

'ST. JIM'S ON THE 'BUST!'" RIPPING LONG COMPLETE STORY INSIDE!

# The GEM

2<sup>nd</sup>

EVERY  
WEDNESDAY.



RATTY ON THE PROWL! HUGS HOMER! LYNCHES LINTON!

# ST. Jim's 'Bust'!

"We'll jape the Shell," said Gassy.

"We'll jape the New House," said Lowther.

"We'll jape the School House," said Figgins.

And since they all played the same jape the situations are amazing in this long complete story of St. Jim's!

## CHAPTER 1.

### Startling News!

"EVERY boy will stand in his place!"

Mr. Lathorn's tone was wrathful. His eyes glowered over his Form like points of fire, and if looks could have killed, the Fourth Form class-room at St. Jim's would certainly have resembled a cemetery.

Perhaps, like the prophet of old, the little gentleman did well to be angry. Undoubtedly the Fourth Form were very trying that afternoon. Even model pupils like Larrison and Replaine were paying no heed to the English Literature lesson.

"Every boy will stand in his place!" came Mr. Lathorn's snapping tones.

The jokers started. It was bad enough sitting down, but it would be ten times worse standing. With dejected looks they rose to their feet and stood behind their desks.

"This Form is incredibly idle and inattentive to-day," rapped Mr. Lathorn. "Not one boy has yet succeeded in reciting a verse of poems correctly!"

The Fourth were learning "The Barbed of Sir John Mearns" and while the janitor had every respect for that book, they sturdily declined to sing his praises that afternoon.

"We will now try a mere original plan," said Mr. Lathorn, with gleaming countenance. "Each boy will recite one verse of this poem in turn. If the verse is recited without mistake, the boy may remove his seat, if not, he will remain standing until his turn comes round again."

"Great pop!" murmured Blake.

"Herries will commence."

Herries sat in the top corner. Somewhat to his own surprise, he managed to get through the first verse without any errors. With a sigh of relief he dropped into his seat.

Cardew, who came next, was not so lucky. He dived up midway through the first line, and he remained standing, while Kerwath started on the third verse. Kerwath recited the stanza and seated himself. Then there was a solemn pause.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was next on the list. But Gassy did not appear to be troubling himself. He was still day-dreaming. His eyes were fixed in a vacant stare on the ceiling, and a gentle snore played round his lips.

Mr. Lathorn glanced at him.

"D'Arcy!"

Gassy awoke with a start.

"Oh! Yess, sir!"

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BY  
MARTIN CLIFFORD

"You will go on."

"Go on with what, sir?" asked Gassy innocently.

Mr. Lathorn choked.

"Boy! Are you paying any attention at all to the lesson?"

"Barghla, sir," answered Gassy, still lost in thought.

"What?" rapped out Mr. Lathorn.

"Barghla, sir. I—I mean— Oh dear!"

Mr. Lathorn stared at him. So did the class. Blake whispered to Clive that Gassy was "off his rocker," and Clive said gloomily that he had been expecting it for a long time.

"What do you mean by barghla, D'Arcy?" roared Mr. Lathorn. "Are you dazed, boy?"

"Naaaa, sir!"

"You will recite the fourth verse of the poem, D'Arcy, and if you do not pay more attention, you will write out the complete poem twenty times."

"Oh heavens!"

"Commence."

Gassy blinked round him helplessly.

"Few and short were the prayers we said," whispered Digby in his ear.

"Oh, yes! Few and short are the stairs we tread—"

"What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" sneered the Fourth delightedly.

Mr. Lathorn adjusted his spectacles and hissed dazedly at the blinking Arthur Augustus.

"I believe this boy is a little insane," he remarked to the world at large. "D'Arcy, you will take fifty lines! Herries standing. Next boy!"

The poem went the rounds of the class. About half recurred their seats. Mr. Lathorn's treatment was a trifle original, but it certainly had the effect of sharpening the wits. Nobody wanted to stand longer than he had to.

Cardew managed to recite correctly when his turn came again, but when he had taken his seat there was another solemn pause. Gries and Winks traveled round the class.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had lapsed into thought again.

# LOCKS UP LOWTHER! FRIGHTENS FIGGINS! AND BAGS...WHAT?



Whatever powerful thought was occupying Gussy's brain, it was certainly leaving no room for class work. Evidently he was thinking of burglars, though why he should be doing so no fellow could say. At any rate, it interrupted him more than the burial of the late Sir John, and he did not perceive Mr. Lathorn as that inveterate master crept up behind him with his cane.

The first intimation that Gussy had of his Form master's presence was a hotly smelt across his back. He jumped.

"Yasoooh! Oh-ah! What—"

"I thought that might arouse you, D'Arcy," said Mr. Lathorn pleasantly. "You will recite the fifth verse."

"Oh dear! Yes, sir! Er—we thought as we hollowed his narrow bed, and—smoothed down his lonesome pillow, that Dixon, and Hobbs, and Patterson said: 'Let's all play a jape on the fellow.' So they—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors hilariously. "Stop!" roared Mr. Lathorn. "What is the meaning of that wanton nonsense, D'Arcy! I begin seriously to think that you are out of your senses, boy."

"Well, Mr. Lathorn—" stammered Gussy, turning pink. "Whose names were those you mentioned?"

"Some schoolboys, sir," faltered Gussy. The juniors looked at each other blankly. Like Lathorn and Binks, they began to think Gussy was a little worrying. Nobody in the Fourth had heard of any schoolboys named Dixon, Hobbs and Patterson.

Mr. Lathorn sneered.

"Fah! You are a remarkable obtuse boy, D'Arcy. You will write out this poem ten times after school. Next day."

The poem travelled round the class again. At the third attempt, every fellow got it right—with one melancholy exception. All the class were now seated. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy alone remained erect. Mr. Lathorn looked at him. So did the class. A general gasp was in evidence.

"D'Arcy, you are the only boy left standing."

"I'm afraid so, sir," murmured Gussy.

"You will recite the last verse, D'Arcy."

"Oh, couldn't!" groaned Arthur Augustus. He pulled himself together. "Shan't and only we laid him down from the field-of—of his leave."

fresh and gony; we carried not a line, we wained not a stone; but—but—"

Gussy dried up.

"Go on, D'Arcy. You are right, so far."

"I—I forgot the rest, sir," confessed Gussy dolefully.

"That's strange," remarked Mr. Lathorn acrimoniously. "I should have thought your own position would have."

suggested the New to you, D'Arcy. It runs: 'But we left him alone in his glory.'

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fourth, who saw the point of Latham's little joke.

Mr. Latham smiled grimly.

"You may sit down, D'Arcy. It wants but a few minutes to four, so you may put up your books, my boys. Before the class discusses, however, I have an important announcement to make."

"There was the usual scuffle while the juniors tidied their desks. At its conclusion, Mr. Latham held up his hand for silence.

"As you all know," said the master, "Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton are attending an important educational conference in London, and have left Mr. James' for a day or two. I now learn that Mr. Scovell has received a telegram requesting himself, Mr. Linton, and myself to go to London to-night, as a point of controversy has arisen which necessitates our attendance."

"There was a buzz in the Form.

"Flew!"

"Half the books away! Oh, good!"

"Silence!" Mr. Latham gave his class a stern look. "The prefects will be in charge of preparation to-night, and will see that everything proceeds in an orderly manner. I trust that there will be no burlesque or misconduct while your Form master is absent."

"What a trading nature!" murmured Blake, and there was a giggle.

"Tomorrow morning you will assemble in class as usual. Railton, of the Sixth Form, will be in charge. I hope you will not neglect your preparation in my absence. Railton has orders to be very severe on any boy who neglects his work. That is all. The class may discuss."

The class duly dismissed.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Excursion in the Fourth!

"NOW, James—"  
"Well, Blake!"

"Now, as—"

"Well, Howie!"

"What do you mean by it?" booted Blake. "Have you gone quite petty, or is it only a temporary attack?"

"I fail to understand you, Blake," answered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy frigidly.

The classes of the Fourth had repaired to Study No. 4, and had cornered the noble Gussy there to explain himself. Arthur Augustus, instead of getting into fustian tackle for a game on the playing fields, had rooted out a boy's magazine from the study cupboard, and was trying to read it. Blake, Herrie, and Digby were pressing him, so Gussy was poverish.

"What do you mean by bustling all that rot to Latham, fellow?" demanded Blake. "Are you off your case?"

"I refuse to be called a fellow, Blake."

"Were you dressing about burglars, Gussy?" asked Digby, with a grin.

"Oh, was?"

"Well, the silly as got himself an impost for it!" sneered Herrie. "Perhaps he likes impost. What's the book, Gussy?"

"This is a copy of the new school paper, Howie. It is called the 'Boys' Companion.' I borrowed it from Latham."

"Well, why are you fussing indoors, reading that rubbish?" asked Blake, in surprise. "Aren't you coming out to football?"

"Yes, withah! The fact is, dear boys, there is a story in here that I think withah good. It's about the exploits of Dixon & Co., of Fieldham College."

"Dixon?" exclaimed Digby. "That's the name of the dandy bandit to Latham."

"Well, Digby—"

"Oh, come on!" sneered Herrie.

"One moment, Howie," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I wish to tell you fellows about this story."

"Oh, bless your silly story!" sneered Blake. "Do you think we want to hang about indoors listening to stories, eh?"

"But this has given me an idea—"

"Buy it?"

"For a jape on Tom Mervey & Co.," explained Arthur Augustus solemnly.

"We haven't time to jape silly fellows now, champ."

"Not now—to-night," went on Gussy, grinning. "Half the masters will be away to-night, and we ought to do something to celebrate the occasion."

Blake passed.

"Well, that's all right," said Gussy, explaining laboriously, "so many of the masters will be away to-night, and the prefects won't bother much what happens in their absence."

"Are you suggesting that we dress up as burglars and raid the Shell dorm?" demanded Blake.

"I shall dress up as a burglar, Blake," replied Gussy solemnly. "You chaps will wait at the corner of the passage to ambush Tom Mervey & Co."

Blake passed.

"Well, that's so," he admitted. "That's often that so many of the books leave off and leave us on our own. What's the stunt, fellow?"

"I have told you, Blake, that I object to being characterized as a fellow."

"I know you have, fellow! Carry on, fellow! Don't be all right, fellow!"

"But Jove! If you want me to give you a jolly thwack, Blake—"

"Too warm for thwackings, champ! What's this petty idea of yours?"

Arthur Augustus heaved a sigh.

"I refuse to tell you my idea now!" he snapped. "You can go and eat cake!"

"Right-ho! Steer me just as well. Come on, you chaps!"

The three Fourth-Formers left the study without the slightest regret at missing Gussy's great idea. D'Arcy directed a searching glance after them, and then apparently came to the conclusion that playing footer was better than staying indoors. He put his magazine back into the cupboard and followed his chaps.

Not one of them mentioned the subject again until half-way through tea. Then Digby looked up and remarked:

"By the way, wasn't Gussy hurrying something about a jape on the Shell just now?"

"Yes. What is it, Gus?"

"I refuse to say, Howie. You have treated me with such contempt."

Blake looked up pleadingly.

"Don't be hard on us, Gus," he implored. "We haven't your tact and eloquence, you know."

"Well, Blake—"

"We're only thoughtless youngsters, don't forget. If we hadn't you with us we should be in trouble all day long."

"But Jove! That's very true, Blake!"

"So forgive us, Gus. It was merely our ignorance, you know."

"Yes; I dare say you are quite right, Blake," nodded Gussy, while Blake winked at Herrie and Digby, who grinned and then looked solemn. "Very well, I will overlook your ignorance, as it's not your fault, dear boys."

"Why, you—"

"Thank!" murmured Blake. "Fire ahead, Gustavus!"

"In this story in the 'Boys' Companion,'" explained Gussy, "Dixon, Howie, and Patterson decide to jape the West House boarders, you know. And—ha, ha, ha!—Dixon dresses up as a burglar—"

"What?" yelled Blake.

"As a burglar, dear boy! He takes an electric torch, you see, and he goes to the West House dorm and shines it in the fellows' faces. Then they wake up and spot him, and he creeps out of the window, and the fellows follow him."

"Great pip!"

"So he goes on creeping down the passage," continued Gussy, chuckling hugely, "and he leads these fellows into a crowd of his own fellows, who are ambushed! the other fellows. Well, these fellows—"

"Which fellows are those?" asked Blake gravely.

"Dixon's friends—the East House fellows, you know. These fellows pitch into the other fellows—"

"Which fellows?"

"The West House fellows, you know, and the other fellows catch in, and the fellows give them a fearful thwack!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"And then these fellows—"

"Seems a lot of fellows about," grinned Blake. "Must be a pretty big school, by the sound of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, was! The funny part is that while the West House fellows are walking into an ambush Patterson of the East House slips in and locks their dormitory door, you know, and—ha, ha, ha!—the West House fellows can't get back in their dorm until they own that the East House is Cook House of Fieldham."

Gussy roared. He laughed so much that for several moments he did not notice that Blake & Co. were staring faces as solemn as oaks.

"Well, dear boys, what do you think of it?" asked Arthur Augustus anxiously. "Isn't the idea a wippah?"

"Not bad."

"But don't you see, dear boys," said Gussy, explaining laboriously, "so many of the masters will be away to-night, and the prefects won't bother much what happens in their absence."

"Are you suggesting that we dress up as burglars and raid the Shell dorm?" demanded Blake.

"I shall dress up as a burglar, Blake," replied Gussy solemnly. "You chaps will wait at the corner of the passage to ambush Tom Mervey & Co."

"Well, was!"



Matchoff and Lizzie rust with a fearful concussion and fell headlong among the ruins of their supper!

"I don't think."  
 "Yes! The idea is quite simple. While you are waiting, Tom Mowry and the Black Heron will slip along the passage and lock the door of the Shell dormitory. Then we won't let the bounders get in until they admit we are top dogs."  
 "Oh eriky!"

"Do you think we are going to handle Tom Mowry & Co. while you play at being a burglar?" roared Blake.  
 "Suppose the Shell handle us instead? They are bigger than we."

"If you are dandy, Blake—"  
 "Funky!" roared Blake. "Lemme greet him!"  
 "Keep off, you foolish wallyan!" yelled Gussy, dodging hurriedly to the door. "I say, you know, what do you think of the idea?"

"Is there any need to say it?" asked Eighy blandly.  
 "It's no better than your usual ideas. Can't be worse, that's one thing."

"Wally, Dig—"  
 "We'd better be careful what we let Gussy read," observed Horries thoughtfully. "If he starts reading 'Young Transcend' in the Gaz, he'll want to fly from the house to the footer field."

"Look here!" roared Gussy in desperation. "Are you fellows game? That's what I desire to know."  
 "Oh, we're game enough," said Blake. "Ee—"

"Ee—"  
 "Ee—"  
 "Ee—"

"You can trust me to play the burglar to perfection, you know. I am a splendid actor, dear boys."

"And a still more splendid talker," grinned Eighy.  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Dig—"  
 "Oh, rot!" said Blake. "The scheme's perfectly idiotic. But the masters will all be away, and there will be some fun if Gus starts pretending he's a burglar. What do you fellows say?"

"I think it's boom-er!" granted Horries.  
 "Not in the kind, Heron. I can assure you, dear boy, that it's a wally great idea. Of course, with your brains, you can't be expected to see that," said Gussy seriously. "I understand that, dear boy. But if you had any brains, you would recognize that it is a topper's stunt."

"You—you—" sneered Horries.  
 "Look here," put in Blake hurriedly. "Let's do it to keep the dummy quiet. It won't come off—Gussy's idea never do. But it will be funny to see our Gus wandering around making noise like a burglar."  
 "Wally, Blake—"

"We'll do it, Gustavus. Count on us, old fellow. You get your burglar's rig, and leave the rest to little us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "I'd like to see any woman for cackles, dear boys. I am glad to see you have got some sense at last. We won't miss this opportunity of having a night without any matches around, Digday, dear boy, will you slip along and lock the Shell door when they come out!"

"Anything for a quiet life," yawned Eighy. "But why am I then honored? I thought that job was for Horries."

"Yes; but it has just occurred to me, Dig, that Horries probably hasn't enough brains for the job."

"What?" roared Horries.  
 "You really haven't, Heron, dear boy," said Gussy sorrowfully. "It's not your fault, of course—"

"You—you silly dummy!"  
 "Bai Jose, Heron, if you characterize me as a dummy—"

"What are you going to do with that cushion, Heron?"

"I'm going to bust it at a footling champ!" sneered Horries. "Like so!"

What!

The cushion flew; but Gassy was on the alert, and he ducked in time. Fortunately, however, the cushion was not wasted. As it sailed through the air, the door opened and the buzzing features of Monty Leather of the Shell were seen. They were seen for one second—then the cushion blotted them out.

"Whooop!" roared Leather in surprise. He staggered backwards and came into Levison, who was peering at that moment with an arsenal of books.

"What do you mean?" gasped Levison. "Yarsooch!" He took Leather full amidships, and the two juniors rolled to the floor clasped in each other's arms. As Levison went backwards he released the books, which flew violently into the air.

Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn were coming up the stairs. Grundy carried a poker and fire-tongs. A Latin dictionary, sailing through the air, caught Grundy neatly on the base of the skull.

"Yarsooch!" howled Grundy feebly. He swung round in anger to ascertain the identity of the issuer of the book. As he swung round, the poker and fire-tongs travelled round with him. The poker caught Wilkins on the ear and stretched him prone; the tongs poked Gunn in the eye and knocked him backwards.

Gunn gave a wild yell and dashed frantically at Baggy Trimble, who was coming upstairs behind him. Baggy overbalanced, and he and Gunn tumbled down the staircase, landed together.

In the hall below, Kildare had heard the noise, and he was coming up to investigate, with a cane under his arm. He had got half-way up the stairs when Trimble and Gunn dashed on him. They were falling towards him with terrible velocity.

Kildare uttered an ejaculation, and turned to race downstairs out of the way. But almost before he could make the cyclone struck him.

"Whooop!" yelled Kildare, as he sailed into the air; described a perfect somersault, and landed on top of Darrell in the hall below.

Darrell fell. As he did so, Gunn and Trimble landed on him and knocked all the breath out of him.

Then the peaceful calm of St. Jim's was rent with yells, roars, and imprecations.

"Oh, my hat! Ow!" gasped Leather.

"Gasp-ty! Garret my head," shrieked Levison, from beneath him.

"I—I'll slaughter somebody for this!" groaned Grundy, nursing his head.

"Mummummm!" came a dolorous moan from the recumbent Wilkins.

From the foot of the stairs a regular choir was heard. Herries started at the deluge in perplexity.

"Well, my hat!" he remarked. "Did I do all that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake & Co.

"You stink aw, Herries! You have terribly injured half St. Jim's."

The excited features of Leather looked in through the open door. He was no longer beaming.

"What fathead checked that cushion?" howled Leather wrathfully. "I—I'll slaughter him!"

"What did you put your silly face in the way for?" scolded Herries.

"I was coming to see D'Arcy, you footling freak!"

"Bal Jove! What did you want to see me about, Levison?"

"I wanted you to return my book—my 'Boys' Companion,'" snapped Leather. "But that silly chimpanzee Herries—"

"If you call me a chimp, I'll bring another cushion!" roared the incensed Herries.

"Check it, you ass!"

"Here's your book, Levison! Merry thanks for the loan, dash boy—Bal Jove, what do all these fellows want?"

Blake & Co. looked with surprise at the door of their study, which had opened to reveal an excited crowd of fellows. Grundy was there, pushing back his cuffs; Levison, Gunn, and Wilkins were there, looking very warlike; Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth were there, taking a firm grip of their sceptres. Baggy Trimble's face could be seen, and his voice could be heard—behind the crowd.

Leather grinned.

"Yarso!" he chorused. "This lets me out. I'll come along and gather up the pieces in a minute."

He pushed his way through the crowd and walked down the passage. As he went, fearful sounds could be heard coming from Study No. 5. It sounded like a particularly fierce battle.

Leather chorused and entered his own study, where his study-mates, Tom Merry and Manserv, were having tea.

"What's all that row, Monty?" asked Tom in wonder.

Leather explained. Tom Merry and Manserv laughed.

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"Dear old Herries," grinned Leather. "Always looking for trouble. Always finding it. Just like the Fourth, ain't it?"

"Just," agreed Tom.

"By the way, I've got that book from Gunn. I'll show you the story I mean, and explain my ripping idea for a page on Piggins & Co. of the New House. It's a splendid scheme—simply splendid. I'm going to dress up as a lawyer—"

"My hat!"

"We can get the key of the passage door now that Railton is away. Piggins and the others won't be expecting us. They'll probably forget there are no masters to-night. We'll do what Duce & Co. did in this Fieldham story."

"Tom Merry and Manserv exchanged apprehensive glances.

"Look here, Monty—"

"My dear old bean, the thing's as simple as A B C," said Leather stily. "All you've got to do is to ambush Piggins & Co., and lock their directory down. I'll do the rest. You fellows know what a splendid actor I am."

"Ahem!"

"Leave it to me," chuckled Leather. "Now open your ears, my infants, while I explain the scheme of the century."

And Monty Leather went on to describe an grand idea for disting the New House juniors, completely oblivious of the fact that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had conceived a similar notion with regard to the Shell. Probably, though, he would discover that fact before another sun rose upon St. Jim's.

## CHAPTER 3.

### Rally in the Wm!

"ARE you ready, Linton?"

Mr. Ratcliff asked the question as he stood upon the School House steps. Moore, Linton and Levison, carrying umbrellas and raincoats—they were cautious gentlemen—joined him there. In the drive a large, dark blue car was waiting contentedly. The car was the property of General Griffiths, governor of the school, who lived near Weyland. He had kindly lent it for the purpose of conveying the three masters to London.

"Is that the general's car, Ratcliff?" asked Levison, as he came out.

"That is the car, Levison. Are we all in readiness? We had better start at once, or we shall not reach London until an extremely late hour."

"By all means."

The three masters climbed into the luxurious car, and the chauffeur closed the door. Dozens of eyes watched it as it slid down the drive. When it disappeared a great sigh of relief went up from a hundred throats.

"We're on our own until to-morrow afternoon, my pippins," chuckled Leather. "Let's go and celebrate it by sliding down the banisters."

"Let's!" shrieked Tom Merry.

And the juniors went in.

"I trust, Linton, that the School House juniors will behave themselves to-night," observed Mr. Ratcliff agreeably, as the car ate up the long, white road.

"I imagine there will be no transgression of the rules, Ratcliff," replied Linton stily.

Mr. Ratcliff looked dubious.

"We cannot hope so," he said. "But I am afraid you're a disorderly House, Linton. I cannot wholly approve of Railton's methods of managing the School House."

Mr. Linton coughed, and Mr. Linton frowned.

"Indeed?"

"You Discipline in the School House, my dear Linton, is very lax—extremely lax."

"I have not noticed any great disparity in the conduct of the juniors of the two Houses, sir," remarked Linton sturdily.

"Nevertheless, Linton, things are—I speak colloquially—wicked at in the School House, which would merit very serious notice in my own house."

"There is such a thing as using authority with discretion, Ratcliff," asserted Mr. Linton. "It is a well-known fact that respect commands more obedience than domination."

"It is excellent to have a giant's power," murmured Mr. Linton.

"Precisely! But tyrannous to use it like a giant."

Mr. Ratcliff's scar face turned purple.

"I hope, Linton, that you are not insinuating that I am a tyrant!" he snapped.

"By no means. Not in the least, my dear Ratcliff. I should refuse to credit the suggestion."

"Very well. But I repeat that I hope order will be maintained in the School House to-night. Of course, there is a chance that there will be no fractious behaviour on the

part of the justice; but I am apprehensive. Extremely so."

"You are not apprehensive of the behaviour of the justice in your own House, of course?" remarked Linton anxiously.

"I have complete confidence, not only in the decorum of the boys in my charge, sir, but in the system which enforces that observance."

Mr. Linton spread his lips, and then closed them again. He did not want a long and utterly futile argument. He directed a dubious glance at his colleagues, and then pulled out his pocket address of Horace's Coda. Mr. Latham became absorbed in the evening paper.

Mr. Ratcliff's thin lips tightened, and he stared out of the window at the scenery. Then his frown grew darker. He disapproved of the money—disapproved of it strongly. He was not in a good temper. If the Last Trump had suddenly sounded, Mr. Ratcliff would have disapproved of its tone.

Mile after mile slid under the wheels of the car. It was growing dark. Mr. Latham dropped his paper and his eyes closed. Mr. Linton was already asleep, with a dreamy smile on his face. Mr. Ratcliff was brooding darkly.

All of a sudden there was a sound like an Atlantic liner ripping itself to pieces on an iceberg. The car stopped. It stopped suddenly. Mr. Ratcliff was not prepared for the sudden pull-up. He dived from his seat and buried his head in Linton's waistcoat. He observed that caught Latham on the nose, and wrote that gentleman with such solemnity that he thought he was still asleep.

"Ooooooh!" observed Mr. Linton. The Fourth Form mistler made a noise like a dragon in pain.

"Dud-dar me!" said Mr. Ratcliff. He groped for his glasses and fixed them on his nose. "What has happened?"

"Moooooh!" came from the unhappy Latham, who was covering his nose. "Whooooop! Gleeoooo!"

"How joy you!" gasped Ratcliff, seating himself feebly on Linton's waistcoat. "What is it—an accident?"

"Engine coughed out, sir!" called the chauffeur mournfully. "I shall have to repair it. A long job, I'm afraid."

"Goddid!" came a foolish roar from Linton. "Remove yourself from my person, Ratcliff!"

"Ooooooh!" wailed Latham. "Wooooh!"

"Dear me! Am I sitting on you, Linton?"

"Gag-gag! You—you are seated on my stomach, Ratcliff. Pray remove yourself. I can scarcely breathe."

"Very well. Perhaps it would be advisable for me to get up from you, Linton?"

"Goddid!" shrieked Mr. Linton violently.

Mr. Ratcliff rose on his feet and clambered out of the car. Linton and Latham sat where they were, dressing their injuries.

"Whereabouts are we, my man?" snipped the New House master, addressing the chauffeur.

"Just on Doytal Heath, sir."

They were in a tiny hamlet. There was an inn, two houses, and a laneyard in sight. For the rest, it was fields and rolling hills.

"Will it take you long to fix this breakdown?" asked Ratcliff harshly.

"Goodness knows, sir! It might be a matter of three or four hours. Or it might be more—the chauffeur scratched his head—" or less," he added.

"Pah!" sneered Ratcliff. "What is the matter with the engine?"

"Why, I don't rightly know, sir. But I reckon a piston's seized. That's what's happened. You may lay a quid on it. And if I'm right—well, bring help on."

"Which is the nearest railway station? We will proceed by train."

"Bostall Heath is the nearest station, sir."

"And how far is that?"

"Why, I think it's about eleven and a half miles, sir."

"What?" Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth. "How can we reach it? Is there a bus?"

"Lee! blow you, sir," answered the chauffeur calmly. "there ain't no bus, nor train, nor Underground, neither, anywhere round here. You'll have to walk if you want to get to Bostall Heath."

Mr. Ratcliff walked round in circles and sought for breath.

"If you'll take my advice, sir," added the chauffeur, following him round. "you'll just go into that inn over there and have a nice little supper, while I fix up the old bus. You needn't have any supper when you get to London town."

Mr. Ratcliff looked as though he would eat him. He rushed up to the car and held a short conference with

(Continued on next page.)

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Messrs. Linton and Latham, who were now conversant. At the conclusion of their chat, he beckoned to the "shover."

"Repair the engine as quickly as you can," he said. "We will have supper in the—er—inn meanwhile."

"Right-o, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff marched across the road to the little country inn. A few people were gathered round, deriving much amusement from his plight. The New House master crisscrossed under their stares.

"Out of my way!" he snapped venomously, pushing a red-haired farmer's boy out of his path.

"Oh! Look 'er 'ere, guv'ner—" ejaculated the farmer's boy.

"Don't dare address me, fellow!" stormed Ratcliff, in a passion. "Go and do some work, you low idler." He stalked disdainfully into the inn. Linton and Latham pursued their lips and followed him. The farmer's boy scratched his head.

"Good work!" he observed frankly.

The inn was called the Hare and Hoards! It was a tiny place, just big enough to meet the thirds of the neighbouring farmers. In front of it was a small tea-garden, for use when infrequent tourists wandered into Anglo Essex.

Mr. Ratcliff ordered supper for three, and then watched into the tea-garden. He refused, almost brusquely, to take supper in the bar-parlour, which was perfumed with ammonia and the smell of strong waters. The three masters chose a table near the little stopped hedge that fringed the main road. Mr. Ratcliff seated himself with his back to the road and the hedge.

On the opposite side of the road, the red-haired farmer's boy sat down on a bank and smoked.

"Low idler!" he muttered. "Oh crimes! Silly old froxy-whiskered idjit."

He glanced at the top of Ratty's head, which could be seen over the shrubbery.

"Blamed if Oh wouldn't like to size a look at it," he snorted.

He leaned back and put his hands down on the grass. Then he felt something wriggling in his fingers, and he clutched it grimly.

It was a shrew! One of those tiny, mouse-like little creatures which an all-wise Nature has provided to give the cock their breakfast.

"Haw, haw! Ye little varmint!" chuckled the red-haired youth, eyeing the wriggling little creature. "Ye're a jerry little chap, ain't ye? I should—"

He paused. A gleam came into his eyes.

"Low idler!" he muttered. "All right, Whiskers! O'U'll show ye!"

He walked cautiously across the road.

Mr. Ratcliff was drinking tea, and regarding the tea-garden solemnly. He disappeared of the tea-garden. He set his cup down, and was about to start on some cheese and celery, when a hand came over the hedge, and a small wriggling creature was suspended by the tail above Ratty's nose. Then it dropped—right down inside Mr. Ratcliff's collar.

Neither Linton nor Latham had noticed the incident. The first intimation they had that anything was amiss was when Mr. Ratcliff suddenly sprang to his feet and spelt the table.

"Crash!"

"Whoooop!" howled Ratty frantically. "Arrrrrrh! Gloopoop!"

He dashed on the ruins of their supper, heading himself on the back with his umbrella.

"Eoooooo!" screamed Ratcliff, cowering furiously.

"Boooooo! Ah-whaaaang!"

The eyes of his two colleagues protruded like frogs.

"Ratcliff—what—what—"

"Booooooooo!"

"He is innocent!" cried Latham, turning deadly pale.

"This is serious, Linton!"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes drew from the inn all the occupants thereof. A score of amazed eyes watched him as he tore furiously all round the garden, stopping at intervals to jump like a kangaroo and bang himself furiously with his umbrella. It was really very unfortunate that Mr. Ratcliff was such a sickish gentleman. The little shrew was torturing him.

"Goooooooh! Whoooooop!" shrieked the New House master.

A large motor-car was passing along the main road. There was a sudden exclamation from the gentlemen inside, and the car drew to a standstill opposite the inn. The door opened, and a tall, stately person descended.

It was Dr. Holman, the headmaster of St. Jim's.

The Gen Library—No. 1, 194.

At first the Head refused to believe his eyes. To see one of his Housemasters in the garden of an inn, evidently in a state of dangerous intoxication, was almost too much for him. His stopped gaze followed Mr. Ratcliff's escape.

The New House master, after making a complete circuit of the garden once more, threw himself violently on the ground and loaned at the month.

"Arrrrrrh! Berrrrh! Whoooooop!" he screamed frantically.

Mr. Linton jumped forward.

"Seize him!" he labored, pale-faced. "He must be put under restraint at once. Seize him!"

Ratty leaped to his feet and dived at Linton. The master of the Shell picked up a chair and swung it round his head.

"Stand back!" shrieked Linton. "I am armed!"

Bump!

The two masters met with a fearful concussion, and fell among the ruins of their supper.

The Head stood as one in a dream. He pinched himself to make sure he was awake.

The last fall opened the prison gates for the little shrew. He scuttled down Mr. Ratcliff's trousers leg and dashed into the hedge—the most alarmed little shrew in the whole of Essex.

Ratty felt him go, and he gasped his relief. He disengaged himself from Linton and rose to his feet. The first object that met his eyes was the red, indignant and wholly discomfited face of his headmaster.

Mr. Ratcliff blinked. So did Linton and Latham when they noticed the Head. A huge crowd surrounded the unfortunate masters.

"It's better now, Jee?"

"It's been 'ere' once! I see it in a minute. Old parties like 'er didn't order 'two anythin' stronger's' lemonade. It goes to their silly 'eads!"

Mr. Ratcliff crisscrossed violently. Then he gasped as the Head beckoned the three to follow him to his car. With apprehensive faces, the masters trailed after Dr. Holman, and grasped themselves about the door of his motor.

"Gentlemen," said the Head in a deep voice, "I cannot express my emotions at this moment. I am shocked—disgusted—appalled—shocked! Three of my senior masters cannot be trusted to take a short journey to London by car without stopping at low public houses and rendering themselves dangerously intoxicated."

The three masters nearly fell down.

"Sir!"

"Dr. Holman!"

"I speak plainly, gentlemen," said the Head sternly. "It is a time to speak plainly. I pass this licensed inn and hear a commotion. I look out to see what is afoot, and what do I discover? My three senior masters in a state of fighting intoxication, smashing up the property of the resort where they have obtained their potent liquor, and chasing each other about the garden like confused and inflammatory dipodomys. Do I make myself clear, gentlemen?" grated the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff was purple; Mr. Linton was pink and perspiring, while poor little Mr. Latham appeared on the verge of a faint. His face was chalk-white, and his hand trembled as he clung to the door of the car.

"Dr. Holman," rapped Mr. Ratcliff, "permit me to observe that I decline to hear this grossly insulting language addressed to me, sir. Unless you can frame your remarks with becoming moderation, I refuse to hear another syllable."

"And I, sir," added the exasperated Linton, "beg to observe that I have never been addressed in this manner in my life, and I decline to listen to any such allegations as you have brought, sir."

"You may decline what you will, gentlemen. But you cannot decline to hear me when I state that I shall require your resignations immediately."

"We refuse to resign, sir!"

"In that case, you will be dismissed forthwith."

"Very well, sir, very well," snapped Mr. Linton. "You shall hear from my solicitor, sir. I intend to bring an action against you for wrongful dismissal and defamation of character. I have an unshakable case, sir. You will be called upon to pay damages—heavy damages, sir."

"And to meet my own action at the same time, sir," added Mr. Ratcliff. And Mr. Latham nodded.

The Head paused. In spite of the evidence of his eyes it was really too ridiculous to suspect Latham—or even Ratcliff, if it came to that—of hawking at a country tavern. He coughed.

"I take it, gentlemen," he said, "that you have a reasonable explanation to cover this—this strange affair!"



"Most certainly, sir. Our car has broken down here, and—"

"I won't ask you to tell me about it now," put in the Head hurriedly, conscious of a large crowd of rebels who were surrounding the car at a little distance. "I have to tell you, gentlemen, that, after all, we do not need your presence in London. Rattley has everything nicely in hand, and will complete his duties to-morrow. If you had gone to London he would have told you to return to St. James' in the morning. We dispatched a telegram to the school, but I expect it arrived too late to stop you."

"It had not come to hand when we left, sir."

"Well, never mind. You will be good enough to return to St. James' as soon as your car has been repaired. You should reach the school by about eleven o'clock. In the morning, if you will be so kind, I should be glad to receive your explanation."

"Certainly, Dr. Holman."

"I would offer you a lift back to the school in my own car, but I cannot wait, and I presume there are several things you will have to adjust with the landlord of that—that tavern."

"Yes, I presume so," murmured Rattley mournfully.

General Griffith's chauffeur approached.

"I've mended the engine now, gentlemen," he said deferentially. "I can start her up at once, as you please."

"Very good," said Dr. Holman.

"In that case you will reach the school shortly after myself. I'll ask Taggins to wait up. Good-night, gentlemen!"

The Head's car drove away and Mr. Rattley, with a heavy frown on his face, went to interview the landlord of the Haze and Hazards. He disappeared of the landlord. He disappeared of him still more when he reckoned up the amount of damage Mr. Rattley had done.

Rattley paid it with feelings too deep for words, and shortly afterwards the car turned about and went back with its suburban burden. And as the car disappeared a great roar went up from the citizens of Bostall Bath.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

They, at any rate, had enjoyed it.

CHAPTER 4.  
Figgins, Too!

IN the New House dormitory windows of candles were burning merrily. Leather had surmised that Figgins & Co. would forget that there were no masters on the scene. Evidently Leather had been wrong. The New House juniors were very wide awake.

George Figgins was the centre of their interest. If Mr. and Mrs. Figgins had walked into St. Jim's at that moment they would certainly not have recognized their son and heir. Figgins was wearing an old greasy cap, a red shaker, a pair of discoloured hose, and a dilapidated jacket. In his hand he held an electric tooth. Across his eyes was stretched a black mask.

"Your money or your life!" hissed Figgins.

There was a roar of applause.

"Good!"

"Bravo, Figg!"

"Surround!" cried Figgins. "Take me to thy accursed plate-chest, Ford. If you make one movement I will blow out thy brains!"

"Oh comrades!" murmured George Kerr. "Do burglars

use possessive adjectives in the second person singular, 'thy'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course they do!" added Figgins warmly. "I've seen scores of crook plays, and the burglar always says 'thy' instead of 'your.'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Anyway, the disguise is all right, ain't it?" Figgins said complacently, squaring down at his disreputable figure.

"Oh, topping!" gurgled Fatty Wynn. "If you met old Crump now, he'd put you in choky without troubling to find out if you'd done anything wrong."



Before Dr. Holman's eyes Rattley was busy throttling Mr. Linton and yelling things about burglars!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wait till Tom Merry & Co. catch sight of me. They'll shake in their shoes!"

"Is it a Shell pattern to go to bed in shoes?" asked Kerr.

"You know what I mean, you man! This is a jolly good start, I think. Lucky you had that copy of the 'Boys' Compassion.' Kerr! If Dixon & Co. can do it, we can do it, especially now the books are having a night on the sles. Have you begged Rattley's key to the passage door, Raddy?"

"What-ho?" grinned Redfern, showing the key that unlocked the door separating the New House from the School House. "And I didn't knock at his door when I went in for it, either."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right! Where's Fatty? Oh, there you are! You slip along and lock the door of the Shell dorm, Fatty. We'll show 'em that New House is Cook House at St. Jim's!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And the rest of the fellows will wait at the top of the main stairs. I'll lead Tom Merry & Co. right into your hands."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!"

George Figgins rapped, and opened the door.

"Ready?" he whispered.

"What do you want?" asked Redfern.

"Not I, I said 'ready,' not 'Raddy.'"

"Who's not ready?"

Figgins groaned, and then flourished a large fat under Redfern's nose.

"See that?" he hissed.

"Yes, and smell it, too!" replied Redfern.

"Then chuck playing the goat, or you'll feel it as well. Come on, you men!"

Figginis crept down the passage like a shadow. A whole army followed him. They were all giggling or whispering; and had Ratty been in the House, he would have been as the spot like an arrow from a bow. Fortunately, he was not there.

The juniors reached the dividing door, and Redfern produced his key. But as he turned it in the keyhole, Figginis caught his arm.

"Hi! Listen!"

There was terrific silence.

"What is it, Figgy?"

"Sounded like somebody shutting the main door," muttered Figginis. "Don't make a noise. There might—What's that?"

There was another silence, during which a faint pattering sound was heard.

"Is that a cat?" asked Kerr, panted.

"Oh! Stay here!" whispered the New House leader.

"I'm going to take a peep through the window."

Figginis crept cautiously to the passage window and peered through the darkness outside. For a moment nothing was visible. If a car had been there it was gone. Even the pattering noise had faded away. But suddenly Figginis uttered an exclamation.

"What is it, Figgy?"

"I saw something moving in the bushes," came Figginis' tense whisper. "I'm certain somebody's creeping about in the rhododendron."

There was a rush of juniors to the window. A number of excited eyes stared out, but no movement was to be seen.

"There's nothing there."

"You must have been mistaken, Figgy," muttered Kerr.

"I tell you I saw it!" roared Figginis.

"Rot!"

"If you say 'Rot' to me, Owen—"

"Thomas-rot, old bean! There's nobody there. I expect old Taggy's cat frightened you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, get a mess on!" said Fatty Wynn impatiently. "It will be daylight in a few hours."

Figginis hesitated, but made no more remarks about the mysterious shadow in the rhododendron. His eyes were led to the army of raiders to the dividing door in the passage, and Redfern again inserted his key. Then Redfern speculated:

"My hat!"

"What's up?"

"The blessed door's already open!" Redfern said, very puzzled.

"You must have unlocked it a few minutes ago, son."

"I suppose so, and yet—Redfern rubbed his nose thoughtfully—"I could have sworn it was still locked when you led us back to look at Taggy's cat."

"Look here, Reddy—"

"Oh, great whizzlers!" growled Fatty Wynn. "Are we going to hang about all night with Redfern wags his chin?"

"Well, it's odd," declared Redfern uselessly. "I know jolly well that door was locked!"

"And I tell you it couldn't have been!"

"Open that silly door!" hissed Fatty Wynn positively. "We're going on. You and Figgy can stop here all night if you like, and be blown to you. But we're going to raid the Shell and get back."

"Hear, hear!"

Redfern opened the door, still looking puzzled. The burglarish Figginis then crept stealthily away, and the New House army went into ambush at the head of the stairs.

"Now I suppose we've got to wait until Figginis comes back," growled Redfern. "This is rather a petty store, isn't it?"

"Awfully petty!"

"Rot!" said Fatty Wynn stoutly. "It's a jolly good idea. Ain't it, Kerr?"

"Oh, ripping!" murmured Kerr rather doubtfully. Figginis' two charms might not think much of his plan, but no imposture would make them say so. They were loyal to their leader.

The crowd of juniors waited patiently. It was rather eerie in the darkness. About ten minutes dragged by, and then footsteps were heard.

"Shush! There he comes!" murmured Kerr.

A dim, willow-leaf form loomed up in the gloom. A slight grin stole over the figure's face.

"All serene!" breathed the burglar. "There's somebody after me. I can hear them. Cut off, Fatty!"

Figginis vanished. Fatty Wynn cut off in the direction of the Shell dormitory. And two seconds afterwards footsteps were heard in the corridor.

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Evidently somebody, whether Tom Merry or not, had seen Figginis and was following him.

The New House juniors grinned, and waited on tiptoe.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Amusing the Head:

THESE was a deep and gloomy silence in General Griffiths' car as it purred its way back to St. Jim's. Mr. Ratcliff, with a simply thunderous expression, gazed through the windows at the street scene, of which he disapproved. Mr. Linton was meditating on the words of Dr. Haines, and a frown creased his brow. Mr. Lathorn was still too much shocked and horrified to speak.

At length Mr. Ratcliff broke the silence. "It was that red-haired individual," he grated thickly. "The landlord saw him distinctly. He placed some kind of small table man and down my neck."

"Disgraceful!" roared Mr. Linton.

"I am a ticklish man," snarled Ratcliff. "Every movement of the creature gave me tortures. If ever I encounter that red-haired person again, I will personally administer chastisement with a walking-stick."

Mr. Linton granted. Perhaps he did not like his colleague's rather arbitrary method of addressing people. Neither Linton nor Lathorn would have dreamed of addressing an inoffensive bystander as a "low idler." That was why Mr. Ratcliff was always in the way. Strongly enough, some people took affront at being called low idlers. It seems barely feasible, but it is a fact.

Taggie opened the gate to admit the car, and the three masters descended at the School House steps. The car then drove away, and the three masters entered the school, and walked into the silent hall.

In a snappish tone, Mr. Ratcliff bade his colleagues "good-night," and rustled upstairs to reach his own room via the door in the passage. And it was as he reached the landing that he paused, and stopped back into the shadow.

A fearful figure was creeping along the Shell corridor. Caught in a gleam of moonlight from the window, the figure was revealed to Mr. Ratcliff's horrified eyes in all its terror.

It was a burglar, and Mr. Ratcliff strongly disapproved of burglars. He crept down the corridor after the intruder, scarcely daring to breathe. It was evident that the scoundrel was going towards the main stairs at the Shell landing. Mr. Ratcliff was deeply thankful he had come up by way of the small staircase. If he had ascended the wide stairs, he would have met that dreadful figure face to face, instead of occupying a scotchingly strategic position in the rear.

The figure seemed to pause a moment by the stairs, near the large hat of Haines, which was supported by a pedestal on the landing. It looked as though the burglar made a swift remark to somebody there. Then he passed on towards the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff crept after him.

He reached the landing.

Then it seemed to him that the end of all things had come. From out the darkness numberless human beings sprang at him—hundreds of them—millions of them. He went down under a swirling mob of the burglar's friends. He was seized, up-ended, trodden on, battered, bumped, ill-used—in fact, he went through it properly.

"Whoooseep!" he roared frantically. "Help! Rescue! I am in the hands of manufacturers! Yeeeh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him some more!"

"Burglars! Rescue!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff.

There was an exclamation from one of them. It was Kerr.

"Sog! That's not Tom Merry. It—it's—"

"Ratty!"

"Oh!"

"Great pip!"

There was a hurried pause—a stopped pause. None of the juniors understood how it was possible; but Ratty was there. The moonlight shined him up quite plainly. Upon his speaking features was an expression too awful to be described.

Evidently Mr. Ratcliff determined to sell his life dearly. He struggled to his feet and charged the hordes of scoundrels. There was a general breaking away as Mr. Ratcliff sprang. A whole crowd of willows, with Ratty in the centre, fell down upon the bust of Haines.

"Look up!" muttered Redfern, in alarm. "Mind old Winton!"

"Old Whizzlers!" was evidently Redfern's way of referring to that great pool of chlorine necessary.

The juniors scattered, as Mr. Ratcliff jumped at them.

Consequently they were not in position to break Mr. Ratcliff's fall. The job devolved on "old Whiskers."

Crash!  
Mr. Ratcliff and "old Whiskers" fell in a heap on the boat.

"Great pip!" gasped Kerr. "Thank you men, quick! It's a case of bank or be hanked!"

There was a hurried scowp, and the passage was devoid of all being but Mr. Ratcliff and his ancient friend. Fifty juries rattled like ghosts at cock-eyes.

Mr. Ratcliff was left, with his right arm cradled desperately around the marble neck of the writer of the Head. At the same moment there was a majestic tread along the corridor, and a stern voice demanded:

"What is all this uproar?"

It was the Head. Rattly gasped with joy. The Head had arrived in the nick of time, like the hero in any film.

Click!  
The landing was flooded with light, as Dr. Holmes passed down the witch. He looked about him with a majestic frown; then he jumped. His eyes nearly popped out of his head. His face went green. Could he believe the evidence of his senses? Was that indeed Mr. Ratcliff who was sitting there with crumpled and dusty clothes, with his arm cradling the neck of the fallen boat of Homer?

The Head staked.  
"Mr. Ratcliff!" he articulated faintly.

"Ah, Dr. Holmes!" gasped Ratcliff relieved. "You have saved me from an untoward fate. The school is populated by burglars, sir. There must be hundreds of the abandoned wretches on this premises at this moment."

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Not a moment is to be lost, sir. I have captured one of the criminals. He was—"

Rattly's voice trailed away as he stared down into the smooching eyes of Homer. He nearly expired.

As Mr. Ratcliff's voice left him the Head's voice returned. When he spoke, he spoke with vigour.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" he said, with terrific acidity. "It is obvious to me that my former suspicion was correct. You are even now in a state of extreme intoxication."

"What!" roared Ratcliff.  
"You create a most terrible uproar. Your cries are heard all over the school. When I arrive at this spot, I

find you attacking a— a best of Homer, and trying to delude me into the belief that it is a burglar."

"Sir, I saw the abandoned creeping along the corridor!" roared Ratcliff desperately.

"You—you saw this best of Homer creeping along a corridor!" roared the Head. "Are you quite—quite—"

"I am all right, sir!" cried Mr. Ratcliff, rising to his feet and taking an affectionate farewell of "old Whiskers."

"I tell you, sir, I perceived a masked villain—a most rascally and lung-dog ruffian, sir—creeping along the passage from the Head dormitory. When I reached the head of these stairs, sir, I was attacked by thirty or forty other second-rate, who did their best to assassinate me, sir. I presume that best must have been broken in the ensuing struggle."

"You—you really ask me to believe that there are thirty or forty burglars roaming about St. Jim's at this moment, Mr. Ratcliff!" gasped the Head.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" gasped. Certainly that was scarcely feasible.

"It—it seemed to me, sir, that—"

Dr. Holmes roared—really there was no other word for it. "Mr. Ratcliff, you had better get to bed quickly. In the morning, when you are sober, I will talk to you."

"Sir! Dr. Holmes!" screamed Mr. Ratcliff violently.

"Enough, sir! Take my advice and seek your bed at once, Ratcliff!"

"I will not, sir!" grated Ratcliff, trembling with fury. "These are intolerable and abandoned manufacturers on these premises, and I will not go to rest until I have secured them, sir, until I have produced the second-rate before your eyes, and shown you that I am not, as you seem to think, in a condition of open corpse mental."

"Mr. Ratcliff—"

"That is all, sir! Enough!"

Mr. Ratcliff stalked away in high dudgeon. The Head was left standing. Never in all his years as headmaster had Dr. Holmes been so absolutely complished. He could no longer doubt. Mr. Ratcliff was in a state of alarming

isolation, or, as the juries might have expressed it, he was "lighting drunk."  
The Head almost dropped in his tracks. For such a thing to happen to the senior Housemaster of one of the oldest and most intensely respectable schools in the country! It was incredible—awful!

(Continued on next page.)

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And if Mr. Hatcliff was in that condition, it followed that Messrs. Linton and Latham were in the same state. The Head left quite ill.

As he stood on the landing, dumfounded, there was a shadow in the dark corridor behind him, and a soft whistle. If the Head could have seen the figure that emitted that soft whistle he might have revised his opinion about Mr. Hatcliff. Unfortunately, the figure kept well in the shadows.

It was George Figgins, and he was dismayed. "The Head! Oh, winking!" muttered Figgins to himself. "I wonder what the dickens—"

Figgins was puzzled. He had heard the uproar, and assumed that the New House were putting it across the Head in no uncertain manner. But if so they must have all escaped quickly, for there was the Head, and nobody else.

"I must get back and find out what's happened," murmured Figgins. "Suppose it wasn't Tom Merry & Co. who were following me."

He paused, and struck back against the wall. Stealthy footsteps were coming down the passage. A fat form passed within an inch of him. Figgins breathed again.

The fat form jumped. "That you, Figg?" came a whisper. "Yes, Careful, old fat head, the Head is here. It must have been the Head we heard come in from that car."

"Oh, my stars!" murmured Fatty deplorably. "What the bump made the Head come back and spoil the fun?"

"Have you locked the Shell door?" "You bet?"

"Anybody there?" "Yes; I took a look. Half a dozen lanks. Skingole, Creek, and that crowd."

"Not Tom Merry or the others?" "No!" Fatty started. "Of course not. They followed me."

"Well, that's what I thought," nodded Figgins. "I looked in the Shell door, and there my torch went, and I heard some unutterable something. Then I moved off, and I heard footsteps behind me. So I led it that Tom Merry & Co. were on my track, and I led 'em into the ambush on the stairs. But where have they gone? There's only the Head there now."

"The row brought him there." "I know that, an. It would have brought the prefects up if they were carrying a heat what we were doing. The question is—where have the Shell gone? They haven't gone back to their doors, or I should have seen them."

"Banked off with the others to the New House, I expect." "Must have done," agreed Figgins, puzzled. "Look alive, Fatty! The Head's going now. Let's get back to our door before we're spotted."

The headmaster had switched off the light on the landing, and was now returning downstairs with stately and majestic tread. Hardly had he vanished when Figgins and Wynn raced across the landing to gain the passage beyond. But evidently Fatty Wynn found an impediment in the way, for three came a loud crash and a dismal howl.

"Toccoco!" "What's up?" muttered Figgins.

"Tripped over something!" growled Fatty Wynn, coming to his feet. "There's something here that trips you up and makes you back your heels. Why, it's old Whiskers! Somebody's booted him!"

"Oh crumbs! It must have been the fellows."

"Kin on!" Figgins and Fatty slipped slightly down the corridor and through the dividing door. They were anxious to hear what had befallen the others. It was their intention to proceed straight to the New House dorm. But there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. Before they could reach the door they found themselves surrounded by a crowd of glumly shaven.

The entire band of New House juniors were hanging about in the passage.

Figgins blinked at them through the darkness. "What happened?" he asked.

"Ratty happened!" growled Kerr.

"Ratty?"

"Yes, dash him!"

"But—but he's away for the night," gasped Figgins, dismayed.

"Must have come back for something," snapped Redfern. "It was Ratty who was trailing you, you filthy-baring lecher. Not Tom Merry."

"Well, my only hat! And did he spot you?"

"No, thank goodness. When we found who we were laming, we dropped him and ran for it."

"Oh, ho!" Figgins winced dizzily. Then the odious of the thing struck him. "But what the bump are you hanging about the passage for?" he growled.

"Because while we were picking into Ratty, some awful Hun looked the door of our dorm and took the key away," howled Redfern.

"Who-as?"

"We're locked out. Locked out of our own dorm. I told you that dividing door wasn't left, unfastened. Some awful ratter has slipped in and locked us out."

"What do you think of your petty stunt now, an?"

grunted Lawrence. "What are we going to do?"

Figgins stared blankly. The position was awful. The entire New House locked out of their dormitory. If they couldn't find the key, they would be compelled to either spend the night in the passage, or report the case to Ratty.

Either case was unthinkable.

"Who's done it?" roared Figgins hoarsely. "What beast has been rotten enough to lock our door?"

"Give it up!" snapped Redfern. "Unless the Shell have got wind of your precious secret, and have done this to pull our legs, I can't imagine what can have happened."

"It must be the Shell."

"You may bet your bottom dollar on it," nodded Fatty Wynn cheerfully.

"Well, it's a rotten trick to do. Suppose the masters find out?"

"An!" Who thought the masters were coming back tonight? I expect the Shell have taken that key, and are going to make us as one up that they are cock House before we get it back."

"That's it!" assented Owen. "You'll have to do something, Figg. We can't spend the night in the passage, especially with Ratty snooping about."

Figgins' eyes glowered.

"Rot!" he said triumphantly. "It's a deadlock. Tom Merry can't make us open up to anything of the kind."

"Why can't he?"

"Because Fatty has locked the door of the Shell dorm, and they are in the same position as we are."

"Then?"

"Good egg!"

## Potts, The Office Boy!



Figgins turned to his surprised clerk.  
 "Gimme me the key, Fatty," he said briskly. "I'll go and interview Tom Merry now, and make him hand over our key in exchange for his own. Wait here, you fellows, and keep your watchful eyes open for Ratty."

"You bet!"  
 "Hook up, Figgis!"  
 Figgis nodded, and then took the key from Fatty Wynn and staid off down the corridor. Numerous eyes cast remained on the alert for any signs of the newly-arrived Mr. Rattiff.

CHAPTER 6.  
 How Burglar!

"O H, cork!"  
 It was a dismal groan, and it came from the dark corner by the low-room upstairs. The groan was in the voice of Bernard Glyn of the Shell.

"Where is that thumping cheap?" asked Glyn despairingly.

"Playing the fool somewhere!" came Noble's voice. "I'm not hanging about here much longer while Lowther does his fabulous burglar tricks."

"Rather not!"  
 "Keep smiling!" urged Tom Merry. "Perhaps the New House crowd are so sound asleep that Lowther can't wake them."

Glyn smiled.  
 "More likely they've collared the cheap without waiting for him to lead them into a silly mistake," he smiled. "It's just one of Lowther's astute games to keep us waiting here long for nothing."

"The last is, Tom Merry," came the loud, bell-like tones of George Alfred Grandy, "the burglar part ought to have been left to a man who could have done it."

"Lowther thinks he's the man, and?"  
 "Well, he isn't—not by long chalks! Is he, you men?"  
 "No fear!"  
 "The barber!"  
 "The one!"

"You see," said Grandy. "We all think the same. Let any of the cheap. They'll tell you that the part should have been left to me."

"What?"  
 "I could have done it on my head," explained Grandy. "Why, you—you—"

Tom Merry grinned in the darkness. There were twenty fellows there, and twenty fellows were prepared to name a man who could have done the burglar part better than Lowther. Unfortunately not one of the twenty names agreed. They were all entirely different—such, in fact, being the name of the fellow who proposed it.

The Shell was feeling fed up. They were tired of waiting in that dark corner, straining their eyes to catch a glimpse of a comrade who had left them many moons ago, and had returned not again into the habitation of his father—or, in plain English, they were fed up with waiting for that treacherous man Lowther.

They did not think much of his idea. They had not thought much of it when he first propounded it, and, as Kanger expressed it, "the more they thought of it, the less they thought of it."

It had not occurred to Lowther—indeed, it had not occurred to either Blake or Figgis—that many other St. Jim's fellows read the "Beep Companion," and that it was not impossible for more than one reader incident to hit on the same idea. It would have been well if it had occurred to them. Now that the masters had returned, St. Jim's resounded an African jungle, whereas many strange animals were prowling about under cover of the darkness.

Tom Merry and the Shell expressed their uneasiness and waited patiently for either Lowther or Mansers to appear—Mansers having been selected for the door-locking part of the arrangement. Every sound made them expectant; but they sustained so many disappointments that there was a good deal of talk about going back to bed and letting Lowther rip.

At length there was a soft footstep, and Mansers appeared.

"What's up?" asked Mansers, blinking at the assembled Shell. "Haven't the New House crowd come along yet?"

"Not yet."  
 "Well, they're not in their dorm. I've just locked the door, and there was no one there."

"What?"  
 "Lowther must have got there in some somewhere," said Mansers, puzzled. "Where the dickens is he? I thought you would have mannaed them by now."

"Either the New House!" growled Clifton Dana. "The New House can go long! We're going to save all our mannaing for Lowther."

"Hear, hear!"  
 "Sh!," hissed Tom. "Here they come! Jump to it, you men!"

"Neither false alarm!" sneered Grandy.

But it wasn't a false alarm. There was no doubt that quite an army of janitors were creeping down the passage. The Shell waited on tiptoe. The whispering drew nearer.

"Charge!" bawled Tom Merry.  
 As one man the Shell sprang. The other party were taken quite by surprise. They were bowled over and set on in the twinkling of an eye. Fearful yells arose from the prostrate figures on the floor.

"Whoooop!"  
 "Gettuff me, blow you!"  
 "Yarrocob! Help!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grandy. "This is where you're done in the eye, you New House freaks!"

"You—you silly an—"  
 "My hat!" Tom Merry was startled. "This isn't the New House crowd!"

"Who-ai!"  
 "It's the Fourth!" roared Tom Merry.  
 "Great pip!"

"You—you—you—" hissed Blake, from somewhere on the floor. "Wherever you charging us for, you striking bastards!"  
 "Lemme up, Glyn, you cetter!" came from Ratty Trinkle. "Take your hoof out of my mouth, you villain!"  
 "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grandy. "Didn't I say it was a false alarm?"

The Shell withdrew, and allowed the Fourth to scramble to its feet. Means, greens, and delicious speculations were heard during the process.

"Well, this is the limit!" gasped Tom Merry. "After waiting six or seven hours for the New House we go and bowl over the Fourth!"

A Ghost from the Past!



"You looking stamp!"  
 "But what are you worrying about the passages for, anyway?" demanded Tom warily.  
 "We're looking for that shuffling maniac, Gussy!" blazed Blake. "And when we find the bitharer we're going to read the jobbook, and tear the sheets, and gnaw the book, and strew the hungry chardyard with the brightest barber's bones!"  
 "Oh, my aunt!" gasped Tom. "Poor old Gus looks like having a hot time of it!"  
 "What's he been doing?" asked Glyn.  
 "The son has got one of his potty ideas again. We were going to ambush you—"  
 "Why—?"  
 "The screaming hint nibbled the blazed idea from some moving rag of a paper!" boomed Blake. "He has dressed himself up as a fattened burglar—"  
 "Ye gods!"  
 "And he was going to lead you into an ambush, and we were going to trap you up."  
 "Why, you cheeky ones!" exclaimed the Shell warily.

"What a nerve!"  
 "We'd have slaughtered you!"  
 "Oh, it's no go now!" said Blake defiantly.  
 "But, anyway, we'll take it out of Gussy. That's our consolation. But what are you fellows doing here, anyway?"  
 "Them!"  
 "You mean—?"  
 "The fact is," asserted Bernard Glyn, "Leather has captured the same idea from the same patrol rag. We're all waiting here like damnies for a New House crowd which won't be coming. And I'm looking for me!"  
 Blake jumped.

"Do you mean to say—?"  
 "That Leather is telling about trying to be a burglar—ye," nodded Glyn. "Never hear of such tommy-rot, you mean!"  
 "Never!"  
 "Hardly ever!"  
 "Well, I thought you Shellish had more sense," snifled Blake. "We're bound to let our cheapie idiot have his own way—got to hangar him, or he'll become violent, you know. But you men should have more sense."

"Just what I said," nodded Gredely. "I've said all along that the idea was potty. You fellows have heard me."  
 "We've heard you talking rot—as per usual," snapped Tom.  
 "That's all very well. But when we meet Leather—"  
 "And when we meet Gussy—"  
 "We'll gutturoise him—"  
 "We'll slaughter him—"  
 "His mother won't know him—"  
 "We'll have his life—"

Fourth and Shell united in a kind of multiple duet, filling the world with what would happen to the unfortunate burglar when they returned to the fold. Bernard Glyn, with a large smile on his face, broke the sequence.  
 "Chuck it!" he exclaimed. "I've got an idea."  
 "Oh, blow your ideas!" snapped Blake. "We've led-up with ideas!"  
 "And! This is an idea for making Leather and Gussy sit up!"  
 "Bury it!"  
 "Make them meet each other," said Glyn freely. "Imagine their dish, you men! They'll tear each other to pieces!"

The Fourth and Shell stared at him through the glass, being they weren't so quick on the uptake as the schoolboy invents.  
 "It!" exclaimed Dicky. "Why should they tear each other to pieces, an?"  
 "You're not very bright, old bean. Don't you see that they'll each think the other is a real burglar!"  
 "Oh!"  
 "Great pip!"  
 "Neither Leather nor Gussy will know that there is another disguised burglar standing about. They'll each think they've encountered the genuine article."  
 "Good egg!"  
 "Let's see if we can't round them up," said Blake, shaking. "Each party try to collect its own dummy and bring them to this spot."  
 "It!" blazed Tom Merry suddenly. "Quiet, you men! Here comes one of them, I think!"  
 "Who is it?" whispered Blake.

Tom Gus Lissner—No. 1,204.

A form was seen stealing through the glass. One would have expected to see the form stealing—either through the glass or the school plate. The intruder was dressed in garments sporting a broad dash. Beneath his jacket could be seen a striped jersey—the attire of the traditional burglar of the comic papers. In his hand the seconded grasped a top pistol with Daddy Brannan, and over his shoulder swung a large sack with the simple word "SWAG" traced upon it in letters of glaring black.  
 This was Arthur Augustus D'Aray's idea of a burglar.  
 "You Shellish keep out of sight," ordered Blake in a whisper.  
 "Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "I shall hast if I look at him again! Does Gussy think burglars carry sacks marked 'swag'?"  
 "No, he, he!" giggled the Shell.



Harris bang the cushion at Gussy, but Gussy doubted. The next moment the name of St. John's was read with cries of anguish.

They proceeded into the background as Gussy approached. Blake & Co. eyed him with deadly glare.  
 "Well, dummy!"  
 "Wally, Blake—"  
 "Where have you been?" blazed Harris.  
 "It's a most extraordinary thing. Look boys, but I look there is something seriously wrong in the school to-night."  
 "Go boy!"  
 "It really is the case, Dig," said the ill-favored hand, with grave solemnity. "I went to the Shell dorm to smoke the fellows, but when I got there I found they were all absent, with the exception of Skinslip and Crooks and Clunge."  
 "How surprising!" said Blake ironically.  
 "Yess, isn't it? I show my torch on Crooks, you know, and I said 'Shewander!'"  
 "You—you—you and 'Surrender!'!" gasped Blake faintly.  
 "Yess, and Crooks said, 'What do you want, lebaned? So I said, 'I'm a burph, Coochie—'"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Fourth.

Supposed motion coming from the background showed that the Shell were afflicting their wits.  
 "Wally, dash boys, I had to see something to catch at," remarked D'Aray brightly. "So Crooks said, 'Well, go and burgle somebody else. I'm too tired for big jobs. And then I said, 'Wally, Coochie, you don't seem in realite, dash boy, that I could blow your brains out, if you had any,' and I pointed my pistol at him, you know."  
 "Oh, ye gods!"  
 "But the wally brute heaved a pillow at me," continued Gussy, more in anger than in sorrow, "so I gave him a faithful thrashing, and then gave that wally's bean Clunge a thump yeh, you know, and buried Crooks's pillow at that Jew's wotsh Shimmyay. Then I hit them, and I'm now looking for Tom Mowsey & Co."  
 "Well, you're looking on the wrong place," said Blake gravely. "I've just found out that Tom Merry & Co. have got a raid on against the New House to-night."  
 "Oh, dash! Then they will be over in Wally's House, I presume."

"I—I wouldn't like to cover it, of course, but I do know they are out jacking Figgins."

"Well, in that case, dash boys, they must have got a key to the divider's door, you know. They could hardly cross the quad to get that."

"I fancy the door's open," notified Blake. "Perhaps you would like to slip along and see if you can find them, Gus."

"Yes, that's a good idea, Blake," notified Guss. "I could then lead them into the ambush, as was our original plan, dash boys."

"Ah—! Quite so!"

"Very well, then. Kindly wait here, you fellows, while I go and word them out."

"Get a move on, Gustave!"

Guss nodded, and, shouldering his sack of soap, he grabbed down the corridor towards the main stairs and the New House. As soon as he had disappeared the Shell emerged.

"What did you send him over there for?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Just Leather's over there somewhere, isn't he?"

"Oh—ah—yes! I'd forgotten that."

"After him!" grinned Clifton Duns. "We mustn't miss this."

"Rather not!"

And like an army, the Fourth and Shell trod softly down the corridor after the conspicuous Guss.

Leather concluded that the New House janitor must be paying a visit to another dormitory. He went silently upstairs on a voyage of discovery.

While he was absent Messers arrived and locked the door—never doubting that the New House was following Leather.

The burglar of the Shell found no trace of Figgins & Co. upstairs, so he came down again and wandered his way back towards his own House. He was just passing Mr. Ratcliff's study, when a terrible uproar roused him to the spot.

The uproar was caused, of course, by the attack of Figgins & Co. upon the unsuspecting Mr. Ratcliff. Leather listened in astonishment. He concluded that Tom Merry and the Shell must have run across Figgins on the main landing and a pitched battle was the result.

He was about to investigate, when a terrible crash held him still. The crash was made by the marble head of "old Whiskers" hitting the floor. Leather did not know this, of course. He was only aware of the fact that the passage was suddenly filled with the sound of running feet, and a score or more human beings were coming towards him at almost incredible speed.

Leather did not stop to think—indeed, he had no time. He crunched open the door of Ratcliff's study and jumped inside. As he did so, a whole battalion of janitors raced past the doorway.

The burglar of the Shell closed the door, and gave himself seriously to think. What was the meaning of it? Why were Figgins & Co. snarping on the main staircase, and why were they coming away in that fashion? It could not be a case of extreme feak. The New House janitors were never so happy as when they were in the thick of a scrap.

"Rats! no!" murmured Leather. "Rats no below!"

He made to leave the study, now that the coast was clear. But at that moment hotspots approached, and it was obvious that they were coming to the study. Almost gasping, Leather crawled under the table.

The door opened; somebody entered and switched on the light. Leather took a cautious peep. Then he almost screamed.

"Ratty!" he murmured faintly.

It was Mr. Ratcliff—no doubt of it. He was not, as Leather supposed, a hundred miles away in London. He was on the spot.

Moreover, he seemed in a slightly temper. He was grinding his teeth.

"Unbelievable!" sneered Ratty. "What a position for a man of my years and discretion!"

He passed.

"But wait, sir—wait!" he ground out. "I will secure that criminal get. I will personally deliver him to you, sir. You shall apologise in dust and ashes—fast and often, sir—for your incredible suspicious!"

"Bulky!" murmured Leather.

Mr. Ratcliff rushed over to his desk, and took an object from one of the drawers. It was an electric torch. He pressed the button, and a bright beam of light cut across the study.

"Very good!" marled Ratty. "I will now search out and secure that villain!"

He left the study, closing the door gently. Leather breathed again.

After five minutes Leather considered it safe to move. He went cautiously to the door, and then edged his way down the passage. His mind was in a whirl. The janitors had returned. That was all Leather could think about. His mind japed was no longer safe. He would have to see Tom Merry and warn him to make a beeline for the Shell down.

He passed through the passage, and emerged upon the landing. Then there was a bang, and Leather's voice was raised in anguish.

"Whoooop!"

The fallen head of Honor had claimed its third victim. The marble head was in the darkest corner, and apologetically passing it would trip over it before they knew what had happened. Leather glared wrathfully at "old Whiskers!" Then he straightened up, and stood still, breathing hard.

From the Shell passage a man had come out. The fellow was dressed in a lead check suit and a black jersey with red stripes—or it might have been a red jersey with black stripes. Leather wasn't sure.

In the villain's hand was clutched a lethal weapon, and over his shoulder ran a sack. He stood revealed in a stray beam of moonlight from the window. The light was not



CHAPTER 7.

Warn for Ratty!

MONTAGUE LOWTHER, the misgusted burglar of the Shell, was feeling very puzzled.

Really his experience was somewhat similar to that of D'Acco, only a little more alarming perhaps. He had done his burglarious disguise—used in the matter of disguising himself Leather was stoutly ahead of Figgins, and whole comments about of Guss—and had crept over to the New House as arranged. But when he entered the New House dormitory, with a stealthy tread, he discovered in his astonishment that it presented a marked similarity with Mother Hubbard's cupboard. It was bare. Not one janitor was in bed.

Leather's first idea was that he was dreaming. He pinched himself, and made certain that he really was awake.

The dormitory was deserted—there was no doubt of it.

effort for Leother to make out the legend "Bang!" upon the sack, but he had no doubt the intruder was a burglar.

Had Leother possessed the eyes of a cat or an owl, he might have seen about forty other persons crouching in the shadows of the passage. Had he owned the ears of a jackal, he might have heard their sniffling soft gasps of movement. As he possessed neither, he did not dream that the meeting was being watched.

He moved forward. At the same moment the burglar saw him. Instead of running away, as Leother had expected, the burglar stood stock still.

"Great Scott!" breathed the robber. "A burgleh, bai Jugg!"

He dropped his sack. He crouched. Leother crouched. They crouched wistly, yearning for an opening.

Then they crouched grimly.

"Scoundrel!" hissed Leother. "I'll stop your little game, my man!"

"Villain!" breathed Gussy. "I will obliterate a fabled thug's and hand you over to the police!"

But: Bang! Thud!

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a laugh from the passage; but the constables were too busy to heed it.

Leother's left connected with Gussy's eye, and D'Arcy's right got home on Leother's chin.

"Yarwooh!" shrieked Gussy.

"Concooco!"

The light proceeded grimly. Each junior wanted the honor of capturing a burglar by himself, and so they each put all they knew into it. Both Gussy's eyes began to assume a beautiful black tint. Leother's ear was twice its normal size, and his nose felt as if it had been pushed into his head. But they stuck gamely to their guns.

"Take that, you wretch— Yarwooh!"

"Take that, you villain— Or-ow-ow-ow!"

"I'm to one in doughnuts on Bangler Bill Leother!" murmured Cardow, from the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardow was a shrewd judge of form. Leother was obtaining the mastery, and in a few moments Arthur Augustus had joined Homer on the floor, and Leother was outside him.

"Now, my beauty!" chortled Leother. "My win, I think!"

"Yarwoop! Woocoo, St. Jim's! Burgleh! Yarwoop!" roared Gussy.

"Help! Burgleh! Help!" howled Leother.

"Great pip!" murmured Blake. "They'll wake the whole blessed hotel at this rate!"

But Leother had ceased shouting. Perhaps he had at length recognized the delect tones of his captive.

"What the thump?" gasped Leother dazedly. "It—is this Gussy, or am I dreaming?"

Arthur Augustus, who had opened his lips for another mighty roar, paused.

"Who are you, you wretch?" he panted.

"I'm Leother, you burbling burder!"

"Who-ah!"

"What are you going about dressed up as a silly burglar for?" hooted Leother, taking himself off the prostrate form of Gussy. "How was I to know it was merely a police idiot playing the fool?"

"Bai Jovv!" Arthur Augustus gasped for breath. "You—you are wreatly Leotherh of the Shell!"

"Of course I am, you dummy!"

D'Arcy raised himself dimly to his feet.

"Deak me! I am in quite a fix. Leotherh, you wreatly wretch, what are you doing dressed up like that? I thought you were a burgleh!"

"It's a jape, me!"

"Bai Jovv! Is it poso, Leotherh, that you got the idee from that Fiddlem story?"

"Great pip. Did you—"

"Yan, I did!" growled Arthur Augustus.

They stared at each other blankly, then Leother broke into a grin.

"Well, my hat!" he chuckled. "What a lark! Two of us disguised as burghlar. Who'd have thought it!"

"You foolish villain, you've blocked both my eyes!"

"Well, you've given me a thick eye, so we're quits!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the passage. "Go, ye ye crippled! Guss the Cookman and Burgleh Bill Leother!"

"Bai Jovv! What are all you fellows doing back?" gasped Gussy.

"Watching you, old bean. Carry on with your game. Don't mind us, we're enjoying it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"You wretch!" howled Arthur Augustus. "You only sent me such loads because you knew I should meet that piffle burglehman Leotherh."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jovv! I—I—I—"

Words failed Gussy. He charged furiously into the darkness of the passage. Leother was on the point of following him, when a bright beam of light cut through the darkness and damped him.

The light came from an electric torch. The man who held the torch spoke.

"Ha, I thought so! I have discovered you! I shall seize you immediately. If you make any resistance, it will be the worse for you."

Leother felt sick. It was Ratty's voice. He was spotted. The New House master snuffed off his torch, and made a furious dive for Leother. That unfortunate youth gasped, and then bolted desperately for the stairs. He cared not where he went. Anywhere out of Ratty's reach would do.

But as he got to the stairs he saw a dark form coming up, and the acid voice of Mr. Linton, his Form master, was heard.

"What is all this disturbance?" snuffed Mr. Linton.

Leother panted desperately. Ratty was charging about in his rear; Linton was blocking his retreat. Never had he been in such a fix. He could not reach the Shell passage or the New House passage because of Rattiff. He could not reach the stairs because of Linton. All his exits were held by the enemy. What was he to do?

Assistance came at the eleventh hour. It came from a most unexpected source. Rattiff was hot on Leother's heels when there was a bump, and a dismal howl.

"Yoooooo!"

Homer had claimed his fourth victim. Mr. Rattiff had tripped over.

Leother acted on the instant. Before the straggled House-master could regain his feet the Shell fellow had slipped silently down the corridor, calling down blessings on the head of Homer, and the fellow who knocked him off his pedestal.

Mr. Linton, meanwhile, heard the bump and the yell, and hurried forward with an exclamation of triumph. As Ratty poked himself up he saw Linton's shadowy form, and he yelped wretchedly. He was afraid for the moment that the burglar had got away.

A great spring carried him on to Linton's chest, and the two masters, locked in deadly combat, rolled upon the floor.

Goop! Gump! Gump!

Fummed! Fummed!

Both Linton and Rattiff were putting in some great work. Fizzling yells were heard from the two masters.

"Yarwooooh!"

"Oh dear! Oh!"

"Surrender, scoundrel!" hissed Rattiff. "I have you secure, you abandoned scoundrel!"

"How?" shrieked Mr. Linton. "Help! Assistance! I am attacked by an irrepressible criminal!"

"Burglar!" roared Rattiff. "Help!"

"Villain! Release me!"

Lights began to be seen, and voices began to be heard. Linton's cries and Ratty's howls could be heard all over Sussex.

The headmaster had been about to retire when the commotion began. It was twenty past eleven, and Dr. Holmes was returning to his private house. With a feeling very near to irony he recognized one of the voices as Mr. Rattiff's. He was saying "Burglar!" and he was making a terrible noise.

The Head's heart sank within him.

"What is he doing now?" cried Dr. Holmes, wringing his hands in despair. "He is mad—dangerously mad! His terrible cry at that village inn has temporarily derailed him. If he is not placed in restraint, somebody may be very seriously injured."

He hurried, with a white face, to the foot of the stairs. Here he met a number of sailors, clad in dressing-gowns, who had been awakened by the uproar. Killdare, Darrell, Knox, Raskin, and other professors were among them.

"Stop!" cried the Head harshly. "The professors will see that no beg, senior or junior, is allowed upon the second door landing."

"That's where the row seems to be, sir."

"I know it is, Killdare. I cannot leave the lives of the boys imperilled. Please do as I say—quickly! I fear that—that something has temporarily tarried Mr. Rattiff's brain. He is dangerous!"

The professors turned away, marvelling, to carry out the Head's orders. Dr. Holmes, with a sad face, mounted the stairs, and switched on the light of the Shell landing.

His face turned green.



Before his eyes Mr. Ratcliff was busily engaged in throttling Mr. Linton, and pulling things about burglars. Mr. Linton was occupied with making his preparations for the next world, and giving forth a kind of low, despairing moan like the sea wind whistling through the turret-top.

The Head's face turned green. Mr. Linton's face was already green. As the light came on, and Mr. Ratcliff saw who he had been strangling, his face turned green. The three masters looked like the Brothers Green from the Emerald Isle.

"Mr. Ratcliff! Mr. Linton!" The Head choked.  
 "Grog-grog!" replied Mr. Linton screechily. He choked.  
 "Bliss my soul!" gasped Ratcliff, and he choked.  
 "Mr. Ratcliff—"  
 "It is a mistake, sir!" screamed the New House master, bounding off Linton and waddling with wrath. "I must have grasped Linton by mistake. I saw the despicable desperado, sir—saw him as plainly as I see you! In the dark, sir, I must have attacked the wrong person. No matter, sir: I'll get him! I'll convince you that there are burglars in St. Jim's at this moment!"

He turned and pointed down the New House passage.  
 "He went down there, sir," stammered Ratcliff. "I know he did. I will pursue him, sir. I will extract a fearsome revenge for this treatment. A bitter retribution awaits that person when I catch him!"

He gritted his teeth and hurried away.  
 "Stay! Mr. Ratcliff!" shrieked the Head, alarmed.  
 "Mr. Ratcliff did not stay—at least, he only stayed a few moments while Homer claimed his fifth victim. Then he was gone. The Head palpitated.

"There will be murder done!" breathed the Head.  
 "Another two minutes and Linton would have expired. I hope and trust I can secure Ratcliff before the boiling liquor within him drives him to homicidal frenzy!"

Linton rose to his feet and hobbled away. The Head stood still upon the landing with feelings too deep—mixe and mixes too deep—for words.

CHAPTER 8.

Figgins is Caught!

"YOU howld wotahs!"  
 "Ee-er-r!"  
 "You cackin' beast!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arny waded indignant with the Fourth and the Shell as he raved after them to the demeritoria. Possibly his derision, eyes, the gift of Lowther, went not working him.

"You know all the time that I should meet that howld beg Lowther and pitch into him!" howled Gony.

"Gully, my lord!"

Fourth and Shell paused at the passage dividing their demeritoria, and Gony surveyed them indignantly.

"If I were not too exhausted atth my fight with the glib wotah," he said, "I should admirahtab howvible threahin's to every lish bee."

"Oh cronds!"  
 "Spape on Gny!"  
 There was a sound as of loud banging in the background.

"Bang, bang!"  
 "What's that?" asked Gony.  
 "My knees crackin' together, old bean," explained Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "You, you—"  
 "Well," laughed Tom Merry, "we'll leave you Fourth

Farm bounders to settle with your own demer. Gony is still missing. Anyone see what happened to Lowther?"

There was a general shaking of heads.  
 "Well, let's get on to the dem," said Tom. "He'll turn up in a minute."

The Fourth and Shell separated. Gony, wagging his chin, went along with the Fourth, and Tom Merry and the Shell crowded along towards their dem.

"By the way," said Missers, "what about Figgins & Co. Tommy?"  
 "What about that, old bean?"  
 "They've still looked out of their dems you know. I've got the key."

"Gross pip!" Tom Merry brought up sharply. "That's rather odd. Where are the bounders, if they're not in their dems?"

"I've been wondering about that," riddled Manners.  
 "It's strange. They can't get into their dem, anyway."  
 "Dash it all," said Tom Merry, "now that Lowther's silly jape has taken through, we ought to try that key box. Figgys won't know we've bagged it."

"I say—" was George Alfred Grandy's voice, rather

along the passage—"what are you been playing about with our door? It's locked!"  
 "What's that?"  
 "We've looked out!"  
 Tom Merry roused up and tested the truth of Grandy's statement. Then he banged on the door.  
 "Crooks!"  
 "Hallo!" came Crooks's lay voice.  
 "Who the cheap has locked this door?"  
 "Fatty Wym!"  
 "Winnat!"

"Two minutes after that fool Gony looked in, I closed up as a burglar, Fatty Wym popped along and looked in as," explained Crooks.  
 "What's his game?"  
 "Give it up!" drawled Crooks. "And now do you mind shutting up and not talking? I want to go to sleep."  
 "You—you silly son!"  
 "Thanks!"

Tom Merry breathed hard, and turned with a surprised look to his dems.  
 "They've guessed we locked their silly door," he said ruefully, "and now they've locked ours. It's us for us, at once!"

"All that an Lowther's fault!" asserted Glys.  
 "The feather-brained cheap!"  
 "The handkerchief!"

There was a knocking, and a dim, burglarious figure loomed up.  
 "Have he is!" hissed Grandy. "Go for him!"  
 "What-ty?"  
 "Give him beans!"

The whole crowd hurled themselves on the approaching burglar. That rascalded youth gave a yell as hands seized him from all points of the compass.

"Whoop! What the dickens—"  
 "Bump him!" howled Kangaroo.  
 "Leggo!" shrieked the burglar. "I—I—I— Oo-woo!"

"Bump!"  
 "Ooooooooooh!"  
 "Bump!"

The Shell were evaporated, and they felt that Lowther needed a severe lesson. They proceeded to supply the required lesson, and their motto was: "If a thing's worth doing it's worth doing well." They did it well. The burglar was bumped, rolled, trodden on, thrumped, pummelled, and banged.

"Whoop! Groggish! Oo-woo!"  
 "There," gasped Grandy, "let that be a lesson to you, Lowther, you demmer!"

"Oo-woo!" You silly marria! looked the figure. "I'm not Lowther!"

"What!"  
 "I'm Figgins!" growled the unhappy burglar. "Ooo! You're hating my backbones, I think!"

"Figgins!" shrieked the Shell.  
 "Yes, you feeding cheap! I've come over here for the key of our dem. Oo-woo-woo!"

The Shell stared at him—stunned. Was it possible that there was a third burglar at St. Jim's that night? There were gasps from all sides.

"Oh, my hat!" Tom Merry looked into a grin. "Figgys, old man, don't tell me you read that falsehood story in that silly paper, and tried on the same game."  
 "Well, I did!"

"You were going to lead us into an ambush!" gasped Tom.  
 "Yes, that was the stunt. How do you know?" asked Figgins in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 The jesters yelled, roared, and howled. It was too much for them. The discovery that Figgins was also playing the burglar completely broke down their gravity.

"Ha, ha, ha!" wopt Tom Merry. "Jeverr hear anything like it?"  
 "What's the catch for?" asked Figgins gruffly.

Tom Merry explained. When he had finished, Figgins was staring blankly.

"Throd!" he yelled. "You mean to say that three fellows were all doing the same jape?"  
 "Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Well, my only sainted Aunt Sangreina!" waddled Figgins sheepishly. "What'd have thought it?"  
 Tom Merry wiped away his tears of mirth and came down to business.

"Look here, Figgys, you've locked us out of our dems." "You've locked us out of ours."  
 "I know. Exchange is no robbery, old bean. I'll give you your key for our key."

"That's what I came for," nodded Figgins. "Here's your key. I'll take ours. Thanks. I only hope I'll be able to

get back safe. It'll be the most ticklish job of my life, I think."

"Why, what's up?" asked Messers.

"Up!" Figgins stared. "Don't you know the masters have returned?"

"Who-ot!"

"Great pip!" ejaculated Figgins. "Don't you fellows know you're all asking for the ballot? Ratty and the rest are on the ground like tiggers. They know there's something up, though they believe it's a case of real burglary."

"Good heavens!" gasped Tom. "I didn't even know they'd come back. Do you mean to say—"

Figgins nodded seriously.

"Every man out of his dormitory to-night is asking for the loot," he said. "It's sure luck we haven't been spotted already. I quite expect to hear that my New House crowd have been caught hanging about outside their doors. It means a fearful row."

"But—but—"

"I tell you," snapped Figgins, "the Head is calling out the prefects. When I came through just now there was a fearful row on the landing. Ratty and Linton having a tussle on their own—each thinking the other was a burglar, you know."

"Great pip!"

"Now the Head's after Ratty. He thinks he's fighting drunk."

Tom Merry almost fell down.

"What!"

"It's a fact. I was hiding behind the window-curtains when the row was on, and I know all about it. The Head's gathering together the prefects to round Ratty up and tie him to his bed."

"Tattle him to his bed!" roared Tom.

"Oh crikey!"

"You—do think he's mad drunk, you know?"

"And—what's Ratty?" stammered Gips.

"Going through the New House like a tornado," answered Figgins, quaking. "Heaven help any man Ratty catches at this moment. I think he really is mad—gone to mad—with temper, you know. That's why it's such a fearful job for me to get back. Ratty, Linton, the Head, and the prefects are all on the warpath in the New House."

"Oh dear!"

"Cheer!" announced Figgins, with a grin. "I'll see you chase in Big Hall to-morrow, when the Head says: 'Boy, you are expelled from this school, and your name shall be expunged from the register.' Bye-bye, old top. I'm going to sit like greased lightning."

He sped, silently away, leaving the Shell on the verge of hysterics.

Figgins had before him a journey of extreme peril. Lights were now springing up all over the school. Much against his will, the Head was taking measures to secure Mr. Ratcliff before anybody was hurt. The thought of making such an affair public property in the school nearly scared the Head to drop; but it was his duty, and it had to be done.

As Figgins cautiously approached the scene of nearly all the trouble—the Shell landing—he paused and crept into the shadows. There were voices on the landing.

The Head was standing there, very white and troubled. Kildare, Darrell, Rusden, and Langton were with him.

"I am deeply sorry to have to do this," came the Head's deep voice. "I cannot possibly express my feelings at this moment. But I have a duty to the school in my charge. Mr. Ratcliff must be captured and held in restraint until he is sober. You understand?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Kildare, in unutterable astonishment. The four prefects, as a matter of fact, were all gasping like fish at the idea of a respectable Housemaster being "under the weather." But they did not venture to state their incredulity.

"Kildare and Darrell will search for Mr. Ratcliff in the New House, and Rusden and Langton will investigate downstairs. You have my authority to restrain Mr. Ratcliff by force if he is troublesome."

"Oh crikey!" Kildare almost fell down at the idea of restraining Ratty by force.

"Please go now," said the Head. "I shall be in my study, considering what is best to be done."

"Very good, sir."

Langton and Rusden hurried down the stairs and disappeared. Dr. Holmes followed them. Kildare and Darrell crossed to the New House, providing Homer with his sixth and seventh victims on the way.

When the coast was clear, Figgins issued forth. He sped over to the passage after Kildare, and managed to dodge Homer, just when that amiable gentleman was expecting his eighth. In the shadows on the New House side, Figgins Figgins ran against a dismal and solitary bungalow.

"Is that you, Lewther?" hissed Figgins.

"Yes. Who's that?"

"It is I—Figgins!"

"But what—"

"No time for explanations now, son. Best  $\frac{1}{2}$  for the Shell door, and look sharp about it."

"I can't," wailed Lewther miserably. "Ratty's hanging about, and Linton, and the Head—"

"Ah!" hissed Figgins. "Do you want the loot? Best, I tell you!"

Figgins did not stop to see whether Lewther took his advice. His thoughts were with the fellows locked out of their dorms. He hurried forward, and was just passing Ratcliff's study when, all of a sudden, the end of the world came.

At least, so it seemed to Figgins. A form, crouching in the shadows, sprang out at him. Figgins found himself staring into the blazing eyes of Mr. Ratcliff.

"At last!" hissed Ratty broadly.

With one hand the enraged Parns master ground Figgins against the wall, with the other he pushed open the door of his study. Then he gave Figgins a push which sent him staggering into the room. A second later the door was slammed and locked from the outside.

"Now you're a prisoner, my fine fellow," roared Ratty through the door. "Escape me this time, if you can!"

Figgins turned dimly with terror. He was caught—no doubt of it. Ratty had bagged him at last. Could he do anything to save himself?

He could. One thing. Figgins had a quick brain, and he saw in a flash that it would be very serious for him if he was found in burglar's clothes. If he was discovered as Figgins he might get off with less or a licking. But if he was discovered dressed up as a burglar it would probably mean a flogging, if not the sack.

Swiftly he disrobed, and stood there revealed in his pyjamas. He rolled up his burglar's clothes and thrust them deep into the thick cluster of ivy outside the window. Then he glanced his face at Ratty's private wash-basin.

He was now presentable, and with a calm countenance he sat down to wash his face.

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## CHAPTER 8.

## Ratty's Year of Terror.

M R. RATCLIFF parted triumphantly. He had secured at least one of his victims. Escape from the study was impossible, unless the burglar chose to risk death by climbing thirty feet down the precarious ivy.

The question was now—were there any other burglars in the school? Mr. Ratcliff had been attacked by several people—evidently friends of the burglar since he had stopped to tell them that he was being followed. Were those accomplices still in St. Jim's?

Mr. Ratcliff determined to make certain. He would prove to Doctor Holmes that he was not in a state of intoxication. Mr. Ratcliff gripped his teeth. That he should have ever been a suspected person! The thought was monstrous!

It was all the fault of that red-headed farmer's boy. If he had not placed that arrow down Mr. Ratcliff's neck, the thought would not have entered the Head's mind. But now—Mr. Ratcliff vowed fiercely to capture the criminals single-handed, and to deprive the wicked occasion.

He crept stealthily down the dark corridor, came barely alert for any sound. He reached the door of the bath-room and paused. Did he hear somebody breathing? He stood quite still.

It was at this moment that the unlucky Lowther started to make a break for freedom.

Like an arrow from a bow Mr. Ratcliff sailed through the air, his fingers outspread like the claws of a tiger. He landed squarely in the centre of Lowther's back.

"Ow!" gasped Lowther.

He staggered against the bath-room door. That was enough for Mr. Ratcliff. With a shriek of triumph the New House master flung open the door, pushed Lowther inside, and slammed it.

"That's another of them," checked Mr. Ratcliff fiercely, locking the door. "Get out of there, you villain. What I do you to! Ha, ha!"

Really Mr. Ratcliff was more like a wild animal than a sane man at that moment. If Kildare and Durrell had encountered him then, it would have gone hard with them.

Still mauling softly Mr. Ratcliff retraced his steps, and went softly to the small entrance. He intended to go down and carry on his investigations on the lower floor.

But before he could do so, he heard a sound.

Breathing quickly, he stepped in the bathroom, opened the door and withdrew the key. Then he retired into a corner and checked softly.

Creak! Creak!  
Somebody was coming upstairs. Mr. Ratcliff hardly breathed. The moon was giving a faint light. Just sufficient to see.

"Ah!" Mr. Ratcliff drew in his breath with a sharp hiss. He knew it. The man who was creeping upstairs was a big, heavy fellow with a marked criminal look.

"A most hang-dog ruffian," murmured Ratty.

The newcomer paused upon the landing. He saw the door of the bathroom open and he looked inside. Mr. Ratcliff signalled.

"This is too easy!" he muttered.

One spring carried him against the midnight intruder. With a startled ejaculation the man fell into the captured. Slam! Click!

"Dear me!" checked Ratty. "How very simple! That's three of the messengers. I wonder if there are any more!"

He went downstairs.

At that moment Ransden and Langton had decided to come upstairs.

The light that followed was short and sharp. Mr. Ratcliff was secured with practically no resistance. He did not care now. Three burglars were in his power—and that was enough for him.

"I don't understand your proceedings, Ransden," he said sternly, "but if you tell me that you are under the orders of Doctor Holmes I am bound to submit. I object, however, to your holding me captive. I will proceed wherever you choose without the least coercion."

"Very good, sir," said Ransden, respectfully. "But we were told by the Head to—"

"I understand! You may release me."

Ratty walked in the Head's study with his nose in the air. Dr. Holmes was seated there as he arrived, followed by the two prefects. The headmaster started and went pale.

"I am here, sir, as you requested," said Mr. Ratcliff lightly. "What do you want?"

"Mr. Ratcliff, are you better now?" faltered the Head.

"No, sir, I am not better. I am still firmly convinced

that St. Jim's is riddled with burglars, sir—absolutely riddled with them."

"Oh dear!"  
The Head cast a despairing look at the stony faces of the two prefects.

"What's more," went on Ratty triumphantly, "I have captured three of them."

"Give my word!"

"Dr. Holmes!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, "I request you to send up the prefects immediately, and to follow me. I will lead you to three abandoned and prodigious accomplices, sir—three of the most dangerous lawbreakers in the country, sir. A menace to the community at large."

The Head felt quite ill. Mr. Ratcliff was still "under the influence" of his awful orgy. Really, the Head was at his wit's end.

"Call the prefects, sir," suggested Ratty.

The Head sighed and eventually to Ransden.

"Do so!" he said wearily.

Ransden left the study.

In five minutes he came back with a dozen seniors. Kildare and Durrell were among them—coming to report matters in their search.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glinted.

"Pray follow me!" he said grandly.

He stalked out of the study. The prefects followed. Dr. Holmes, nearly sinking with worry, made a rear to the procession.

## CHAPTER 10.

## Lucky for Ratty!

UPON the second floor landing the procession ran into a herd of juniors.

It was not difficult to account for their presence. The uproar seemed to have caused, and Tom Merry & Co. were looking for Lowther, and the New House juniors for Figgins. They were standing there, wisely posted, when that grand procession descended on them.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head petulantly. "What are you boys doing out of your dormitories!"

"We heard noises, sir," explained Tom respectfully, "and we wondered whether it was burglars."

"We thought perhaps burglars might have been robbing about during the absence of the masters, sir," put in Kerr with a sly grin.

"Nonsense—nonsense! Nothing of the kind!" snapped the Head.

"Not nonsense at all, Dr. Holmes!" ripped out Mr. Ratcliff. "Merry is substantially correct. There are burglars roaming about, and—"

"Yes, yes—"

"And I have captured them, sir," finished Ratty, with some importance.

"That remains to be seen, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Fetch!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "Pray follow me to my study."

The Head was so worried that he forgot all about the juniors, and they grouped together wondering in the rear. The procession moved off down the New House corridor, ascending three victims to the ever-present House.

Outside the Form master's study there was a solemn pause. Mr. Ratcliff turned.

"Be ready to capture the burglar," he said.

"Alam!"

The master turned the key and threw open the study. Curious eyes peered in and dwelt upon the imprisoned form of George Figgins as he stood there, blinking wildly.

Mr. Ratcliff stopped back in amazement.

"Figgins! Boy!"

The Head gasped and the prefects concealed their grin.

"Figgins!" muttered the Head. "Is this, then, your burglar, Ratcliff?"

"Dr. Holmes, I—"

The Head pursed his lips and stepped into the study, frowning.

"Figgins!"

"Oh, yes, sir?"

"How came you here?"

"Mr. Ratcliff pushed me and locked the door on me, sir," gasped Figgins.

The Head gave Mr. Ratcliff a deadly glance. The unfortunate New House master turned pale, then pink, then blue, then violet.

"I—I-I thought—" he stammered faintly.

"What were you doing out of your dormitory, Figgins?" asked the Head.

"I—I was going back, sir."

"What—what? In this manner for impertinence, Figgins?"

"Nonsense, sir! I—I heard a noise—"

"I see. And, like the other juniors, you left your dormitory thinking there might be burglars about."

"Yes, sir. I—I thought it very likely, sir," gasped Figgins—how likely, he did not explain.

"Very good! You will take five hundred lines for leaving your dormitory, Figgins!"

"Oh, you, sir! Thank you, sir!" murmured Figgins, who was too anxious to know what had happened to the New House juniors to heed what he was saying.

The Head turned and looked grimly at his subordinate.

"Now, Mr. Ratcliff, we will proceed to release the second of your burglars, sir."

Ratty was absolutely dazed. It seemed to him like a horrid miracle. With his own eyes he had seen the burglar; with his own hands he had pushed him into the study; and now—it was Figgins—not a desperate criminal—merely Figgins!

With his head swimming round Mr. Ratcliff led the way to the bath-room. Without a word he unlocked the door and threw it open.

Moosey Lowther's brain had worked along the same lines as Figgins. For three was no sign of a burglar. It was merely Lowther. He had a very red appearance, as though he had just had a wash.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes goggled—they nearly dropped from their sockets. He went mauve, then green, then grey, then magenta. He appeared on the verge of a swoon.

The prefects tried to smother their grins; but they were not wholly successful.

As for the Head, he looked like a tropical thunderstorm.

"Lowther!"

"Yes, sir?"

"How did you get here?"

"Mr. Ratcliff pushed me, sir. He locked me in."

Mr. Ratcliff decided it was a horrid dream. In a few moments he would awake.

"You will take five hundred lines for leaving your dormitory, Lowther!"

"Oh!"

"You may go!"

Lowther did not and joined the crowd of juniors in the background. Figgins was already there, and was relieved to find that his share had not been discovered looked out of their dormitory. He held the boy securely, and waited to see the flash of the constabulary.

The Head turned to Mr. Ratcliff. He was pleased to be accurate.

"I cannot thank you enough, Mr. Ratcliff, for securing the safety of St. James' in this fashion," he said. "Now will you please lead on to your third prisoner, and let me see what other misguided individual you have released."

"Sir," answered Mr. Ratcliff, "I cannot understand it. I mean—"

"Fray led on, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff stumbled along to the bath-room. With a feeling almost of dread he turned the key and opened the door.

A large form sprang out and knocked the Head and Mr. Ratcliff in a heap. The prefects were so astonished that they were incapable of action. The burglar tore his way through them and reached the passage.

"After him!" roared Kildare.

But for the jackets, it is not unlikely that the villain would have got away. But they, though they were astonished to see a real burglar emerge, were ready for him. As he tore towards them they crunched down. Then they fell on him as one man.

Any ordinary man would have crashed to the earth under their sweep; but the burglar was a big, strongly built man, and he fought desperately. Inch by inch he clawed his way to freedom, and just as Kildare and the others arrived he broke from Tom Merry and ran. "He's got away!"

"Don't let him escape!" roared Kildare. "Go for him!"

"Dash it all," cried Langton, "he'll get away yet!"

And he would have done so—but for one thing. He was running strongly. It is doubtful if any of his pursuers could have reached him before he had reached downstate and left the building. He was well on the road to freedom—but for one thing.

That one thing was the fallen hero of Homer. As the burglar came dashing up, it claimed its tenth victim.

Cram!

"Whooooo!" roared the burglar, as he tripped over the bust of "Old Whiskers" and sprawled on the floor.

After that there was nothing in it. The prefects seized his hand and foot with ropes that Manners fetched from the boot-room. Then the Head and Mr. Ratcliff rushed up.

It is difficult to say which was the more astonished. Mr. Ratcliff had got used to seeing his burglars turn out to be

juniors, and he was utterly surprised to find he had actually bagged a burglar. The Head had never believed in the existence of the burglar in the first place, so he was dumfounded.

"We've got him, sir!" said Kildare.

"Dear me!" said the Head. "A most villainous and heaping specimen. The police must be informed by telephone."

"All right, guv'nor," growled the burglar. "No need to grieve your 'eads into my neck. I know when I'm copped."

"How did you get in here?" asked Kildare.

"Why, I was waitin' about, lookin' for a chance to get in, when I see three old coveys come up in a car."

"That would be Mr. Linton, Mr. Lathorn, and myself," snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes," went on the burglar, "and when I see the car, I hid myself in the chandelinding tubs."

"There you are!" said Figgins triphantly. "I know I saw somebody in the rhododendrons. It wasn't Taggins' car, you see."

"Well," added the robber, "one of the old coveys hid something in the car—"

"Mr. Linton left his copy of Horace," nodded Ratcliff.

"And he went back to get it, leavin' the door open for a minute. So I see my chance, and I dodged in, and hid myself in a kind of cupboard until everybody was in bed, as I thought."

"Oh, that was the way, was it?" grinned Kildare. "Well, you'll find yourself in another kind of cupboard when the police get you."

"All right," grunted the burglar. "I know when I'm 'ed. I'll go quietly. 'Tain't no use strugglin' now."

He was marched away. The Head wrestled with himself for some moments, and then turned to Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ratcliff," he said loudly, "there—there seems to have been a mistake. Your impression that you saw a burglar in the school turns out to be correct. Moreover, you have captured the man. I—I cannot quite make out why you shut up the boys Figgins and Leather—"

"Neither can I, sir," confessed Ratty in wonderment. "Unless some trick of the darkness deceived me—"

"Quite no! Abomin!" The Doctor coughed. "I—I have to beg your pardon for my unjust and unworthy suspicion, Ratcliff—"

"Not at all, sir."

"It was—it was perfectly incredible, and perhaps I—I should have given the circumstances more consideration before I ever originated such an extreme injustice."

"I beg you won't mention it, Doctor."

"At any rate, I am convinced now that I was hopelessly in error, and I beg you to overlook my remarks."

And there the thing may be said to have ended. There were no more reactions that night, neither did the authorities ever discover anything about the three amateur burglars who were passing St. Jim's in the hours of the darkness. Which was certainly lucky for the three burglars.

It really was the most fortunate thing in the world that a real burglar had chosen that night to make his attempt on the school. But for his presence the Head would have continued to think Ratty was "under the weather," and there would have been nothing for it but for Figgins and Leather to have sneezed up and explained matters. They could not have seen Mr. Ratcliff diagnosed for a crime of which he was perfectly innocent.

But fortunately they were spared that situation, and all was calm and bright. The following morning three juniors had seen and paid. The Shell humped Leather heartily; the Fourth year Gussy a mild kind of Fern-ragging; and the New House rolled Figgins downstate and kicked him. That was their share in the rewards of that night.

Everybody agreed that Ratty was the hero of the hour. But he wasn't. Not by miles. The real hero was Homer—good old Whiskers! He played a more important part than anybody. He tripped Mr. Ratcliff twice—which was noble work. He upset the fleeing burglar and effected his capture. Moreover, he gratified his sense of humour by tripping up at least eight other people. Which wasn't bad going.

Homer was given a brand new pedestal, and his badly-chipped nose was repaired. And to this day he still ornaments the battlement of that heroic night. And if you ever visit St. Jim's, make a point of seeing him—in the Shell landing.

THE END.

(Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, is in the illustration next week, please. He sure you read "CAPTAIN AND CREW!" It shows Martin Cuffard in top-top form.)

ANOTHER FINE FLYING AND FOOTER YARN.

# YOUNG THUNDERBOLT!

## And his Team of Butterflies



By

ARTHUR S. HARDY.

### CHAPTER I.

#### The Damaged Plane!

"THERE can be no doubt about it, Mac," said Mr. Harland Jackson, designer, inventor, and manufacturer of the famous Butterfly aeroplanes.

He was examining the wreckage of a Butterfly Minor two-seater, dual-control plane, in the closed and lighted hangar to which it had been run.

"This little air bus was blown up by a deadly explosion of some kind. I can trace no defect in what remains of her motor, and there is no structural weakness anywhere."

Sandy McFarlane, the show-room manager at the Butterfly Works, pulled his chin with thumb and forefinger. "That's a fact," he remarked.

"Since the explosion took place soon after the engine had been started, and just before the Butterfly team left the ground for the League match at Bolton on Saturday, I can only conclude that it was a villainous attempt to not only damage the reputation of my Butterfly, Mac, but that of the football team as well. Just think of the effect upon the country if that explosion had happened in the air, and not on the flying ground with nobody aboard the plane."

"You're right, Mr. Jackson," agreed Mac. "And, therefore, whoever caused the explosion had his knife into me and also into my team, Mac. And he must have known how to get about the Works."

"That," said Mac, "is an indelible fact, sir."

"The police have been busy investigating ever since it happened," Harland Jackson went on, "but have discovered no clue. Now, there are two men I suspect—"

"I can name them," jumped in McFarlane. "One is Starler, the trainer of the City team whom you dismissed last week, and the other is his cousin Creek Garride, employed in the Works."

"That," agreed Mr. Jackson, "is so."

Mac stared hard at the damaged plane and shook his head.

"I've been working on that suspension," he cried.

"I've traced Garride's movements ever since he came

to the Butterfly Works on Saturday morning, and he was never out of sight of the workers from clock on to clock off. Starler works near the Works at any rate. The explosion might have been caused by some spy of the Clippier firm, sir, who would stop at nothing in order to damage the reputation of the Butterfly plane."

"True, it might. Have a watch set over the hangar, Mac. I have doubled the night guard, and shall have extra policemen stationed. And now a word with you, Cliff."

Cliff Jackson, who had been eagerly examining the wrecked machine, bounced down over his side.

"Yes, pastor!" he cried.

"You are not to go up in a Butterfly plane, especially your own, until the engine has been well run, and only after the machine has been thoroughly examined. The Butterfly team must not fly from the testing ground at those works until every machine has been overhauled and all risk eliminated. Furthermore, I shall take it

as a kindness to me and your mother if you never go about the town alone, and always take your chum Deildler Hanson, or one or other of your friends, with you when you go for a motor-bike ride or for a walk into the country."

The sound advice went in at one ear and out of the other, for Cliff Jackson loved any sort of risk. It gave him a thrill. Besides, he had tremendous belief in himself. He was always alive, on the look-out, and he did not believe that he could ever come to any harm.

"All right, go'now," he laughed.

The hangar was shut up and locked. Cliff went back to the office with his father.

"What are you going to do to-day, Cliff, a job of work?" The boy's bright eyes danced as he pulled his lips down in a crafty grimace as he looked at Mr. Harland Jackson.

"Don't think so," he answered. "I've been slugging away at school for years and years. I want to take it easy for a bit. I think I'll fly over to the City ground."

The Gas Lantern.—No. 1,164.

## YOUNG THUNDERBOLT

is faster than greased lightning both at catching crooks and notching goals on the footer field!

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The Gas Lantern.—No. 1,164.

Hank is training the Batterfly team there, and giving the pros a lesson, gu'n'ar."

Harland Jackson turned to the great pile of correspondence on his desk.

"Very well," he cried; "only one that the place is all right before you start, Cliff. I don't want to lose you, but in the whole Batterfly team over at City Road?"

"The whole lot of them, sir, and they're waiting for you."

"Cliff, my boy, every member of your team plus Hank Parsons, your trainer, is a skilled workman to whom I pay high wages. While they're training at football I'm losing their services, and that isn't sound business."

Cliff sat on the desk and smiled at his father, whom he considered the smart man in the world.

"It depends how you look at it," he argued. "Every time they play in the City colours, every time they fly to the football ground, they give the Batterfly places an advertisement which you couldn't otherwise get, not even if you paid thousands and thousands. My Batterfly team is putting the Batterfly places on the map, dad."

Harland Jackson's face softened.

"They were on the map before you got me to take over the City club and gave me the advertisement you mention, Cliff."

"They were," the boy agreed, "but Clipper's were out-advertising us. Now we are getting over the big noise."

Harland Jackson began to write.

"All right, get along, only take care of yourself, Cliff, for there are enemies about." And he added as the door closed, speaking very softly: "That boy is a genius, and he's my son."

As for Clifford Jackson, nicknamed Young Thunderbolt at his school, because of his smashing runs and crashing shots at goal, he ran to the testing ground, found his Batterfly mixer standing there, with his cap on, leaning, and, with a word of thanks to Gun, the mechanic who had looked her over and started her up, he climbed to the cockpit and set her going.

Up into the blue he flew, and away over the town to where the City ground showed up sombre and dark, with scarcely a blade of grass on its patchy playing pitch. Circling, he came down cleverly to land in the middle of the open space and taxi gently to the rails, where he stopped his air bus and got out.

He saw Hank Parsons, who had taught him all he knew about flying, and the Batterfly's team, leaning about talking. The men who were slouching up and down with their hands in their pockets and their faces set and grim, were the City's team of professionals, who had never won a match since the season opened, and who had been stood down to make room for the team of Batterflies, all amateurs from the Batterfly Works.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Training!

"MORNING, Hank," called Cliff, as he ran up.

Hank Parsons grinned, his good-natured but ugly face lighting up as the boy came.

"Morning, young 'un. You managed that landing very nicely. Now, slip into your things, kid, and we'll show the City boys a new style of training."

The City players heard, and Grover, their captain, came up.

"You're one of those boys who know everything," said he snarly.

"Yeah!" Hank looked back at Grover and then at the group of sulky-looking pros. "Well, Snarler, your trainer, who was given the air last week, didn't know enough did he, or you boys wouldn't have been at the bottom of the League with 12 games played, no games won, no games drawn, 12 games lost, no points gained, and a credit score of goals against you, when Mr. Jackson took over the team. I'm not claimin' my method's water-tight, but it keeps the boys alive and we win matches. Hear that?"

"We had no luck," answered Grover.

"No! Well, I'll tell you some more. You boys are getting full pay now, and you never got half your wages under the old management. Don't look sour—smile. You watch my team at training, playin' like little happy kids, and when that done give the ground a miss excepting when you're gettin' some here. Can you see anything cheerful in this old dump? Dirty, ugly advertisements, rusty crash barriers, stinkier turkeys all covered with wood, and John smoke. Staying along the country lanes, back and be yourself!" He set his cupped hands to his mouth and shouted. "Now then, Batterflies—step on it—we don't want to miss the tide!"

Even Grover brightened under Hank's cheery example. **THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 1,234.**

and the other players raised a smile. Down to the palms they crowded and stayed here to watch the Batterflies' team do a work out. Hank's methods were popular.

He threw four footballs out on to the pitch, and made up teams of six sides. He sent Bunny Coote into one goal and stopped into the other himself. Then left five players on each side and each side had two footballs. Two players acted as defenders, roaming back or half-backs, whilst the others, with two footballs, formed the forward lines or starting-parties. The sides kicked off at a word, each from ten yards within the centre-line, and the forwards tried at once to kick the ball through.

The position which followed was hectic.

It was dribble and tackle and swerve and run for each lot of players with never a breathing space and very little time in which to think. The players couldn't think—they had to act.

And when either side did manage to work an opening and break through, the shots that came at goal had something behind them, especially when both balls were shot at goal almost at the same moment.

Hank was pretty spy on these occasions, hitting one ball out and slipping away another and kicking out a return just in as much time as it takes to think.

The speed of the practice game was terrific, and after fifteen minutes, when a halt was called, the Batterflies needed it. The rest over, they lined up for passing practice, the four balls being used now more, and the sides standing well back near goal and kicking the ball backwards and forwards from end to end, whilst Hank cried out for the boys to control their kicking.

"Don't kick the ball as if it were a hot ball on a pavement," he roared. "Look where you're aiming at."

This was followed by heading practice, the balls being lobbed into the air for the Batterflies to kick. Then came a shower, a towel-down, and—dinner.

"If you do that every week out," said Grover to Hank, "you'll use up your team in three months—they'll all be dead."

"Snarler didn't mean you boys that way, but you were used up before the season opened," Hank shot back. "Now, listen, you take a rest and breathe some fresh air, then come along and train with my lot this way. Then you'll grow young again."

"You're playing Huddersfield here on Saturday," answered Grover. "I'm coming in to see your works team kicked."

## CHAPTER 3.

### The Mighty Waterplane!

WHEN Saturday came there was a rush for the City Ground, and the terraces stacked steadily, even to the roof, to the ears of Manager Harlow who had used the team go to rack and ruin and the gates shrink to almost nothing during the last two years. Cliff Jackson—Young Thunderbolt—had worked the miracle by inducing his father to take over the club and play the Batterflies' team. But Harlow, who was a bit of a pessimist, did not think the task could last. The team of boys would blow up and then—Very likely they'd blow up this afternoon.

But they didn't. The thirty thousand spectators who filled the stand and packed the terraces saw Huddersfield outplayed, saw Young Thunderbolt tear through when the game was five minutes old, and smash the ball into the net with a drive like a thunderbolt—and they cheered like mad. The Batterflies were all alive, and even Grover had to admit that he couldn't find a weak spot in the team. It was the Batterflies' team which was already talked about all over England and which afterwards became so famous, and here are the players: "Bunny" Coote (14st.), goal; "Bifer" Swann and "Irish" Kelly, backs; "Bunny" Mann, "Drifter" Hanson, and Tom Selwyn, half-backs; "Gunner" Shaw, "Dapper" Davis, Cliff Jackson (Young Thunderbolt), Bobby Roberts, and "Shrimp" Martin, forwards.

And they had Hank Parsons for trainer.

Everyone of them could play football, and everyone of them could fly, and they were all mighty useful with their hands.

Encouraged by the cheering of the friendly crowd, cheered by the advertisements of the Batterfly places which streamed from kites up in the blue, Cliff and the boys played as if inspired. They scored their second goal within fifteen minutes, and no sooner had the Town applied with a brilliant goal from Maggot than Young Thunderbolt burst through and scored again for the Batterflies' team.

Not did the change of ends make any difference in the game. The Batterflies were definitely on top and ran out



Without a moment's hesitation Cliff harried himself at Searler and brought him crashing into the water.

winner by five goals to one. Drabber Hanson popping on the fourth goal, and Stammer Stone cutting in from the right to complete the score.

The Batterley team came off the field amidst deafening cheers, the crowd halting Cliff up and cheering him to the gate.

As he entered the dressing-room, Grover came to Cliff and held out his hand. The pro was smiling happily.

"Thunderbolt," he cried, "I'm no great left. You're gotta grand team. All the boys had to admit that."

Cliff's eyes danced.

"You're a good sport, Grover," he cried. "And don't you worry. You're all staying on the pay-roll. Someday we'll lose our form, just as your team did, and then you'll all be back and playing better than you ever did. Things will shape better at the City Ground now that Searler's gone."

"Searler was a twister," Grover replied. "And it's my belief that he never wanted the City to hold a good team. He was always spotting the boys. I'm glad he's gone, I suppose," he eyed Young Thunderbolt thoughtfully. "You'll be taking the Batterley boys to Chelsea next Saturday?"

"Yes, Grover."

"How are you gonna get there? You won't be flying, I take it. There's no aeroplane near the Fulham Road, is there?"

Cliff's eyes danced.

"Not very near, Grover," he cried. "And I'll tell you into a secret. I'm going to take my Batterley team to London by waterplane. There's the Thames, you know. If we come down near Putney Bridge it won't be a long drive to the Chelsea Ground."

Grover stared.

"You're certainly putting over a new one in football," he said. "I suppose I mustn't talk about it?"

"Do what you like," replied Thunderbolt. "I'm going to hand over the news to the papers and everybody will know about it in the morning."

Everybody did. Cliff's telling paragraphs told the football public that the City's team of players, from the Batterley works, would start on the morning of the match with Chelsea and fly to London, wet or dry, snow or fog. For the first time use would be made of the small Mayfly waterplanes, which were based in the riverside airlocks belonging to the Batterley Works. These little planes, made in single and two seater, were midge editions of the Batterley airplanes which had already gained an international reputation. They were ideal bases for any riverside dweller, who could land and ride in them anywhere save on a raging sea.

Six dual-control waterplanes would make the journey and carry with them eleven Batterley players with Hank as trainer and trolley man.

This news Searler, the dismissed trainer of the City Football Club, devoured greedily. In the afternoon, while walking through the town, hands in pockets and looking for trouble, Searler ran into Grover.

"Well," he sneered. "Are you still taking it lying down? Why don't you and the best race Coon at City Road? If I want to give them I wouldn't allow a school kid like Clifford Jackson to herd it over me. None of you has the pluck of a horse."

Looking at Searler, Grover thought that he had never seen anyone such an evil face. The man was bad, bad right through.

"Look here, Searler," he cried. "Nobody can blame Mr. Harbord Jackson and Young Thunderbolt for giving the City a winning team. The boy's as clever as a pig. We're all receiving regular wages and will be back in the team one of these days. We'd clean let our form and I blame you for it. You were always putting the boys off. I'm not going to stop and listen to you cursing young Jackson down."

Searler laughed.

"You're a coward, Grover," he cried. "Now let me tell you something. Young Thunderbolt won't be taking his team to London by any Mayfly planes on Saturday?"

"No! Why?"

"There'll be bad weather. And perhaps there won't be any Mayfly planes to fly."

Grover swung on his heels and walked away. He did not take Searler's threat seriously, even though he remembered the damage done to one of the Batterley planes on Saturday week. It was only after he had gone to bed on Friday night and could not sleep that Searler's words took sinister shape, and he began to toss and turn and wish that he had said something to Young Thunderbolt.

Searler's words now seemed like a threat. He half thought of going out and ringing Clifford Jackson up, then he realized that the boy must be asleep, and he decided not to disturb him.

And at that very moment a man was rowing a boat along the river, and making for the sheds or boat-houses which enclosed the small water-docks in which the Mayfly planes were housed.

He pulled his oar against rowlocks padded with binding of cloth, to deaden sound. Each dip of the blades was made noiselessly, and the boat glided swiftly forward.

When he saw the darkened shadow of the sheds loom up in the starlit darkness, the man pulled the boat in to the bank, and secured it there with grapples and painter. He stepped the scull.

Then he threw off the man, he was wearing, and rapidly slipped, until he stood in only swimming-slip. Then, taking a metal instrument in his right hand, he let himself down into the water, and swam slowly to the dark door of the boat-house. The man could swim. Diving down of the boat-house. The man could swim. Diving down of the boat-house. The man could swim. Diving down of the boat-house.

like a duck, he plunged deep down, and, swimming under the submerged part of the shut doors, came up on the other side.

Here he reached the steps and climbed out. He had evidently been there before, for he quickly found an electric button and pressed it down, flooding the boatroom with light.

And there, floating on the still water, he saw the foot of Mayfly waterplaces in which the Butterfly team were going to fly to London in the morning.

He tested the instrument he held, pressing the metal arms together, and as sparks flashed from the end of the automatic fire-lighter, he laughed again.

Then he stepped on to the floor of the nearest water-place and climbed up to the cockpit. There he waited, examining the machine and its perfection of fittings. He lingered over his examination, and even after he had heard the port side of the engine to get at the carburettor, he waited, gazing over his anticipated triumph.

Finally, after gaining a position from which he could quickly drop into the water of the dock below him the moment the petrol flared, he uncoupled the carburettor, and, holding the lighter at arm's-length, prepared to snap it.

And it was just then that he received the shock of his life.

A boyish figure had risen in the Mayfly place which floated cheek by jowl with the one the racer was on. Without a moment's hesitation the boy hurled himself at the incendiary, and, clasping him about the shoulders, brought him crashing down into the water below.

As they plunged under, other figures rose in the other

places. Benny Coates, the Butterfield goalkeeper, was there, Driveller Hanson, too, and Bobby Roberts, and Strang Martin, two of the Butterfield smart forwards, who had come to the dock to keep watch over the water-planes because Cliff wanted them to, for Cliff had had a hunch that dirty work would be attempted to-night.

They scrambled down from cockpit to float, and looked at the two who were fighting desperately in the water, the boy in full clothing, the man in a swimming suit.

They fought like cats, and there were times when the man was on top, and, gripping the boy by the throat, held him under.

But Cliff knew how to counter that. Pushing the butt of his right hand under the man's chin and doubling up his legs, he thrust with his drawn-up foot at his enemy's middle, and threw him off.

Then he was on top and holding the man under. "Go it, Cliff!" yelled Driveller Hanson, who was used with excitement. "Work him over this way. Then we've got him!"

Hanson didn't want to interfere lest he should cramp Cliff's chances. But at last he jumped headlong into the water and joined in the battle. The man shook Cliff off. Driveller leaped into Cliff, and the man ducked for safety and swam for the closed doors.

"No you don't, Scareler!" cried Cliff, grabbing him by the ankle and holding on like grim death.

Driveller helped to drag the half-drowned man back into the dock, and the others hauled him up and tied his hands behind him.

(Continued on next page.)

## QUESTIONS ANSWERED HERE!

# CAN YOU CATCH OUR WISE OLD ORACLE NAPPING?

**HAPPY NEW YEAR, CHUMS!**—Make a New Year's resolution to find a question that Withers can't answer!

WHEN I popped in the office the other day I found the old Ed, looking through the stacks of queries from Gem readers. "That's funny," said he, "a young reader living in Liverpool has been reading the Arabian Nights, and he wants to know why the chaps who went about begging in Bagdad were called calenders. Now, then, Withers, what's the connection between calenders and calenders? I suppose these chaps in Bagdad lived on dates. Is that the idea?"

I could see the Ed. was very pleased with himself for thinking of that, so I took the opportunity to air my knowledge. "Not at all, sir," I said. "In the stories of the Arabian Nights, the calenders or Liverpool friend has been reading about some certain group of men known as dervishes, who were supposed to be always travelling from one place to another. In Persian their name was palander."

"What's a dervish, exactly?" asked the Ed.

"A dervish, sir, in Persian, means 'beggar.' Out in the East the dervishes travel about in groups and perform strange feats of endurance, like the fakirs in India. They eat fire coals and glass, for instance, cut themselves with knives, pick up red-hot iron, and devour serpents. These chaps are known as the Howling Dervishes, and another group, that go in for wild dancing, are known as the Dancing Dervishes."

"That's idle, interesting," said the Ed. "Now, Withers, can you tell Ted Shan, of Sligo, something about bananas?"

"I should say I can, sir," said I. "I can't count the trees I've walked up on. The Gem Lassie!—No, 1,124.

the Strand with a banana in my hand. One of the most remarkable things about a banana is the plant it grows on. To start with, the stem of the banana plant is ten feet high, and the leaves that shoot out from the top of the stem are ten feet long. The

native in the land of the banana wears cloth from these leaves, and uses them to shelter under from the hot sun. What we call plantains are really large bananas, but they are not sent into this country. In East Africa these plantains grow to a length of two feet, and are as thick as a man's arm. In Coochin China and Malaya there is a species of banana plant that only yields one solitary fruit, but this is so big that it makes a meal sufficient for three men. Those plantains have to be cooked before they are eaten, and they are very filling, believe me."

"Are any other parts of the banana plant useful, besides the leaves?" asked the Ed.

"Yes, sir," I informed him, "the natives make rope out of the fibre of the plant, and as you know, Ed., banana skins make excellent slippers."

"I didn't know that, Withers," said the Ed. "I didn't know you could make slippers from banana skins."

"Well, sir, just step on one and see," I shouted. "You'll slip all right."

The Ed. frowned and peered up another letter. "Can you tell a reader who lives at Ripley anything about Harold Smith, who played centre-half for Notts County in the F.A. Cup-tie at Chesterfield?"

"Harold Smith was a railway porter until a few weeks ago," said I. "He played for Woodstone, the Athenian League team. When Froggatt and Jakeman, the centre-halfs, dropped out of the County team owing to injuries, he was given his chance. He's six feet tall, and, to my mind, a player of great promise."

"Can you tell Percy Wickes how many feet it takes to ring a peal of bells?" "One man can change three bells by

holding a rope in each hand and keeping the third rope round his foot."

"Here's a question about bread-fruit, my lad. A young Yarmouth reader wants to know what it tastes like, and how it's eaten, and all that sort of thing. Now don't tell me you've walked down the Strand with bread-fruit in your hand."

"No, sir, I haven't done that," I admitted, "but when I was in the South Sea Islands I've had many a meal off the jolly old bread-fruit, believe me. Bread-fruit grows to about the size of a melon, and in the South Seas we used to bake it whole in hot ovens, and then scoop out the inside. When it's cooked the inside is soft and smooth, and tastes like potatoes boiled with sweet milk. Mixed with treacle or sugar, it makes a splendid pudding. It can also be prepared by cutting it into slices and drying it in the sun. In the Pacific Islands we used to make a flour out of these dried slices of bread-fruit, which could be used for making biscuits. The natives get juice from the stem of the tree, and boil it down from the wood."

"I didn't know you'd been in the South Sea Islands," said the Ed. "How you ever got back beats me. Here's a letter asking us some questions about anchors. Why are the arms of an anchor curved?"

"That's an easy one, Ed," I answered. "Years ago they weren't, as a matter of fact. The curve was introduced in the year 1814, at Plymouth, by a clerk named Perring. Before that, the arms, which were straight, often broke away from the crown of the anchor when the anchor was weighing. Nowadays, on big ships, an improved type of anchor, known as the Martin anchor, is used, which has flukes, or spines, that swing from side to side. This enables both the flukes to catch into the ground, instead of only one, as with the old type of anchor. In stowing an anchor of this type, it is brought up by a greased chain secured to a gravity band, which is joined to a casting chain runs through a pulley."

"That's quite enough of that," interrupted the Ed. "I don't want to hear anything about cats and catting chains. The best thing you can do, my lad, is to go out and buy a dogskin and chain yourself up."





"No, you don't, Snarler!" cried Cliff, grabbing him by the ankle and holding on like grim death.

Then, parting from the severity of the struggle, Cliff leapt to a telephone on the wall, and rang up the police.

"Send a car down here at once, please!" he begged. "It's Clifford Jackson, you know, speaking. We've caught Snarler in the act, trying to burn our Mayfly places, and we've all the evidence you want."

"All right, please 'em," said a deep voice at the other end of the wire. "We'll be coming right along!"

When the police car arrived Cliff and Driftler handed the directing policeman. Benny tossed Snarler's clothes, which he had collected from the moored boat, into the car.

"Now, come clean," said the police-inspector, who had come along in the car. "It was you who put that explosive in the Batterfly place up at the Batterfly Works the other Saturday, wasn't it, Snarler?"

Snarler snuggled like a mad dog.

"All right, it was me! I'm gonna get a heavy sentence for this job! It can't make it much worse. Yes, I did it!"

"And who helped you? Someone inside the works? Out with it!"

"I worked alone."

"All right. You're for a long stretch, Snarler! Good-night, Thunderbolt, and the best of luck at Chelsea tomorrow!" said the police-inspector as the car began to move.

After it had gone Cliff stretched his arms and yawned, then changed into dry clothes.

"What did I tell you, Driftler?" he said to his chum. "I thought that show in the papers might bring someone down here tonight, and I half suspected it might be Snarler."

In the evening the waterplanes were run out into the river, lined up under the supervision of Hank Parsons, the best pilot attached to the Batterfly Works, and got ready. Then followed football kit inspection, and the plane partners were arranged. Every member of the Batterflies' team was as much at home in the air as on a football field, and, the word being given, the planes taxied down the river amid the cheering of a mighty crowd, and, rising up into the cloud-flecked sky, headed for London.

At Stamford Bridge the afternoon sixty-five thousand spectators gathered to see their favorites play the famous Batterflies. More of the second attempt to damage the football planes had arrived in London. A high wind blew the clouds at speed across the faded blue of the wintry sky.

Suddenly a mighty shout rang deafeningly:

"Here they come!"

Soon enough, the host of six Mayfly waterplanes flashed into view, flying low and in splendid order. They sped towards Putney.

Waiting cars, ordered by phone, bore them to the Chelsea ground. And only one minute after the advertised time

for the kick-off Cliff and his team of Batterflies raced on to Chelsea pitch and gave the Possessors the game of their lives, even though they'd come from the North by air, and had lost the toss into the bargain.

In spite of Chelsea's clearance, Jackson, Wilson, and Gallacher playing brilliantly in the Possessor's attack, a fine attacking rally by the Batterflies' half-backs sent the Possessor's forward away.

Skinner Shaw went down the right-wing like greased lightning, and swinging the ball right across before he could be blotted out or tackled, he dropped the ball at Bobby Roberts' feet.

Tapping the ball, Bobby backkicked to Cliff, and Young Thunderbolt, after just standing the ball, shoved the Bridge crowd why his old school chums at St. Clement's had chastised him "Thunderbolt."

The ball flashed into the net before the goalie could get anywhere near it, and the Batterflies took the lead. It was a lead they never lost, and in the end, when they had won the game by three goals to one, there was not a dribbler to be found in the stand or on the terrace.

The plucky, lucky, flying footballer had captured London Types.

It was black as pitch when the team, after a hearty feast, boarded their waterplanes, whose riding-lights gleamed above the lapping waves.

They raced up-river, rose, turned, and headed straight for home.

When searchlights from the river docks at home shined upon their landing-place, thousands of people who had gathered in the choir, pulled themselves loose as the planes swept down.

As they alighted on the water like landing ducks, Harlow Jackson, Cliff's father, waiting in the covered docks, beamed happily.

The papers were full of his team of Batterflies; they talked about nothing else, unless it was the Mayfly waterplanes and the attempt Snarler had made to burn the Boat.

"Well done, young 'em," said Cliff's father, as Cliff landed as fresh as if he had only just got out of bed. "You've completely routed the Clipper planes with this last advertisement you've given us. We've got a big lead at last. And with Snarler bound for prison, I don't think I need worry about your safety in the future. Cliff, my lad, I'm proud of you!"

Hank Parsons winked at Cliff, then looked at Cliff's father and winked again. The Batterflies three were had given them six points on the League table, and Hank reckoned there were more to come.

(Well, chums? Cliff has got Snarler, but his troubles aren't over! Don't miss next week's great game!)

FURTHER CHAPTERS OF OUR SPLENDID SERIAL

# THE RANGERS' RECRUIT!

BY  
HEDLEY SCOTT.



### An Old Acquaintance!

**H**ALF-DAZZED by the shock of the collision, Bill sat hunched over the steering-wheel and mechanically switched off. Like the long grey car, buried in a heap of its own debris, the Bentley was a complete and irreparable wreck.

From the grey car a wreath of smoke was curling skywards. Of the two occupants of the wreck Bill could see nothing. Then he became conscious of the constable by his side as a low groan reached him. A splinter of glass from the shattered windshield had evidently struck the police officer, for a crimson stream oozed away from his left temple and down his cheek. His eyes opened as Bill sat staring anxiously at him.

"I'm all right," he said faintly. "That was a good crash, sir!"

Bill clambered from the wrecked car. He quite expected to see the two bandits lying motionless. But both were on their feet. For a fraction of time Bill saw them clearly outlined in the light from a neighbouring lamp-post. The next moment they were running for dear life. Both limped painfully.

"Hi!" Bill's voice rose croakingly. "Stop 'em!" This was to the crowd that was already gathering, but it was to the crowd that the bandits owed their escape. In the darkness and confusion it was comparatively easy to make a break for freedom.

"Stop 'em!" Again Bill's voice rose above the tumult, but in vain.

As for Bill himself, he staggered, then clutched frantically at the nearest man for support. The excitement of the last twenty minutes, coupled with his exhausted state, had proved too much.

His faintness was but momentary, however, for as three beleaguered policemen pushed their way through the crowd he heard one of them ejaculate excitedly:

"They've left the avag! That's a bit o' lack!"

The chase, after all, had not been in vain. Bill's head cleared, and a kindly policeman led him away to a seat. Arrived in front of him was the constable who had accused the Bentley as his own.

The Gun Lawyer.—No. 1, 11th

passed him in the Bentley. His wound had been attended to, and the bandage that covered it did not hide his cheerful face.

"That was hectic work, sir," he remarked, as he spat out down beside Bill. "Beats the film and Chicago hollow. Folks we didn't ask the bigtime, though!"

An inspector, open notebook in his hand, grinned cheerfully.

"We've recovered the avag—what's one constant. When you two are feeling O.K. we'll get along to Vine Street."

"I'm ready now," volunteered the wounded constable.

"Ditto!" grinned Bill, albeit somewhat wearily. "I'd give anything for a hunk of bread and cheese and a cup of real tea!"

The inspector and his men, not realising Bill's plight, laughed good-humouredly.

"You'll get that at the station, sir!" said the former.

"Pray the car won't carry you any more, sir," he added, jerking a finger towards the wrecked Bentley.

"It certainly looks a mean," agreed Bill, not realising the inspector evidently thought that the Bentley was his property.

In a police car the party rushed back to Vine Street Police Station. The inspector in charge then listened with interest to the constable's account of that reckless drive through London, and Bill's story.

"I congratulate you, sir," he said, at the conclusion of the account. "You walk, of course, he was responsible for the loss of the car."

Bill started.

"My car?" he asked.

"But it wasn't my car?"

"No!" The inspector's face showed his black astonishment. Then as he ran a critical eye over Bill's shabby

## BRAWN AND PLUCK!

The Game Isn't Lost Till It's Won!

THAT'S BILL HARTLEY.

### THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

BILL HARTLEY, a city foot soldier of brawn and muscle, with a head of flaming red hair, is "and down" from Oxford. On arrival home, Bill quarrels with his father and leaves for London to find work. He meets in Pall Mall a mysterious stranger, a wealthy man about town who was really behind the plot that resulted in Bill's dismissal from the "Varsity" football team through the treachery of a classmate. Bill finds him in London and their friend on a midnight walk in the lower market. Bill happens in his pocket to transfer along Regent Street, when suddenly there is a smash and gold said by two tourists in a car. Accompanied by a policeman, Bill "knows" a Bentley car and gives chase. When it comes that the bandits will escape, Bill stows the Bentley into a delivery truck, completely reversing both cars.

(New serial on.)

clothes and general unkempt appearance, he exhibited sadly. Bill looked the last person on earth to possess an expensive Bentley.

The wounded constable whistled, too, then grinned. "It's my mistake," he chimed in. "I saw this gentleman standing by the car, and assumed that it was his. Then I asked him if he would give chase. An' he did!"

The police officers laughed, and Bill joined in. "We'll soon learn whose car it was," chuckled the inspector. "The registration—"

He had no sooner uttered the words than a full-throated howl from the waiting-room announced the impudence of an individual the station sergeant was interviewing. The conversation, or part of it at least, came plainly to Bill's ears, and he started as he fancied he recognized the voice.

"Positively disgusting! I leave the contaminated car for three minutes! Three minutes, you hear! And when I return the blasted thing has disappeared! That car, suggest, cost me— Well, never mind what it cost me! But it's gone! Blasted under the very eyes of the police! What this country is coming to I shudder to think!"

And so ad infinitum.

The inspector with Bill chuckled. "Here, I fancy, is the owner of the Bentley," he remarked dryly. "Sounds as if he'll explode when we tell him the fate of it. Young man"—he turned and winked at Bill—"prepare for a thunderbolt!"

Bill smiled. He was positive now that he knew the value of the aggy individual in the next room. In company with the inspector he entered that apartment. From behind the heavy back of a policeman Bill caught sight of a thick-set, white-haired gentleman with a face closely resembling the colour of a lobster. A choleric temper was more than indicated in the flash of the steely grey eyes and the spasmodic movement of a fiery moustache.

"Three minutes, darn me! My car—Bentley! Police! Bah!"

The fiery gentleman was groping for his second wind, for his utterance became well-nigh unintelligible. Then suddenly his jaw thrust forward aggressively, and his eyes opened wide in astonishment and unbelief. Behind the constable he had caught sight of Bill's pale face. Throwing the policeman aside as if they had been skittles, he closed a path and leaped up sharp in front of Bill.

"Well!" There was a world of emphasis in that single exclamation.

"Hallo, sir!" said Bill shyly.

"Well! Darn me if it isn't Hartley's cub! My dear fellow, how are you?"

He seized hold of Bill's hand and wrung it after the fashion of a pump-handle. All unconscious of the original error which had brought him there, he smiled, beamed, bearded, clapped Bill on the back, and then wrung his hand afresh.

"Well, this is a surprise, my boy! Haven't seen you for years! Run back with me to the fall! Now, I won't take 'No' for an answer."

Bill found himself being marched towards the door of the station. All the time the old gentleman kept up a running commentary.

"Major Constantine! It was the station sergeant's voice, curt and peremptory.

"What the devil do you want?"

The old gentleman turned a lurid face on him.

"I believe you came here to protest that your Bentley car had been stolen," said the sergeant.

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Dashed impudence, my boy! Some sneak-thief has made off with my car," he told Bill. "So! that can wait."

"Major Constantine!" said the sergeant afresh, and this time there was a twinkle in his eyes. "That young man with whom you are so friendly can tell you more about that car than we can."

"What? What in the name of thunder are you suggesting?"

This time the sergeant winked at Bill.

"Go along with the major to his flat and tell him all about it, sir," he advised. "Make a clean—cheer—breast of it!"

Wonderingly, the major stared from the sergeant to Bill, and then back again to the sergeant.

"Darn me!" he muttered. "Is the man out of his senses? He'll come along, my dear fellow, Police—bah!"

Taking Bill by the arm, he pushed him away out of the station, leaving the officers shouting. They knew Major Constantine and his fiery temper of old.

A taxi rushed Bill and the major to the latter's flat. Bill signed contentedly as he lowered his big limbs into a comfortable armchair before a blazing fire. Hard nervously pouring his chin, the major regarded him quizzically. It was quite five minutes before he spoke.

"What's the trouble, Bill?" No one would have recognized in that kindly voice the fiery, choleric, ill-tempered individual of the police station.

Bill told him without waste of words.

"Phaw!" The major heard him set before that whistle. "Four old lad!"

Next minute he was on his feet furiously singing the bell for his manservant.

"Food!" he barked, when the naive gentleman appeared. "Food for two! An' hurry, hang you!"

Bill smiled his gratulations.

"My dear chap, you must be starving! Bah! We'll soon after that. If that grub isn't here inside five minutes I'll fire Johnson!"

The grub was produced within the time limit; but before it arrived Bill told his old friend of the smash-and-grab raid and the subsequent chase.

"Well, I'm hanged!" followed the major. "That Bentley did me a good turn after all. I shouldn't have run into you otherwise. But here's some food! Get down to it, lad!"

Bill wanted no second bidding. While the major smoked a cigar he fell to and gobbled away a loaf of which he had only been able to dream during the past month.

The major watched him approvingly, but did not speak again until Bill had appeased his ravenous appetite.

"By Jupiter, that was good!" Bill's face was radiant. "Major, you've saved my life!"

"Nonsense! Now let's talk, my boy. Something's got to be done. You can't drift about London looking for work and bumping into smash-and-grab raids. Hartley's cub is too good for that sort of thing. But what the devil is to be done?"

He broke off sharply.

"Look here, Bill, you need to be pretty useful as a footballer before you went up to Oxford."

"I can play a bit," agreed Bill modestly.

"A bit!" followed the major. "Why, Ribbin headed the public schools while you played for 'em. How would you care to turn out for Cashin Rangers?"

"Oh!" Bill's eyes lit up with enthusiasm.

"As a pro?" continued the major.

"Wouldn't I jump at the chance," said Bill eagerly.

Cashin Rangers—a First Division team. The "team of all the talents" as certain newspaper scribbles designated them.

"You'd like it?" queried the major. "Paid player, you know?"

Bill was on his feet now, his eyes shining with excitement.

"Like it?" he echoed. "Why, you couldn't offer me anything better. I'm not cut out for office work. Football! Why, major, it seems too good to be true."

"We'll see about that," granted the major. "I'm not chairman of the Rangers for nothing. Besides, we can do with a first class inside-forward. Bill, my lad, you can count on me."

A torrent of thanks burst in an embarrassing flow from Bill's lips, but the major good-naturedly refused to listen to them.

"But, sir," Bill's face became grave again. "You haven't asked me why they cleared me out of Oxford. You're talking a lot of trash—"

"Nonsense!" barked Major Constantine. "They're a lot of ignorant braggarts! I don't care a brass button what they cleared you out for! But they obviously didn't appreciate a good 'un. Say no more, my lad. You'll come along with me to the club in-morrow for a try-out. And if you don't play as you played in that game against Marlborough I'll—I'll speak you!"

### The Try Out!

IT was a tight-hearted six-foot giant that accompanied the stocky major to the Rangers' club next morning. The sun was shining from a cloudless sky, giving an additional gloss to the immense stand and tribunes that greeted the "best piece of turf" in London.

Without loss of time Bill was introduced to the board of directors—a mixed gathering of business men who had not accompanied sports in the hurry and scurry of commercial life. The major's personality predominated, that much was clear at a glance. While the old soldier expounded the merits of his protégé, Bill watched the changing expressions on the faces of the sceptical directors. But the major's words carried such conviction, as he ended his remarks with an invitation to see "the boy" in action, that a general movement was made to the ground-level.

