner, took the form of momentary warning and punishing. Believing in such methods, he naturally found a spy in the House invaluable.

From the great mass of the Sixth were prominent the two Messias and Harrow, who were prefects. Inward themselves called over the coals by their House-master for the slightest carelessness in their duties—trivial matters which Mr. Ratcliff, of the School House, would certainly have taken no notice of. James Harrow, the lone prefect of the House, was ten minutes late at night in turning lights out for the Fourth, being engaged in a warm argument on the subject of cricket with some School House seniors.

He was "wired" by his House-master the following morning. Mouths thought it even, decided the Matty junior was the sneak, and gave Matty a flogging with his adoptive, which led to another painful interview with Mr. Ratcliff, and a threat that, for another offense, he would be deposed from his lofty position.

There were too many privileges attached to the position of prefect for Mouth to wish to lose it, and his obedient made no further acquaintance with the wren of Master Bartholomew. And Barti Womew was never called upon to fog the 36 other juniors. The seniors only desire, to keep the underground.

young gentleman at a distance—whom they considered for Bartholomew.

"There was power in the hands of Matty junior, and it made him thoroughly disliked, a little feared, and courted by a few. Chowls of the Fourth was quite chummy with him, and Matty junior was a good deal in Chowls's study, where smoking and loitering went on.

Chowls and Clamps and their kind were well aware that Matty junior's friendship might be useful to them if their shady ways were in danger of coming to light. But they certainly did not see his aim, and, among themselves, they made good many bitter remarks about Bartholomew, who never "stood his whack" in a feud, and never paid for any of the smokes he consumed so recklessly.

He also had a little way of forgetting to settle up his losses at barter or nap, which did not make him beloved; by the fact alone, though they teased him so much to show their feelings on the subject.

Finally, a Co's study was not the better than it once had been. The claims of the New House often did their work in the Senior study, and left Bartholomew's study all but empty.

Tom Merry & Co., being School House seniors, were able to avoid Master Bartholomew, and his smacking propensities did not trouble them much. Matty junior made one attempt to spread his activities in that line to the School House. He presented himself in Mr. Ratcliff's study, after he had been three or four days at the school, with a tale to tell. Mr. Ratcliff had seen enough of him not to like him, but he gave his colleague's nephew a hand out.

"What is it, Ratcliff?" he asked.

"I'm not quite sure how the School House matter would take it; but he had determined to make the attempt. He would have dearly liked to succeed in the School House, the prefects themselves would have been forced and lured to his side."

"I'm sure you'll advise me, sir," he began again. "I think I ought to tell you."

Mr. Ratcliff's face flushed.

"If there is anything you think you would do best to tell me, I will certainly listen to you," he said dryly.

"It's about Tom Merry, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I know, sir, that it's very wrong to go out of bounds," said Bartholomew, meekly. "I think I ought to mention that to you, Tom Merry."

Mr. Ratcliff held up his hand.

"That will do!" he said curtly.

"Oh, sir!"

"I cannot possibly take any notice of information brought to me in this surreptitious way, sir," and the School House master sternly.

"Your intentions are good. But I warn you, very seriously, that tale-bearing is not looked upon with favour in this House. Leave my study!"

"It's-but, sir—" stammered Matty junior.

"Get away go," said Matty junior, waving his teeth.

It was his first—and last—attempt to gain the ear of the School House master. He failed equally with Mr. Latham; and Mr. Latham, his own Form-master, left him short at the first word. There were four or five other attempts at a sneak's at St. Jim's as Bartholomew had supposed.

But he found that Mr. Nelly, the master of the Third, was more like Matty junior in his methods—that was his only success in the School House. When he tackled the French master his failure was the most lamentable of all. Monsieur Morry was reading in his study on Saturday afternoon when Bartholomew presented himself to try his luck.

Messie laid down his paper, and gazed at Bartholomew rather dumbly. "Probably you had heard something in master's room on the subject of Mr. Ratcliff's nephew."

"Yes, mon garçon, and is it?" asked Monsieur Morry.

"I think I ought to tell you, sir, that Lowther—"

"Don't say that! Is it not something has happen to Lowther?" asked Messie.

"Zero has been some accident, n'est-ce pas?"

"Oh, no, sir! They're doing theatricals in the Form study—"

"Et postscript, pas?" said Messie.

"V. any not do you if any chance!"

"I thought it was very disrespectful, sir," said Bartholomew, meekly. "Lowther is making himself up to imitate you, sir—"

"Yes!"

"And speaking to imitate your voice, sir—your English—"

"I was very shocked to see such disrespect shown towards you, sir, and I felt it my duty to warn you, sir," murmured Bartholomew. "Tom Merry was saying that it was Froggy to the life!"

"Froggy!" ejaculated the French gentleman.

"Yes, sir; that was you—"

Monsieur Morry rose to his feet and picked up a cane. Bartholomew smiled. He had no doubt that the French master was about to pay a visit to No. 30 in the Shell, with painful results to the Terrible Ten.

But that was not Messie's intention. He fired his eyes upon Matty junior.

"How you know all this!" he asked.

Bartholomew started.

"I happened to be in the Shell passage. I was going to see Crook—"

"How was it?" asked Monsieur Morry.

"I was going to see Crook—and how was Tom Merry speak? You do not see and hear all that in Crook's study, do you?"

"I—"

Bartholomew's beady eyes glittered.

"I—"

"Ze hand!" said Messie, smiling the corner.

Bartholomew clenched his hands. He remembered how Tom Merry had answered Mr. Ratcliff in the New House, and decided on the same course.

"I'm not going to be cased in this House, sir!" he said. "You can report me to my House-master!"

Messie looked at him.

"I will not report you to your House-master," he said. "I will report you to an Head. You will come via me to Dr. Holme, sen!"

"Oh!"

"Venez donc," said Messie. "Come, sen!"

"I—I—I'd rather not, sir," gasped Bartholomew.

"I—I—I'd rather—rather be cased here, sir, if you don't mind!"

"Zai is as you please. Hold out ze hand!"

"Oh!"

"Now you go," said Messie, laying

down the case: "And come not here with any more tales, mess me. I advise you to keep away from an English—it is mean, and it is verree unworthy. Alas!"

And Ratty junior departed, rubbing his hands merrily. In steady No. 10 the captain of the Shell went on giving his conversation of Moscow amid roars of laughter, little dreaming of the narrow escape he had had. Moscow, fortunately for the humorist, was a sportsman.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus is Wraty!

"WOW! My only Aunt Janet!"

"Hello!" murmured Monty Lowther. "That sounds like the dearest tone of Wally!"

The Terrible Thresh looked round as they walked under the elms.

Two fags came into view under the trees; one of them Wally D'Arcy, the young brother of the great Arthur Augustus; the other, Lewison minor. Wally was rubbing his hands, and "pooing" and "wowing" at a great rate; and Frank Lewison was looking on sympathetically. That was all he could do, under the painful circumstances, for his chum.

"Does it hurt, Wally?" he murmured. "Does it?" repeated D'Arcy minor. "Wow! I think so! Wow! I've got a sort of idea that it does! Yoop!"

"Hallo! What's the trouble, young shaves?" asked Tom Merry, as he came up with his companions.

"Who are you calling young shaves?" was Wally's reply.

"Whom, dear boy—whom!" murmured Monty Lowther. "What sort of grammar does Selby teach you in the Third?"

"Rate!" growled Wally. "Owl! Oh!"

"It's really rotten, you fellows," said Lewison. "Selby's given Wally two on each hand."

"Which he didn't deserve, of course!" remarked Manners.

"Well, he may have," admitted Frank. "But how did Selby know it was Wally who put the tar on the seat?"

The Terrible Thresh grinned. "I've never done anything to him. My major doted him on the nose the day he came—that's all!"

Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, was a very quick gentleman with the cane; but he often had his reasons, where D'Arcy minor was concerned. Tar on a seat could not possibly be expected to please a Form-master who sat on it.

"I was jolly careful, you know," growled Wally. "I was Selby's favourite seat under the big elm; and I took jolly good care that no master or prefect saw me with the tar. Somebody saw me and gave me away; and I jolly well know who it was, too! I saw that old young Ratty stare at my hands as I came away from the seat."

Tom Merry frowned.

"Ratty junior—eh?" he said. "He's sneaked about me to Selby!" growled Wally. "Selby's the only master here who will listen to him, beside his uncle, old Ratty. The old one seems to enjoy sneaking for its own sake."

"You've never done anything to him. My major doted him on the nose the day he came—that's all!"

"Hai, Jove! What is the match, Wally?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy arrived on the scene. His eyes gleamed indignantly at his hopeful young brother.

Wally only growled painfully; but Lewison minor explained. Arthur Augustus' noble eye gleamed behind his eyeglasses.

"You see a young wascal, Wally, to talk to your Form-master?"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"But that, which you begin, Wally, is a sneakin' worm to betray you! I suppose he really did—"

"The cat was seen coming out of Selby's study just before Wally was sent for," said Frank. "Manners might say him!"

"I do not approve of your disadvantageful tricks, Wally; but nethin' can excise the sneakin' conduct of Wally junior. Leave the match to me!"

"What can you do?" growled Wally. "I am going to give young Wally a fearful thrashin'!" answered the swell of St. Jim's firmly.

"Better let him alone; he will only sneak to his sneaking uncle!" growled D'Arcy minor. "You'll only get into a row."

"I shall wick that. I regard it as bein' up to me, as your eldth, Wally. Tom-Mewey, dear boy, will you do me the honah of bein' my second?"

The captain of the Shell nodded cheerfully.

"You bet!" he answered. "I doubt whether Ratty junior will come up to the scratch, though!"

"Pway take him a message from me, dear boy, and request him to meet me behind the gym in an hour's time," said Arthur Augustus. "You may sneek if he does not come. I shall pull his nose next time I meet him in public."

"Ha, ha! All serene!"

Tom Merry cheerfully walked off to the New House to deliver the noble Gussy's challenge. He found Figgins & Co. at tea in their study, but Ratty junior was not there.

"Where's your prize sneek, my peepers?" asked Tom, with a smile.

"Chawb's, steady, most likely," answered Figgins, with a grin. "Figgins looks as like as not."

"Oh, my lad!"

Tom Merry went along to Chow's about the matter. Bartholomew told him he was not playing banker, as it happened. He was poring over a pink paper with Chow, and discussing fast racing. The paper disappeared quietly as the captain of the Shell looked in.

"Well, what's wanted?" granted Bartholomew.

"Ratty is wanted," answered Tom. "D'Arcy wants you, Ratcliff. Behind the gym in an hour's time. That suit you?"

Bartholomew eyed him.

"Does D'Arcy want to fight me?" he asked.

"You've got it."

"What for, please?"

"For playing the sneak, and getting his young brother licked by his Form-master," answered Tom contemptuously. "A betting snail appeared on Chow's face. It might have been supposed that Chow would not be sorry to see his chum in the dog's jaws, was a great fighting man; and Ratty junior had certainly never shown any great courage since he had been at St. Jim's. True, he was a good deal bigger than D'Arcy, as well as older; but that had not served him in the previous encounter with the swell of St. Jim's."

Bartholomew paused for a moment or two before replying.

"Behind the gym, in an hour's time?" he repeated, at last.

"Yes—or anywhere else you like, of course."

"That will do."

"You'll be there?" asked Tom.

"Certainly I will be there!"

"Good enough!"

Tom Merry quitted the study, rather surprised by Ratcliff's prompt acceptance of the challenge. Arthur Augustus, with all his dead-end ways, was a great fighting man; and Ratty junior had certainly never shown any great courage since he had been at St. Jim's. True, he was a good deal bigger than D'Arcy, as well as older; but that had not served him in the previous encounter with the swell of St. Jim's."

"La, he comin', dear boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, when the captain of the Shell came back from the New House.

"Yes."

"Very good!" said the swell of St. Jim's, with great satisfaction. "You can come along about ten, Wally, and see the wettah thrashed. I am sure that it will be a pleasm to you, dear boy."

"What-ho!" grunted Wally.

Not only had he had quite an army of juniors gathered behind him, but other tea. The news that Ratcliff of the Fourth was booked for a fight with D'Arcy spread like wildfire. There was hardly a fellow in the Lower School who was not anxious to see Ratty junior well thrashed; and he doubted that Arthur Augustus would do it.

D'Arcy arrived at the rendezvous with his chums, Blake and Herries and Dig. The Terrible Thresh came along with Talbot and Kangaroo and Gove and several more Shell fellows. Lewison and Cardow and Clive came, with Roylance and John and Kerrish and five or six more fellows. Then arrived Figgins & Co., and Redfern and his friends, from the New House—all in high feather. The gathering was numerous and representative.

Wally came along with Frank Lewison and King and Manners, and five or six more of the Third. The fags were looking gleeful. Indeed, it might have been supposed, from the smiling looks of the assembly, that they had gathered for a very rare treat.

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Time has come, here!" he remarked.

"Bound to be late, if he comes at all!" growled Blake. "I shouldn't wonder if he doesn't turn up."

"But he has agreed to come, Blake! It would be dishonourable not to try, up about seven to come."

"Of difference that would rate as him!"

"Precious little!" growled Figgins. "Hai, Jove! If he does not come I shall certainly go and look for him, and give him a fearful thrashin', all the same!"

"Hallo! Here he comes!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Here is young Selby, and—My only lad! Old Ratty, too!"

Ratcliff of the Fourth came round the corner of the building—not alone. A deep silence fell on the meeting as Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, strode upon the scene with his nephew.

CHAPTER 10.

Something for Bartholomew!

M R. RATCLIFF looked at the juniors; and the juniors looked at Mr. Horace Ratcliff. Bartholomew smiled in his sleeve way.

There was a grim silence for a few moments. Monty Lowther broke it, raising his cap respectfully to the Housemaster.

"Good-evening, sir?"

Mr. Ratcliff did not reply to that polite greeting. He had fixed his eyes upon D'Arcy with a stern stare, but the swell of St. Jim's met his gaze with perfect calmness.

"D'Arcy!" thundered the Housemaster.

"Was, sir?"

"What does this mean?"

"Wally, Mr. Wally, I think I am entitled to ask you what question. I was not expectin' to see you, dear, sir," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"My nephew has informed me—"

"Sneak!" came a howl from somewhere.

"Sneak!"

"Sneak, sneak, sneak!"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, with a glare round at the juniors. "How dare you? D'Arcy, you have antagonized"

to force a quarrel upon my nephew; to be fought out in this secluded spot by the brutal method of fistfights—"

"Nothin' of the sort, sir! I was goin' to give your nephew a fearful thrashing for bein' a rotten sneak!"

"Deavo, Gussy!"

"My nephew very rightly informed me of this intended infraction of the school's rules," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I have therefore accompanied him to this spot. This brutality will not be permitted, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus' lip curled.

"If the fellow is hidin' himself behind you, sir, I suppose I shall have to relinquish the idea of thrashin' him."

"Boy!"

"I feel bound to mention, however, sir, that I regard him with utter scorn," said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Sneak, sneak!"

"Will you be silent!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff furiously. "D'Arcy, I shall take you to the Housemaster. Bartholomew, you will come with me."

"Yes, uncle."

"Follow me, D'Arcy!"

"Vewy well, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff whistled away, accompanied by his nephew, and followed by the swell of the Fourth, Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another with eloquent looks.

"Jorver hear of such a sneaking worm!" gasped Blake. "Now Gussy's bound for a trower with Railton!—I—I shall slaughter that worm yet!"

"He ought to be wringed, an' no mistake!" remarked Cardew.

"He ought to be boiled in oil!" growled Levison.

The juniors followed slowly towards the School House, anxious for Arthur Augustus. From the junior point of view, Gussy's actions were fully justified, and, indeed, laudable; but they were aware that Housemasters looked upon things of that kind with a different eye.

But Gussy himself was not dismayed. His noble head was held high as he followed the New Housemaster to Mr. Railton's study. Mr. Railton was enjoying a chat with Mr. Latham after tea when they arrived. His handsome face clouded a little at the sight of his fellow-Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff explained at once in sharp, staccato tones. The School House

master controlled his impatience as well as he could.

"What is it you wish me to do, Mr. Ratcliff?" he asked.

"To punish D'Arcy most severely for his ruffianly conduct."

"Weally, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"Silence!"

"I refuse to hear my conduct characterized as wufianly. I certainly consider—"

"Be silent, D'Arcy, please!" said Mr. Railton. "You should not have sent this challenge to Ratcliff. Why did you do so?"

"Because he got my young brotwhah into a waw, sir, by his wotten sneakin'!"

Mr. Railton coughed.

"You hear him, sir?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "This insolence—"

"D'Arcy, I forbid you to fight with Ratcliff of the Fourth, or to send him a challenge again!"

"Vewy well, sir."

"You may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Is not that boy to be punished?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, as the swell of St. Jim's left the study.

"I fail to see any reason for punishment. It appears that the fight did not take place, owing to your nephew giving you information—"

"Do you blame my nephew, sir, for giving me information of an intended defiance of the laws of the school?"

"Ahem! I shall not pass an opinion upon that. Please dismiss your nephew, Mr. Ratcliff, so that I may speak more freely."

Mr. Ratcliff angrily signed to Bartholomew to quit the study, and the hopeful youth reluctantly obeyed. He did not go far, however—no farther than the outside of the door, where he remained in close proximity to the keyhole.

"Well, sir?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"I should like to point out to you, Mr. Railton quietly, "that since your nephew has entered the school he has caused much bitterness and resentment by a habit of tale-bearing, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, indeed! It has been in my mind several times to suggest to you to administer some correction—"

"Correction!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Precisely. Correction administered in time may have the effect of eradica-

ting this exceedingly unpleasant trait from his character—"

"Nonsense, sir!"

"Wh-a-a!"

"Nonsense!"

"Mr. Ratcliff!" exclaimed the School House master.

"I repeat, sir, nonsense!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "And as I have no time to waste, sir, in listening to nonsense, I will retire."

And the exasperated man wrenched open the door and strode out—and strode right into his nephew, who jumped back from the keyhole too late. Mr. Ratcliff's waistcoat came into violent collision with Bartholomew's hard bullet head, and there was a howl from Bartholomew and a gasp from his uncle.

"Wh-a-a-a-nt!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff, reeling against the doorpost.

"Yow-ow!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, staring at the scene outside his doorway. "Really—really—"

"Smack, smack, smack!" Mr. Ratcliff was nearly winded, and quite infuriated. He boxed his nephew's ears right and left, and then strode down the corridor and whistled away. Bartholomew staggered against the wall, yelling.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a howl from the distance.

"Yow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton closed his study door, smiling. Bartholomew Ratcliff limped away, rubbing his crimson ears, and he had to run the gauntlet of a yelling School-House crowd. For once Ratty junior had felt the heavy hand of Ratty senior, and Tom Merry & Co. enjoyed it, and they roared.

CHAPTER 11.

The Ratcatchers!

NOT a word before young Ratty!"

Bartholomew halted, his eyes gleaming. He was coming to his study when the whispering voices of Figgins & Co. were heard within. Bartholomew had a habit of walking very quietly, not to say stealthily, and he grimes, as he heard the whispers through the half-open doorway. Evidently his study-mates had not heard him coming.

"Even that spyin' cad can't suspect if we're careful not to let him hear a word!" went on the low tones of George Figgins. "If he knew he'd give us away, Ratty, of course."

"Of course he would. It's hardly safe to talk here—" murmured Patty Wynn.

"No fear! I've arranged with the School House chaps for a meeting over there," said Figgins. "It's a splendid scheme, but we've got to arrange the details with them."

Outside the door Bartholomew was as still as silent as a mouse. His sharp ears were drinking in every word.

He wondered what the "scheme" was that Figgins & Co. were to arrange with the School House fellows. He certainly meant to know, and he was not at all particular as to his methods of finding out.

"We've got to put in some cricket practice. House match next week, you know," continued Figgins. "Meeting in Tom Merry's study at four. Then we'll settle the whole matter, and somebody will meet with a giddy surprise."

There was a chuckle in the study.

Outside the study there was a grin. Bartholomew had no doubt who the "somebody" was—himself! But per-

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haps he was not going to be so surprised as Figgins thought when the "scheme," whatever it was, came into operation.

"Not a whisper here," continued Figgins. "That odd hat jolly long ears."

"I had a suspicion of our little game would be just like him to sneak into the school house when we're there and see what we can do."

"He can't comb," said Kerr; "Too many clumps around the passage."

"Well, he'd know to spy on us, somehow if he knows, I'll bet you!" answered Figgins. "He wouldn't mind hiding under the table to listen—he's quick enough. Let's get down to cricket now—we can talk over the scheme later. And if we don't make him sit up, I'll eat my hat!"

"Want till I get my bag," said Fatty Wynn.

"Hurry up, then!" Bartholomew stopped softly away and disappeared into a neighbouring study. The passage when Figgins and Co. came out with their bats, Figgins smiled as they went downstairs. Figgins did not speak till they were outside the House.

"He was there?" he murmured.

Kerr nodded.

"Yes, indeed. I heard him sneaking up the passage. He was there, right enough, and heard every word we said. He's so jolly sharp."

"He, ho, ho!"

"And now he knows there's going to be a meeting in Tom Merry's study at five—can his account?" murmured Kerr.

"Well, he'd do it. He will want to know, I fancy, if he doesn't know anything else Tommy's study before he's Tom's double Dutchman!"

And Figgins and Co. went obediently down to cricket. It was a half-holiday that day, and they were going to enjoy it—mostly wholly at cricket. About a quarter of an hour later Bartholomew Ratcliff appeared on the table.

He was not often seen there; but he appeared interested in the cricketers now. Perhaps he wanted to ascertain that the Terrible Three were not in their quarters.

If so, he was soon satisfied on that point. Tom Merry and Co., and Study No. 6, were all on the school-field. Half-past three had chimed on when Bartholomew strolled away, and in a very careless sort of manner entered into the School House.

On that fine half-holiday the house was almost deserted. Bartholomew met hardly a soul as he went up to the third quarters, only passing Trimble on a landing. And Trimble was too busy with his bag of bats to be of any use.

In the Shell passage Bartholomew stopped close by the door of No. 12, and looked this way and that, like Meeks of old. The passage was clear. He stepped quickly into No. 12 and closed the door. He sat down, and the upper part of the cupboard was closed. He turned to the lower part for firewood and lumber.

There was a good deal of saws there, and the lumber could be moved a little, to allow a secure and ample hiding-place behind it, so that a spy would not be able to see in the study, even if he got into the cupboard.

Nothing could have suited Bartholomew's purpose better; it really was as if the cupboard-door had been left open on purpose to tempt him.

He had allowed himself plenty of time. He stepped into the cupboard, bending his head under the shelf, and moved the lumber carefully and quietly. An old

chair, a stool, some boxes, a superannuated cricket-bag, and some other articles made a vast cover for the wretched sneak crouching in the back of the shadowy room.

He had unaccounted himself quite comfortably when four o'clock rang out. The thing was followed by the sound of footsteps in the passage. Bartholomew, through the openings in his screen, had a glimpse of the trousers of the Tomlike Three of the Shell as they came into the room.

"Hallo, we're here first!" remarked Tom Merry. "Merry, you careless man, you! Did the cupboard-door open!"

"Sham!"

"Click!"

Bartholomew started. He had not expected the cupboard-door to be locked on him. Still it did not matter—it would have to be unlocked again at tea-time, anyhow.

But, it was all the better for when the meeting occurred, even the suspicious Figgins and Co. could hardly suspect that there was an eavesdropper hidden in a locked cupboard!

He listened, expecting to hear many footsteps and voices. All he heard was footsteps receding, and a study-door closing.

The silence.

Bartholomew was puzzled. Minute followed minute, and the meeting had evidently not arrived.

It was very warm and close in the cupboard. There was a ventilator above, but the air was stuffy enough to follow a croaking among lizards. Ratty junior began to grow very impatient.

He was close to Fatty; but that seemed nothing to listen to. Silence reigned in the study.

Half an hour passed. It lengthened into an hour. Faintly from the distance came the booming of the great clock, and he knew that it was five.

He was perspiring in his narrow quarters, and feeling half-suffocated. And there was no sound in the study. And the dread of suspicion was forcing itself into Bartholomew's mind.

It was odd, to say the least, that the Terrible Three should have come to the study, merely locked the door, and departed again. What did it mean?

As the minutes passed by Bartholomew began to realize very clearly what it meant—that Figgins and Co.'s suspicions had been intended for his ears—that they had known he was listening—that there was to be no meeting at all—and that the "scheme" was this—to trap him in the study and lock him up there!

But he had no feeling as he realized that was not agreeable.

At half-past five there was still silence, and he had no further doubts. And he was fed-up.

"The rotters!" he muttered, grinding his teeth. "They've fooled me—the whole lot. I've got to get out of this. I could have my revenge. He could only succeed by making a terrific noise and attracting someone to the study to turn the key and release him—and then, how was he to explain his presence there?"

He hesitated; but as six o'clock rang out he felt that he could stand it no longer. He had been more than two hours in the cupboard, and he was cramped and aching and half-suffocated. He groped for the nearest bat, and smote upon the cupboard-door with it.

"Bang, bang, bang!"

"Bang, bang, bang!"

"Bang, bang, bang!"

"What's that?" roared Bartholomew.

"No reply."

"Bang, bang, bang!"

The infuriated crowd would have snatched through the door if it had been possible. But the door was of thick oak, and it resisted well. All he could do was to make a terrific din—and that he did.

"Crash! Bang! Crash, crash!"

Bartholomew was desperate now. He knew that the game would come to his rescue; but somehow he did not care whom, so long as he was released.

"Bang, bang! Crash! Bump!"

There was a footstep at last, and a well-aimed angry surprise.

"What's that noise? What does it mean?" It was Mr. Ratcliff. "Bless my soul! The room is empty—"

"Bang! Crash!"

"Upon my word!"

Mr. Ratcliff strode across the study, turned back the key, and threw open the cupboard door.

"What—what—Who is there?" he gasped.

"Oh dear! Owi!"

Crimson and dusky and perspiring, Bartholomew crawled out at the House-master's feet. Mr. Ratcliff stared at him blankly.

"What—what—Ratcliff! Epy! What are you doing here?"

"Oh! I've been locked in!" wailed Bartholomew. "Oh dear! I'm nearly suffocated! Oh! I—"

"What? What?"

"What? What? Locked me in there!" wailed Bartholomew. "I've been there for hours—hours—Oh!"

Mr. Ratcliff grasped him by the shoulder and jerked him to his feet.

"Kindly explain what you were doing there, Ratcliff!" he said.

"You appear to have been hidden in Merry's cupboard, and he turned his key on you."

"Yes! I—I—"

"Whether he knew you were there or not is of no moment. Why were you hidden in this study at all?" thundered the House-master.

"E—E—"

Bartholomew's voice failed him.

"You utter unscrupulous young rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff. "This is a matter of your miserable spring tricks. Am you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Oh!"

"Come!"

"Oh dear!" groaned the hapless Bartholomew.

With a grip on his shoulder Mr. Ratcliff led him out of the study and down the stairs and out of the House of the Terrible Three. Mr. Ratcliff led him to the New House, and to Mr. Ratcliff's study—much to the surprise of Ratty senior. And having explained Ratty junior's conduct, and added that he was prepared to take the young rascal before the Head if he was not adequately corrected, he turned to Mr. Ratcliff. Mr. Ratcliff waited till Mr. Ratcliff, who was really left no choice in the matter, administered the required correction. And Mr. Ratcliff being extremely exasperated by the affair, laid it on with unusual vim—much to the sorrow and tribulation of Bartholomew.

That evening there were smiling faces in both Houses at St. Jim's.

There was only one sorrowful face in the whole Lower School. It was Ratty junior's. All other faces were smiling and merry. It was not a smiling matter for the Snake of St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"BY RATTY'S COM-MAND!" by Martin COTTELL.)

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EXTRACTS FROM



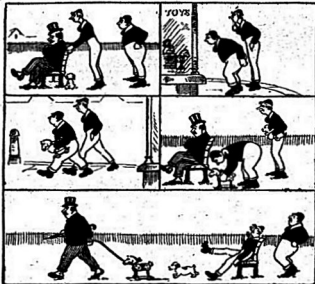
THE TUCK-HAMPER TRAGEDY. By George Bulstrode.

"I'm expecting a hamper!" said Skinner of the Remove, a big hamper, packed with all sorts and conditions of tuck. The sort of hamper one used to receive in the dear old days of long ago!" "Good!" said Bolover major. "Ripping!" said Stott. Both Bolover and Stott were aware that if Skinner received a hamper they would be in for a good time. Skinner was notoriously mean; but Bolover would see that he was made to whack the good things out among his friends. "Rippling!" said Stott. "Wheo! Wheo!" said Bolover major, who was standing by when Skinner made his announcement, were frankly incredulous. "Why, you never get hampers, Skinsney!" said Bob Cherry. "This is an exception to the giddy rule," said Skinner. "I've got an uncle in town who has just come down handsomely." "Made a fortune as a taxi-driver, I suppose!" granted Johnny Bull. Skinner nodded. "Rate! He's made up a gorgeous hamper,

with hams and tongues and preserved fruit and goodness knows what. And I'm expecting it to arrive to-day." "No need to make a song about it!" said Wharton. "Well, it isn't every fellow who can have a hamper sent to him, even in these days. Why, that grub will be worth its weight in gold! What's more," added Skinner vindictively, "I shouldn't think of asking any of you fellows to share it with me. The feast is going to be for three—Bolover, Stott, and myself!" At this there was a wail from Billy Bunter, who had overheard the conversation. "Oh, really, Skinsney! I hope you're not going to leave me out in the cold. I've been your pal for as far back as I can remember, and this is where you ought to show your gratitude." "Oh, go and eat cake!" said Skinner. "But—but aren't you going to invite me to the spread?" "Invite my grandmoother! You'd wail the wail if we let you get within a hundred

yards of the hamper. No, porpoise; nothing doing!" The fat junior fairly exploded. "Yah! Bount! Nosh! nosh! nosh! Greedy pig! I hope the stuff chokes you—see!" "Rate!" Skinner walked away with his nose in the air, and Bolover and Stott walked beside him. "The silly idiots think we're jealous!" said Wharton. "There will be no holding Skinner," said Nugent. "He'll be going about swinking for weeks over his condemned hamper!" Bob Cherry heard into a coughing fit. "Why not play a little jape on our worthy friend?" he suggested. "I vote we take over the Friedalst, get a big packing case from the grocer's, and fill it with brickbats, or something. Then we'll leave it at the railway-station, addressed to Skinner, and make him cart it all the way to Greyfriars. Perhaps his chivy when he sees what's inside." "Ha, ha, ha!" "It's a ripping scheme!" said Johnny Bull. "And it'll teach Skinner not to be so beastly bombastic in future!" So the Famous Five fetched their bicycles, and rode away with many chuckles to Friedalst. The grocer was disinclined at first to part with one of his large packing-cases; but at the sight of half-a-crown in Harry Singh's dusty palm he became very affable, and produced from his basement a packing-case of immense size, which the juniors cheerfully dragged out into the yard at the back of the grocer's shop. In a corner of the yard they found a number of bricks, stones, empty trestle-tins, and so forth. They crammed the case with these unwieldy articles, and nailed it up. After which, Frank Nugent affixed a neat white label, addressed to Master H. Skinner, Remove Form, Greyfriars. "For another half-crown," said Bob Cherry, "the grocer merchant will lend me his trolley, to use this case in the street."

TUBBY & LANKY, THE TERRIBLE TWINS.



Drawn by JACK BLAKE of St. Jim's.

He produced a strong snap-knife, and proceeded to back away at the lid of the packing case.

"Bilbover and Stott bent down and wrangled at the back of their benches."

So absorbed were the three juniors in their task that for some time they failed to observe the Famous Five, who had disappeared from their bicycles, were standing by to see the fun.

Presently, however, Skinner stood up to take breathers, and he counted about a dozen—Wharton & Co. His face flushed angrily.

"You fellows can clear off," he said. "I know you want a minute in the pie, but there's nothing doing—see? Go away and pick flowers."

"But we want to see the lions feed," said Nugent. "Don't lug us away in our old age!"

Skinner granted, and resumed operations on the lid of the packing-case.

That lid had been nailed on very stubbornly, and it took a long time to yield. But at last the joint efforts of the three juniors met with their reward.

The lid burst asunder, and three pairs of hands were immediately plunged into the packing-case.

As when a yell went up—a yell of anger, astonishment, and dismay.

Skinner bobbed up a very sticky Argentinian. Bilbover major produced a pair of very small boots, and the majority of a trunk, and Stott was juggling with a huge brick.

"Goodf!" yelled Skinner.

"Pardon me, sir," cried Bilbover.

"What a beastly self!" grumbled Stott.

The Famous Five were convulsed with merriment.

The little jags had succeeded beyond the wildest expectations.

The various expressions of dismay on the faces of Skinner and Bilbover and Stott were, as Bob Cherry declared, worth a guinea a box.

Skinner turned forward to Harry Wharton.

"This is your work, you rotter!" he said wrathfully. "I—I'll burst you!"

Skinner was not a fighting man as a rule, but the present case was an exception.

He clenched his fists and advanced upon the face of the fat junior.

But Bilbover major seized him by the shoulders and swung him back.

"Keep back, you ass!" he said. "You knaves haven't a dog's chance against Wharton!"

"But where's my hamper?" roared Skinner.

"Here's the genuine one!"

"And the another?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"We haven't set eyes on it."

Skinner was almost weeping with rage.

"Let's go back to Greyfriars," he said thickly. "I think that we've been making ourselves stiff and sore through eating that rubbish about from the station! It's the absolute limit!"

"And I was hurriedly thirty!" roared Stott.

"Well, it's no hanging about here," said Bilbover. "Let's get back to the school and see if the genuine hamper has turned up."

And the disgruntled trio turned their faces toward Greyfriars. The Famous Five followed them, laughing and indulging in a burst of chaff from time to time.

The procession had not proceeded very far when, suddenly, through the hedge, a fat junior came squirming into view.

It was Billy Bunter.

He had just returned to school at once jumped off their machines, and even Skinner and his cronies were filled with momentary alarm.

For Bunter was as white as a sheet, and he turned aside to hide, as though suffering terrible physical pain.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Oh—I-I'm ill!" stammered the fat junior. "I-I'm going to die, I think. Yow! I'm awful-pain!"

And Billy Bunter straightway collapsed in the roadway.

"I-I shan't last much longer," he moaned faintly. "It's a pity you fellows have come such heads to me in my life-time, but I bear you no malice. Perhaps you'll think better of me when—I've expired!"

"Be a stupid young ass!" said Frank Nugent. "You've a long way of expiring yet. Fellows like you never die—and you're much too fat to fade away!"

"Oh—oh—oh!" groaned Bunter, seized

with a fresh spasm of pain. "Oh dear! I—I'm afraid the end's very near now! You see, I'm—pin-pain-poisoned!"

"Wig!!" gasped the juniors, in a startled chorus.

"I—I've got botulism, or something. It's only a question of minutes before I chuck on my gut. But, as I said before, I bear no malice to any of you. You fellows have treated me as Greyfriars. I have my good watch to you, Bob Cherry."

"What's the secret that," said Bob, when the watch in a brass case, and took it up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I leave my Sunday tea to you."

"Help!" murmured Nugent. "I shall have to wait double before they'll fit!"

"And the sum of fourpence-hamper, in my trousers-pocket, I leave to Wharton!" said Bunter. "And I advise him not to squander it on tuck, Ow!"

"Still suffering internal pain?" asked Johnny Bull. "If you'll leave me to you, I'll undertake to see that you get a decent burial!"

"Oh—er—er!" sighed Bunter. "Wish I'd left that last cake alone, and stuck to the wafers!"

And he pressed two fat and sticky hands to his waistcoat.

Light dawned upon Bob Cherry.

He sprang through a gap in the hedge, and a moment later he gave a shout.

"Come and look, you fellows!"

The juniors hurried to the adjacent field, where they beheld a large hamper.

At one time it had been filled with good things, but now very little was left save an "empty" of empty time and bottles.

Skinner nearly choked.

"That fat villain," he shouted, "has raided our tuck!"

"But how?" asked Stott helplessly.

"He must have met the carrier on the road and pinched the hamper. Oh, my hat!"

And Skinner advanced with clenched fists towards the squirming Bunter.

"Stand up, you fat thief," he said, "and put up your hands!"

Harry Wharton sprang forward.

"You'll have to settle with me—first, Skinner," he said. "Bunter's been punished enough already."

"Do you think I'm going to take this lying down?" demanded Skinner.

"You can't touch me," said Harry. "But you can't touch Bunter just now. He's made himself really ill."

And as it proved, the wretched Owl, trembled to go from one end to another, had badly overate in the long run.

"We shall have to carry him back to Greyfriars," said Nugent.

"Oh, help!" cried Bob Cherry. "I never was a champion weight-lifter!"

"There are some hurdles over in the field," said Johnny Bull. "They'll answer the purpose."

So the juniors made an improvised stretcher, and with some difficulty Billy Bunter was hoisted back to Greyfriars.

"When he gets fit again," said Skinner, "I'll give him the licking of his life!"

"You'd do nothing of the sort," said Harry. "He's too weak to try, it with or, I shall ask you to meet me in the gym, with or without gloves!"

That threat, coming as it did from one of the fiercest fighting-men in the Remove, was quite sufficient to make Harold Skinner change his mind.

For quite a long time afterwards the end of the Remove murmured and groaned and comforted. But at length 99-64 suggested that he should write to his uncle for another hamper to replace that which was stolen.

Accordingly, Skinner did so.

By the time the second tuck-hamper arrived Billy Bunter had shaken off the effects of his 99.

The fat junior looked into Skinner's study as the cad of the Remove unpacked the good things.

"I say, Skinny, old chap—"

"Scat!"

"Oh, really, you know! After the rotten time I've been through, you ought to give me a grain."

Bilbover major caught up a five-bat, with a grin.

"Bilbover major caught up a five-bat, with a grin."

The bat whizzed through the air, and Billy Bunter shot into the passage like a stone from a catapult.

Skinner was not likely to invite Bunter's assistance in disposing of the second tuck-hamper!

**GREYFRIARS
EPITAPHS.**

No. 1.

By BOB CHERRY.

HERE LIES

(as was his wont in the flesh)

THE INFLATED AND PODGY FORM

of

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER,

THE PRIZE PORPOISE OF

GREYFRIARS,

Whose infinite capacity for taking pains (and other things which didn't belong to him) was one of the wonders of our age.

HE PERISHED

as a result of consuming, at one sitting, fifteen currant-buns, twelve doughnuts, six sausage-rolls, and four veal-and-ham pies (no coupon required), to say nothing of numerous bottles of ginger-beer, which, like himself,

WENT OFF POP!

All his life he was expecting

A POSTAL-ORDER

from his titled relations, but it never turned up, save on one memorable occasion, when he received the lordly and magnificent sum of

ONE SHILLING,

in anticipation of which he had borrowed many quids from his long-suffering schoolfellows.

His body will be taken to the Zoo, and exhibited as

A TAME BOA-CONSTRICTOR,

and all the keyholes in the Remove passage will be dedicated to his memory.

"We've placed him on a cattle-truck. Our eyes grow strangely dim! He shifted much unwholesome tuck—And now it's shifted him!"