 Here Again! The 3 Comrades.

**THE RIVALS  
OF ST.  
WINIFRED'S.**

A SPLENDID LONG, COMPLETE  
SCHOOL TALE.



**JACK,  
SAM,  
AND PETE.**

SEE THE STORY ENTITLED,  
"THE VALDA STRIKE."



NO SOONER HAD PETE GOT THE  
JIBBING HORSE FROM THE SHAFTS,  
THAN HE HAD TAKEN ITS PLACE, AND  
RAN THE RAMSHACKLE OLD ENGINE  
TOWARDS THE BLAZING BUILDING,  
SHOUTING "FIRE!" AT THE TOP OF  
HIS VOICE. (See "THE VALDA STRIKE,"  
one of the TWO Long, Complete  
Stories contained in this issue.)

The **MARVEL**

No. 56  
New Series. Containing **TWO POWERFULLONG, COMPLETE STORIES.**



# THE Rivals OF St. Winifreds

A FINE SCHOOL TALE.

By

CHARLES HAMILTON.



## CHAPTER I.

### Dick Esmond's First Day at St. Winifred's.

"NEW boy?"  
"Yes."  
"Which side?"

Dick Esmond looked puzzled at the question. It was his first day at St. Winifred's. He had just put his head into the gymnasium when half a dozen fellows spotted him and surrounded him at once.

The one who addressed him was a lad of about his own age, squarely-built and muscular, with a freckled face and a shock of red hair.

The group of boys seemed to wait for Dick's answer to the freckled youth's question with a great deal of interest.

"I don't understand——" Dick began.

"I mean, which house are you going to enter? I s'pose you know that there are two houses—Ratcliff's and Mr. Duff's?"

Dick's expression brightened.

"Oh, I see! I am going into Ratcliff's House."

Instantly the half dozen youths groaned in chorus.

"A rat! A rat!"

Dick looked at them in amazement. He knew nothing of the manners and customs at St. Winifred's, and he was totally at a loss to account for his strange reception.

"Better teach him manners to begin with, Knowles," exclaimed one, addressing the freckled youth. "I vote that we frog-march him round the gym."

Knowles, who was evidently the leader, nodded cheerfully.

"That's a jolly good idea, Foster! Collar him, chaps!"

And the boys rushed to seize the unlucky new-comer.

Dick Esmond had not the faintest idea to what this sudden hostility was due, but he was by no means disposed to submit to the proposed infliction.

He made a desperate attempt to break away from his tormentors, but he was surrounded, and the odds were too great. But as half a dozen hands were laid upon him he struck out right and left, and Knowles went down in a heap, and Foster went sprawling across him. But then five or six fellows had hold of him, and he was helpless.

Knowles got up rather slowly. A thin stream of crimson was flowing from his nose.

"Crumbs!" he ejaculated, as he mopped the injured organ with a handkerchief. "The rats have got a jolly good recruit, and no mistake! A regular firebrand! What's your name, you little bounder?"

"My name's Dick Esmond."

"Well, Dick Esmond, you must be taught to treat the young gentlemen of Duff's House with a proper and becoming respect, and your first lesson shall be a frog's-march round the gym. Now, chaps! March!"

And they marched. Dick, in spite of his struggles, was powerless. But the march had not proceeded far when a tall young fellow stepped into the gym.

"Hallo, there, you kids! What are you up to now?" he exclaimed, as he perceived what was going on.

"Oh, crumbs, it's Talbot!" exclaimed Knowles, in dismay.

"I say, it's all right, Talbot; we're only showing the new fellow round the gym, you know."

The young captain of St. Winifred's suppressed a smile.

"Do you usually show new-comers round in that way, Knowles?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Knowles unblushingly, "when they belong to Ratcliff's House."

"Oh, I see, you young rascal. It's that ridiculous rivalry of the two houses again. Let him go! Do you hear? Let him go instantly!"

The young gentlemen of Duff's House reluctantly released their victim. Dick escaped from their hands a good deal

crumpled, but otherwise not much the worse for his rough experience.

Talbot beckoned to a boy who was looking curiously in at the door.

"Here, Outram! The new boy belongs to your house. You'd better show him round and explain things to him."

"All right, Talbot!" cheerfully replied Outram, who was a good-looking lad, with blue eyes and an expression of sunny good-temper. "Come along, you new chap. Don't mind those Duffers—they're only Duffers, and they can't help it! We're going to teach 'em manners this term, though, for a measly crowd like that are a disgrace to the school!"

This was said loud enough for the boys of Duff's House to hear, and it is probable that further hostilities would have resulted but for the restraining presence of the captain of St. Winifred's.

"Be off with you!" exclaimed Talbot, laughing.

And Outram and the new boy walked out of the gym.

"I should like to know what all this means," Dick exclaimed.

"Why the dickens did they go for me like a lot of lunatics?"

Outram grinned.

"Of course you're new to St. Winifred's," he said, a little patronisingly. "You don't know the ropes."

"No, I certainly don't."

"You see," explained Outram, "there's always been a keen rivalry between the two houses. Each is always trying to cut the other out. The Duffers—we call 'em Duffers, you know, because they belong to Duff's House, and because they are duffers—well, the Duffers hate us, but we only treat 'em with contempt. We always lick 'em at cricket and football, and it makes 'em wild. We have lots of rows, and it's jolly fun. We mean to give 'em the kybosh this term, and no mistake!"

Dick Esmond began to understand. And it occurred to him that there would be a good deal of fun in the contests between the rival houses of St. Winifred's, and he felt himself already eager for the fray.

"We begin this term, though, with a little bit of bad luck," Sidney Outram went on. "Chilcot's not coming back to St. Winifred's. He was our leader, you know. He was the only chap on our side who could stand up against Cyril Knowles in a fight. The Duffers will crow a bit now, I expect."

"Knowles—that freckled chap?"

"Yes. He's leader of the Duffers," said Outram. "By-the-by, was it you who tapped his claret?"

"Tapped—his what?"

"Damaged his boko."

"Oh, I punched his nose!"

"You must have punched it hard, too, to judge by the look of it," chuckled Outram. "Scott! the chaps on our side will be glad to hear about that! But here we are—this is Ratcliff's House—the top house of St. Winifred's."

And they entered, and Outram showed his protege over the building with a great deal of pride, and introduced him to a number of fellows who had the honour to belong to Ratcliff's House.

## CHAPTER 2.

### A Challenge—The Prefect of Duff's House—A Hot Chase.

DICK ESMOND very quickly fell into the ways of St. Winifred's. Before he had been there twenty-four hours he felt himself heart and soul a Ratcliffite, and as keen a partisan as the "oldest inhabitant."

The feud between the two houses at St. Winifred's was an affair of long standing. New-comers usually entered into the spirit of the thing, and took up the cause of one side or the other with ardour.

The hostilities were confined for the most part to the juniors of

the two houses, the senior boys looking upon the various contests with good-humoured amusement. There was not a trace of malice on either side; the juniors contended in a frank and manly spirit, with plenty of good-nature, and bore no grudges.

Each house claimed to be top house of St. Winifred's, and each fiercely disputed the other's claim, but lately Ratcliff's House had got a little ahead. George Talbot, the captain of the school, belonged to Ratcliff's House, and though there was no favouritism, yet his election to the captainship brought Ratcliff's a good deal of éclat.

Gerald Goring, the head prefect of Duff's House, had tried for the captainship, but he was by no means so popular as Talbot, and he had been beaten at the poll—a circumstance which he never forgot nor forgave. He confided to his immediate cronies that he meant to be captain yet, and all his efforts were directed towards contriving the downfall of Talbot.

Goring owed his position as head of Duff's House mainly to the fact that he was a good all-round sportsman, and played well for St. Winifred's both at cricket and footer. But apart from that he was not much liked. He was a good deal of a bully, and even in his own house he was not popular.

All this and a good deal more Sidney Outram related to his new friend as he showed him over the school. And ere long Dick was, as we have said, as keen a Ratcliffite as any.

"You're to share my study, Esmond," Outram told him the following morning; "Chilcot used to, you know. You'll have his bed in the dormitory, too, next to mine."

It flashed into Dick's mind that he would like Chilcot's place, too, of leader of the juniors of Ratcliff's House. But he did not say anything about that as yet.

The study was also shared by a third boy named Tim O'Malley, a merry Irish lad, to whom Dick took a liking at once. The trio were busy with prep, about six o'clock, when there came a tap at the door.

"Come in!" called out Outram.

To the astonishment of the Ratcliffites, Foster, of Duff's House, entered. A darkened circle round his left eye was a relic of the row in the gymnasium the previous day.

Dick, Outram, and O'Malley stared at the visitor.

"What do you want?" Outram inquired politely. "Don't you know that you measly Duffers ain't allowed on this side?"

"I'm a flag of truce," explained Foster. "I've come to bring a challenge."

"Oh! What sort of a challenge?"

"That new kid had the cheek yesterday to dot old Knowles on the boko—"

"And you in the eye," Dick remarked cheerfully.

"Never mind my eye," said Foster hastily. "It's Cyril Knowles's nose I'm talking about."

"What! Does he want it punched again?"

"He's going to give you a jolly good hiding for your cheek," exclaimed Foster; "and that's what I'm here for. Will you meet him this evening behind the boathouse, with two witnesses? That's what I want to know."

Outram looked at Dick, a little dismayed, though he tried not to show it. Dick was perfectly cool.

"So Knowles wants to fight me?"

"Yes, if you don't back out."

"Oh, there won't be any backing out as far as I am concerned!" said Dick cheerfully. "I'll meet Knowles when and where he likes, with a great deal of pleasure."

Foster grinned. It was evident that he hadn't the least doubt as to the result of the contest.

"All right! Shall we say in half an hour?"

"That'll suit me."

"All serene!"

And Foster went off, grinning.

"Here, I say, Esmond," said Outram dolefully, "I don't half like this. What rotten luck that Chilcot's gone! This means another take-down for Ratcliff's."

Dick smiled quietly.



"Gentlemen of Ratcliff's House!" said Dick. "I am sensible of the honour you have done me, and I accept the post of chief. We'll make Duff's House sit up—we'll lick 'em at football, we'll lick 'em at cricket, and we'll give 'em the kybosh generally." (See page 22.)

"So you think Knowles will lick me, Outram?"  
"Of course. Why, he licked a Fifth Form fellow once. Chilcot was the only chap in the Fourth who could stand up to him. You can't."

"We shall see."  
"I like your pluck, Esmond, and I hope you'll put up a good fight. But I tell you Knowles is a corker."  
"There's some gloves here," said Dick. "Just you shove 'em on for a few minutes, and we'll have a mill or two, to see whether I'm in form."

"All right. No harm in that."  
They took off their jackets and donned the gloves. Outram rather prided himself upon his boxing, though he admitted he wasn't up to Cyril Knowles's form. He wasn't prepared for what happened now. The new boy, quiet as he looked, was "all there." He simply played with Outram, keeping so perfect a guard that his opponent could not touch him, and giving Outram playful taps upon the chest, the chin, or the nose. At length Sidney, amazed and breathless, called halt.

"That'll do!" he exclaimed. "If you box old Knowles like that he'll find you a tough customer, Esmond."

Dick laughed.

"Do you still think he'll lick me?"

"Well, I think you have a chance now."

"So do I, bedad!" exclaimed Tim O'Malley. "My belief is that Esmond will come out best, me boy!"

"I hope so. Tim and I will go with you, Esmond. I suppose Knowles will bring a couple of fellows too. It won't do to have a crowd, you know, or some of the masters or prefects are pretty sure to spot what's going on."

The three boys left the study, and crossed the old elm-shaded quadrangle, and sauntered towards the rippling Wynn, where the old boathouse stood. Near this was a space shaded by a big oak, and almost hidden by other trees, which was the favourite battleground of the St. Winifred's boys, whenever a dispute had to be settled by fisticuffs.

As ill-luck would have it, Gerald Goring spotted the three as they crossed the playing-field.

"Cut along," said Outram, in an undertone. "That's Goring, of Duff's. He likes to fag our side whenever he can, and I can see he's got his eye upon us."

"Are the seniors of Duff's House allowed to fag us?" asked Dick.

Outram made a grimace.

"Well, they ain't supposed to, but they do sometimes, especially Goring. He's a beastly bully."

"Hallo, there, you kids!" exclaimed Goring, coming towards them. "One of you go up to the school and ask Briggs major for my Euclid, and bring it to me. Cut off!"

"Can't," said Dick, before either of the others could reply. "We've got an appointment, Goring."

The coolness of this reply from a junior fairly took the prefect's breath away. He glared at Dick speechlessly.

"You are a new boy?" he said, at length.

Dick gave a nod.

"Then perhaps you don't know whom you are addressing?"

"Oh, yes! You're Goring, ain't you—cock of the walk in Duff's House?"

"Ah, you know all about it, I see! And I suppose you are in Ratcliff's House?"

"Well, rather," said Dick, with emphasis.

"Well, then, you little hound, I'll teach you to pay proper respect to a prefect."

And he made a grab at the new boy. Dick promptly dodged and eluded him.

"Now, keep your wool on, Jerry, old boy!" he exclaimed, in a tone of mild remonstrance.

To be addressed as "Jerry, old boy!" by a junior was a new experience to Gerald Goring. He made a rush at Dick.

"Keep off!" exclaimed Dick, dodging round Outram and O'Malley. "You know you Duffer's ain't allowed to fag us Ratcliff chaps, and I'm going to stick up for my rights, so I warn you! Oh, crikey!"

The last exclamation was uttered as Gerald Goring caught him, and seized his ear, and gave it a vicious twist. But in a moment Dick wriggled himself loose, Goring's grasp relaxing as he received a kick on the shins from the youngster in the struggle. The pain made him howl out, and Dick got away.

"Sorry to hurt you, Jerry," said Dick, rubbing his ear, now fiery in hue, "but you mustn't take liberties with my ears, you know. I bar that. Ah, would you?"

He broke into a run as the infuriated prefect made a spring at him. Goring, cursing under his breath, gave chase. Right across the field they went, Dick, who was a good runner, keeping the lead. But he was running directly towards the river, and it looked as if Goring was certain to have him.

Outram and O'Malley, dismayed and anxious, followed the chase. Dick was close to the water's edge now, and Goring was only a few paces behind. The prefect, wild with rage, was running his hardest.

On the very edge of the water Dick halted and flung himself down. Unable to stop himself in time, Goring went stumbling over him, and plunged headlong into the water. With a mighty splash, he disappeared, and a simultaneous yell of joyous laughter burst from Tim O'Malley and Outram.

Dick picked himself up in a flash and joined his two friends, bursting with merriment.

"Scott!" ejaculated Outram. "You'd better give old Goring a wide berth after that, Dick. Come on!"

They scudded away, turning their backs on the boathouse. When Gerald Goring, panting and puffing, scrambled out of the river, they were vanishing through a hedge. He ground his teeth, and, muttering threats of vengeance, made his way to St. Winifred's for a change of clothing. And when he was gone and the coast was clear, Dick and his friends hurried to the boathouse, where Knowles and two other Duffites impatiently awaited them.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### "Rat" Against "Duffer."

"HERE he is!" exclaimed Foster, as Dick Esmond and his two friends came under the trees behind the boathouse. "We've been waiting for you, slow-coach."

"You must thank your no-class prefect for that," the new boy answered cheerfully.

"What, has Goring got wind of it?" exclaimed Foster.

"What if he has?" said Cyril Knowles. "He wouldn't interfere to prevent a Rat getting thumped."

"Oh, no, he doesn't know anything about this," said Dick coolly. "He was cheeky, that's all, and I had to give him a ducking."

The three Duffites looked at each other. What kind of a new boy was this, who talked of ducking Gerald Goring, the prefect of Duff's House, second only to George Talbot at St. Winifred's?

"I say, you're talking rot, you know!" said Knowles uneasily. "And, look here, if you're ready, I am."

"I'm ready and willing," Dick answered promptly.

And, without more ado, the two boys "peeled," and faced one another.

When they stood face to face the advantage seemed to be with Knowles. He was quite six months older than Dick, and a couple of inches taller. He was well known at St. Winifred's as a boxer.

But Dick's manner expressed a cool confidence which was encouraging to his two friends, though there was nothing of "bounce" in his manner.

"Buck up!" said Foster. "Get through with it before some beastly prefect is down on us."

And the adversaries set to with a will.

Knowles, labouring under the delusion that he had only just to "wade in" to knock the new Ratcliffian into the middle of next week, or still further along the calendar, led off with a smart attack.

Dick gave ground a little at first, and then suddenly making a feint with his left, put his right fairly on Cyril's nose, and the leader of Duff's juniors went to grass in a startlingly abrupt fashion.

Foster picked him up. A copious stream of blood was flowing from his nose, and he looked dazed.

"Say, old man, what did you let him do that for?" was Foster's consoling inquiry.

Knowles looked vicious.

"Do you think I let him do it on purpose?" he demanded.

"Well—"

"Don't be an ass!"

"That was nobby, Esmond!" exclaimed Outram, patting his principal on the back. "Keep that up, and you'll knock the Duffer out in no time."

"Bedad, and he will!" said O'Malley. "Didn't I say so entirely, now?"

"Will he?" ejaculated Knowles, who overheard the remark.

"We'll see about that, you Rats! Come on, Ratty!"

They began the second round. Cyril's over-weening confidence was gone now. He fought with care, and all the skill that he was capable of. And this time it was Dick who went to grass, though not before he had severely punished his adversary.

"Good!" was Outram's verdict, as he sponged his principal's face after the round. "I can see you're a game 'un. Keep it up."

"I did him that time, Bob," said Cyril Knowles to his second.

Foster nodded, but did not reply. He looked as he felt—very dubious. The round had been fiercely contested, and though Knowles had had the best of it, he was panting and fagged.

"Struck dumb all of a sudden, you image?" Knowles asked pleasantly.

"Well, you did him, Cyril, but be careful in the next round."

Ratcliff's House would grow ever so something awful if you should be licked."

"Licked—by that kid!"

"Well, be careful."

"Rats!"

And as it the combatants went again, Cyril had been rendered angry instead of cautious by his second's advice, and he forced the fighting hard. Dick Esmond received two or three heavy drives which made him stagger. But, watching his opportunity, he planted his right fist in Knowles's eye, and as the Duffite reeled followed it up with his left on the jaw, and Cyril went down with a thump on the grass.

"Bravo!" shouted Outram, in delight.

"Arrah, now, and isn't he a broth of a boy?" cried O'Malley, flinging up his cap.

"How do you feel, Dick?"

"Fit as a fiddle!" Dick replied cheerfully.

"I'll bet Knowles doesn't."

Knowles had been picked up by Foster and Jones, and he was sitting on the latter's knee, while Foster sponged his bruised face. He looked decidedly groggy.

"Time!" called out O'Malley.

Foster looked anxiously at his chief.

"Going on, old man?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"My advice is—"

"Blow your advice!"

Foster shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all right! Get on, then!"

He had no more hope of seeing his chief lick the terrible new boy. But Knowles would not admit to himself what all the others could see.

The fourth round was rather tame, both of them being a little breathless and the worse for wear. But the fifth round was a fierce one.

Knowles stood on the defensive at first, but the new boy attacked fiercely, and twice his fists reached Cyril's face. Then Cyril fought his hardest, and terrific blows were given and received. The Duffite chief was game to the last, but the lookers-on could see that the new boy was steadily getting the better of him. And at last, with a terrible right-hander, straight from the shoulder, Dick laid his adversary upon the ground, from which he was unable to rise without Foster's assistance.

"I—I'm done!" he gasped. "I can't go on!"

Dick wasn't in much better condition, but he was ready to toe the mark again, if necessary.

"We give in," said Foster glumly.

And he chucked up the sponge.

Dick walked across to his late adversary and held out his hand.

"Shake, old chap!" he said. "We've had a good tussle, but I hope there's no malice on either side."

Cyril Knowles hesitated for a moment. His defeat was bitter to him. But he was a good fellow at heart. He grinned faintly, and put out his hand and shook Dick's cordially enough.

"All right, old man," he said. "I don't care. We don't bear malice, but we're going to give you Ratcliff chaps a high old time this term, and don't you forget it!"

"We'll try and give you as good as you send," laughed Dick.

And so they separated.

#### CHAPTER 4.

#### Goring Seeks Vengeance—A Lively Scene—Exit Goring!

IN the juniors' common-room at Ratcliff's House there was only one topic that evening—the fight behind the boathouse, and Dick Esmond's victory over the chief of Duff's juniors.

The victory caused great excitement, and the new boy had jumped into popularity at a bound. He received quite an ovation from the jubilant Ratcliffites, but he bore his blushing honours with becoming modesty. He also bore a black eye and a fine assortment of cuts and bruises, which considerably impaired his beauty.

These traces of the combat caught the eye of Mr. Ratcliff, the house-master.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" he asked severely, stopping Dick as he walked into the quad on his return. "You have been fighting."

"Yes, sir," assented Dick.

"With whom?"

"One of the Duffers, sir."

"Ah, some more of this absurd disputing between the two houses, I suppose."

"Yes, sir. We're going to knock 'em sick this term," said Dick cheerfully.

"You must not speak like that," said Mr. Ratcliff, trying

hard not to smile. "You will write fifty lines for fighting; or stay, as you are new here, I shall overlook your offence. But take care, sir—take care!"

And Mr. Ratcliff, looking very severe, marched off, only to burst into a laugh as soon as the boys were out of hearing.

"He seems a decent sort, Outram," Dick remarked.

"So he is, and so is Mr. Duff, the house-master of the other side. Of course, he's bound to take notice of fighting; but I knew he'd let you off. I wish I felt as easy about Goring."

"Why, what do you think he'll do?"

"He'll never forgive that tumble in the river. You'll hear from him soon, I expect."

"Well, I shall have to stand it, I suppose," said Dick carelessly. "I'm not sorry I did it."

Later in the evening Sidney Outram's prediction was verified. The common-room was in a full buzz of talk about the fight and the downfall of the chief of the Duffites, when a head was put in at the door, and a pair of spiteful eyes looked over the groups of youngsters in search of Dick.

"Hallo," exclaimed Thwaite, "there's a Duffer!"

It was Goring. Seeing Dick, he advanced into the room, an evil expression upon his face.

Every eye was upon him at once. It was so unusual for a boy belonging to one house to venture into the sacred precincts of the other that the juniors were all amazed by this visit; but, the visitor being a Sixth Form senior, they did not quite know how to resent the intrusion.

"Ah, you Rat! I've caught you, have I?"

And Goring made a dash towards Dick Esmond. Dick promptly dodged round a table.

"Now, Jerry, don't lose your temper," he admonished. "Just be calm, and tell us what you want."

"I'm going to give you the biggest hiding you ever had in your life," snarled Goring, glaring at him across the table.

"Rats!" answered Dick, with provoking coolness. "You've no business here, Jerry. Chaps, are we going to stand his cheek? This is a respectable house; no dogs or Duffers admitted. Now, Jerry, off with you before we chuck you out!"

Gerald Goring panted with rage. He made a rush round the table to get at Dick, but the new boy, wisely declining to come to close quarters with the big bully, dodged him nimbly, and twice round the table they went, till Goring stopped, panting and furious. The boys around were shouting with laughter, and he realised that he was making an exhibition of himself.

Sidney Outram had quietly slipped out to fetch Talbot. For a senior of Duff's to invade Ratcliff's House to punish a boy belonging to it was a breach of all the laws written and unwritten at St. Winifred's, and he knew that the captain of the school would have something to say about it.

"You young cub!" hissed Goring. "I'll break your neck as soon as I get held of you!"

"First catch your hare," said Dick coolly. "It's no good, Jerry. Better chuck it, old boy."

"Oh, you little hound!"

And Goring, giving up in despair the idea of catching the lively junior, tried to scramble over the table. As he did so somebody threw a dictionary, which caught him on the side of the head with a fearful clump. He flashed round, glaring with rage—just in time to catch an inkpot on the bridge of his nose. The fluid ran down his

face and shirt-front, and a good deal of it into his mouth, and he spluttered and swore at a fearful rate.

Just as he seemed about to "run amuck" amongst the laughing juniors, Talbot came in with Outram.

"Hallo, hallo, there!" exclaimed the captain, in his cheery way. "What's the row here? What's up, Goring?"

"Look at my face!" howled Goring. "Is that how you teach your brats to treat a senior?"

"Ha, ha! I'm sorry. You do look a sight, certainly. But what's the matter?"

"I came here to thrash Esmond—"

"You had no right to do that," said Talbot quietly. "You know perfectly well, Goring, that I keep order in my own house, and that the prefects of one house are not allowed to interfere with what goes on in the other. You know that as well as I do. I've had complaints a good many times about you and your set fagging the youngsters on this side. It's not playing the game, and I tell you plainly it's got to be stopped."

"Who's going to stop it?" asked Goring, with a sneer.

"I am," said Talbot, still quietly.

"Do you know what that brat has done to me, Talbot?"

broke out Goring, changing the subject.

"I didn't know he had done anything."

"He shoved me into the river."

"Is this true?" said Talbot, turning to Dick.

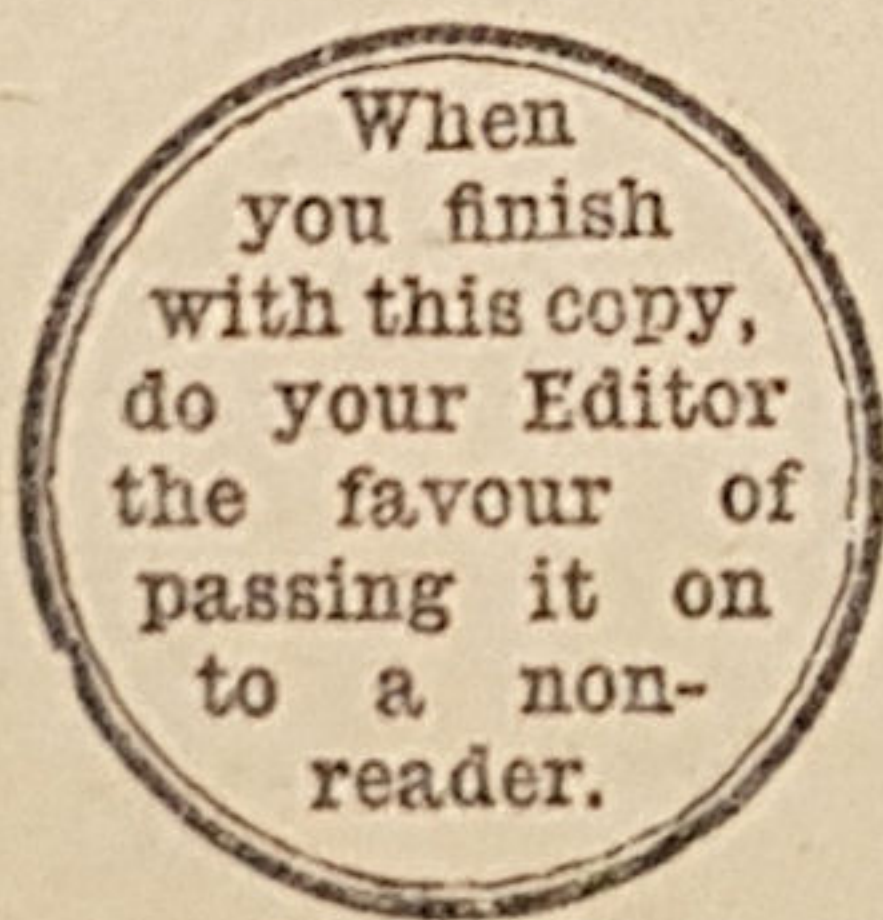
"Does that mean that you doubt my word, George Talbot?"

cried Goring passionately.

"I must hear what the youngster has to say."

"He will tell lies, of course."

"You've no right to suppose so. Answer me, Esmond."



"I tripped him up, and he went in," Dick confessed frankly. "He was chasing me. He wanted to fag me, and I wasn't taking any. P'raps I cheeked him a bit—but then, he bullied us."

"I see how it is, Goring," said Talbot. "You were interfering with the youngsters of Ratcliff's House. I don't approve of the young 'uns cheeking the seniors, but I can't blame the kids for standing up for their rights. I used to when I was in the fourth. Why can't you be satisfied to fag Duff's boys, and let our side alone?"

"Of course, I knew that you'd back the whelp up in his insubordination, Talbot," hissed Goring. "You'd stand up for anything that was done against our house, and you set the kids on to cheek the Sixth Form."

"That's not true, and you know it, Goring."

"It's true, but it won't be stood long. You've given yourself too many airs since you got in as captain——"

"I think you've said quite enough, Goring," interrupted Talbot. "Don't you think that you'd better be getting back to your own quarters?"

"I shall not go until I have thrashed that cheeky young scoundrel——"

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense—eh? I'll show you."

Goring had completely lost his temper now, and he had thrown discretion to the winds. He made a rush towards Dick. Talbot's brow flushed up at this defiance of his authority on his own ground. He made a rapid stride forward and laid a heavy hand upon Goring's shoulder.

"Goring, please understand——"

"Hands off!"

"You shall not touch that boy," said the captain, tightening his grip.

"Let go! Take that, then!"

And the prefect's clenched fist was dashed full into the captain's face.

A thrill almost of horror ran through the eager crowd of juniors. He had struck Talbot—the captain of the school!

Talbot's face turned scarlet; then deadly pale. With one twist of his arm, he sent Goring reeling, and stumbling through the doorway, to fall in a heap in the corridor outside.

He was up again in a moment. Talbot sprang towards him with blazing eyes.

"Get out! Do you hear? Get out, or, prefect as you are, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

And Goring thought it better to go. He slunk away, muttering hatred and vengeance.

## CHAPTER 5.

### A Glimpse of a Plot—A Ratcliff Raid.

THE scene between the captain of the school and the head prefect of Duff's House, of course, became the talk of St. Winifred's. Most of those who discussed it expected the affair to go further, but, by the efforts of some of the Sixth Form of both houses, peace was patched up. A "row" between the captain and the prefect was, of course, a serious matter, which the masters would have had to take notice of, and when Gerald Goring calmed down he saw that he had gone too far, and that he was too hopelessly in the wrong to risk an inquiry by the Doctor. So he sent an apology finally to Talbot, and the two shook hands in public.

But the reconciliation, though it tided over an awkward situation, left them no better friends than before. Honest, frank George Talbot had an instinctive contempt for the bullying prefect, and he knew that Goring hated him, and would never forgive him for having won the captainship. And, in Gerald Goring's heart, envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness ranked more bitterly than ever.

He hated Talbot because he was frank and brave and true, as reptiles hate the light; because he was captain of St. Winifred's—because he was popular—almost as popular in Duff's House as in his own. He hated him for these reasons, and for a score of others; and since the altercation in the juniors' room that night his hatred had grown more deadly.

How to revenge himself upon the one he chose to consider his enemy—how to hurl Talbot from his position in the school—that was the problem which he set himself to solve, and which he discussed with his chums—two or three fellows like himself, given to bullying and petty tyranny—vices which, since Talbot had been elected captain, they were not allowed to indulge so freely as of old, and who therefore felt for Talbot the mingled fear and dislike usually felt by mean natures for a brave, strong one.

It was a few days after the "row" that Dick and Outram, coming up the lane from the school towards the village, spied Goring and his crony, Gibson, walking towards them. Although the prefect had not taken notice of Dick since the "row," the boy felt pretty sure that he would not let slip this opportunity, so, as soon as he caught sight of Goring, he jerked Outram

aside and bundled him through the hedge. There they took cover, and waited for the two seniors to pass. "I don't think they've seen us, Sid," said Dick. "No; I'm sure they haven't. They're talking mighty solemnly over something, and they haven't looked up."

The two seniors, apparently deeply interested in their talk, were walking slowly, and they came on without the least suspicion that the two juniors had taken cover behind the hedge. And, as they came nearer, the two boys could not help hearing what they said. The first words they distinguished were spoken by Gibson.

"I say, it would be frightfully risky, old fellow."

"I don't care," burst out Goring fiercely—"I don't care, Gibson! I tell you I'll set him down! I hate him more now than ever I did before, the consequential prig! I'll bring him down if I get expelled from St. Winifred's in doing it!"

"I don't like him any more than you do, Gerald. I'd rather have almost any other chap for captain. But he's there now, and he's safe enough. We could get up a movement, a petition, or something, if he wasn't so confoundedly popular. But he is, Gerald. He's liked by both houses; it's only our set that's against him, and——"

"I know all that as well as you do, and I know we can't settle his hash by fair means. Well, then, we'll do it by foul. I'll crush him! I'll disgrace him! And I can do it——"

They passed out of earshot. Dick and Outram looked at each other, each with a rather scared expression.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Outram at length.

"A precious lot of rascals!" exclaimed Dick. "It was Talbot they were talking about, of course."

"Of course. Goring's got his knife into him."

"I wonder what plot they've got afoot. I wish we had heard more. We really ought to put Talbot on his guard."

Sidney Outram shook his head.

"No good, Dick. He wouldn't listen to us, and it would look like telling tales. But we can keep our eyes open."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, come on, or we sha'n't be at the tuck-shop before Mother Brown has sold out all her fresh tarts."

And they hurried on up the lane to the quaint old village of Slowcome, which, as it was a half-holiday, was within bounds to-day.

The tuck-shop was pretty full of boys from St. Winifred's, and two or three were lounging in the doorway. Dick recognised Foster among them. A trap, with a sleepy-looking old horse, was standing in front of the shop, evidently waiting for someone who had gone inside.

"That's old Souther's trap and geegee," Outram remarked. "Somebody's got it out for the afternoon. O'Malley and I had it once last term, and Duff's cads ambushed us with peashooters, and gave us a hot time up the lane. Scott! we were glad to get out of it, I tell you."

While Outram was speaking, Knowles came out of the tuck-shop carrying a basket, which he placed in the trap, and then went back into Mother Brown's.

A flash of mischief darted into Dick's eyes.

"Come on, Sid. That's our game!"

"Who—what?"

"Don't you see? The Duffers have got the trap; old Knowles has shoved in it the tommy for a picnic——"

"What about it?"

"Why, we're going to raid it, that's all. Come on! I tell you we're going to collar the trap."

"All right! I'm game."

Outram was heart and soul in the enterprise at once. If it succeeded, it would be about the biggest "rise" they had ever succeeded in taking out of the Duffers.

They ran towards the trap. Knowles and Jones were coming out of the tuck-shop, each carrying a bag of oranges in his hand.

"I say, Rats, what are you up to?" shouted Knowles as Dick put his foot on the step and sprang into the trap, while Outram scrambled up behind.

Dick did not take the trouble to answer. He snatched up the reins and the whip, and gave the horse a flick. Old Tom started out of his daydreams and began to trot off.

Knowles, Foster, and Jones seemed for a moment or two quite petrified by this daring raid. But as the trap moved off they rushed desperately forward, howling out terrific threats. Dick whipped up the horse, and old Tom went down the village street at a pace he had seldom shown before, with the three Duffites in hot pursuit, and innumerable village boys and dogs joining in the chase.

Outram sat facing the rear and making faces at the pursuers. The Duffites made tremendous efforts to overtake the trap. But in vain!

"Pelt 'em—pelt the cads!" panted Knowles.

He grabbed an orange out of his bag and hurled it with deadly aim. It was a bullseye. Squash it went into Outram's grinning face and bowled him out. He collapsed. Then one from Foster's hand—Foster was a good over-arm bowler—caught Dick on the back of the head, pitching him forward.

He saved himself, unavoidably jerking upon the reins, and old Tom at once slowed down.

"Now's the time!" yelled Knowles.

And, putting on a spurt, he and Foster reached the trap and hung on behind, trying to climb in.

"Keep her going, Dick!" shouted Outram. "I'll manage these rotters!"

"All right, old son!" answered Dick cheerfully; and he drove on at a spanking rate.

With their boots scraping and clattering on the ground, the two Duffites hung on desperately.

"Yah, trying to collar our grub!" gasped Knowles. "Just like you Ratcliff Rats!"

"Do you want the tommy?"

"Yes; and we're going to have it!"

"Here's some of it, then!"

And Outram, having picked a nice plump jam-tart out of the basket, slammed the same down upon Knowles's upturned face as he hung on behind.

"Oh—ah—ooch!"

Poor Knowles let go his hold and went down into the dust, blinded by jam.

"Will you have one?" asked Outram politely. "Or perhaps you'd like some lemonade?"

And he proceeded to pour a bottle of that refreshing beverage over the head of Foster.

"I'll pay you out for this!" howled Foster as he dropped into the road.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Outram. "Who scores this time—eh? Duff's or Ratcliff's? Go home, Duffers! Ha, ha!"

And the trap rattled on, soon disappearing from the sight of the hapless Duffites. Knowles and Foster picked themselves up, looking decidedly sheepish. Knowles's face was caked with jam and dust, and Foster's hair was like a wet mop with lemonade. They looked so utterly funny that the village boys, forming an admiring circle round them, howled with laughter.

"Haw, haw, haw! Doan't uns look a soight, Jarge? Haw haw, haw!"

"Get out of the way, you yokels!" exclaimed Knowles; and he strode off, but the crowd followed.

The village of Slowcome had never seen a sight like that before, and naturally they wanted to make the most of it. Not until the boys had gained the shelter of the tuck-shop, where they implored Mother Brown to let them clean themselves, did the village tag-rag and bobtail leave them in peace.

Meanwhile, the raiders were enjoying themselves. A drive through the pleasant lanes, a feast upon the contents of the basket, and the consciousness of a triumph over the rival house at St. Winifred's made them naturally jubilant. They had "done" the Duffers—completely done them—and they were determined never to let Duff's House hear the end of it.

CHAPTER 6.

A Narrow Escape and a Collision—In the Enemy's Hands—A Trying Ordeal.

WHEN the two Ratcliffites entered the quadrangle at St. Winifred's just before calling-over, Knowles and Foster and a lot of Duffites were ready for them. Dick saw the enemy as he passed the gates.

"Scott! we shall have to run the gauntlet, Sid!" he said. "Old Knowles and his lot are there in force waiting for us! Come on! Pluck does it."

"I'm ready."

And they made a rush for the entrance of Ratcliff's House, across the old elm-shaded quadrangle.

"There they are!" shouted Knowles. "Rats! Rats! Sneaks! Sock it into 'em!"

The two Ratcliffians, with a desperate charge, broke



"I think he'll do," said Jones, as he finished his artistic labours. "Crumbs! Won't some of the Rats stare when they see their precious leader?" (See page 22.)

through the swarming Duffites, though not without a good many thumps, and gained Ratcliff's House. The Duffites pursued them up to the very doorstep. Dick and his chum bolted in blindly, and the next moment there was a yell and a fall.

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Dick, horrified.

Mr. Ratcliff had been coming out of his study, and Dick had butted right into him, sending him sprawling. But with great presence of mind he rushed to the fallen master to assist him to rise.

"I hope you're not hurt, sir," he said meekly. "I'm very sorry I cannoned you, sir."

"Oh—sh—er!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff as he stood up rather unsteadily. "What do you mean, sir, by bolting into the house in that reckless manner?"

The Duffites outside heard the master's voice, and melted away into thin air.

"I'm very sorry, sir," stammered Dick. "I—I was in a great hurry, sir."

"And why were you in a great hurry?"

"It's time for calling-over, sir," Dick said diplomatically.

He didn't want to betray the Duffites or to tell a lie, and that reply seemed to hit the happy medium.

"Ah, you were in a hurry not to be late for calling-over? Under the circumstances I will excuse you, but please be more careful in the future."

And Mr. Ratcliff was turning away, when Dick blurted out:

"No, sir; I'd—I'd rather not deceive you, Mr. Ratcliff. I had forgotten all about calling-over when I bolted in."

Mr. Ratcliff stared at him, while Sydney Outram gave a little gasp of dismay.

"Why—what—Esmond! I certainly congratulate you upon your frankness. Will you have the kindness, then, to tell me why you came in like a wild Indian?"

Dick was silent.

A slight smile broke over the house-master's face. He had heard shouting in the quad, and he guessed the truth.

"Never mind, Esmond. I am very pleased to see that you scorn a lie. You may go."

And Dick, somewhat surprised at escaping so easily, hastened away with his chum.

"Oh, you little Georgie Washington! Where's your little hatchet?" gurgled Outram.

But Dick's face was serious.

"I couldn't take him in, Sid, when I saw that he trusted to my word. It went against the grain somehow."

Sidney slapped him on the back.

"Of course it did, old chap! I was only joking. But come on, or we shall be late."

As it was, they were just in time to answer "Adsum!" when Smith, the prefect, called their names.

The next morning there were some gloomy faces over in Duff's House. The story of how the Ratcliff boys had "dished" the Duffite chief was all over St. Winifred's. And whenever a Ratcliffite met a Duffite some joking allusion to it was made.

And Knowles's temper wasn't improved by a letter which he received by the morning's post. It contained a postal order to pay for the pecuniary loss the Duffites had been put to, and an extremely laconic note in Dick Esmond's handwriting—"Many thanks."

"Hang him!" growled Knowles. "I'd have given twice the amount for it not to have happened. We shall never hear the last of it until we've done something to take those rotters down a peg."

"We must do something!" exclaimed Foster resolutely. "We must get our own back somehow."

And the leaders of Duff's juniors put their heads together and plotted a plot.

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CHAPTER 7.

Cornered—A Sad Surrender.

**E**XASPERATED as the Ratcliff boys were by the indignity to which their chief had been subjected, few of them could help laughing at the ridiculous figure he had cut as he marched across the quadrangle painted and placarded. All through the evening the boys talked about it, with many a grin and chuckle, and Dick was chaffed without mercy. It was the biggest hit the Duffites had ever made, and Dick saw his ascendancy in jeopardy unless he did something to recover his prestige. And so he took counsel with his chums, Foster and O'Malley.

The Duffites, of course, made the most of the affair, and never met any of the Ratcliffites without an allusion to it. But Dick's opportunity came at last.

One day after afternoon school he was strolling with Outram along the river, when he suddenly stopped and drew his companion into the cover of a group of willows. Outram looked at him inquiringly.

"What's up, Dick?"

"Just look!"—and Dick pointed.

Some distance out in the river was a little island, where the boys of St. Winifred's were fond of fishing. Dick had caught sight of Knowles and Foster and Jones sitting there with their rods. Under the willows a few yards from the anglers a boat was tied to a stump.

"Well, what's the game?" asked Outram.

Dick grinned.

"Don't you see? I know very well that old Knowles can't swim, and the others—"

"They can't either."

"Well, where would they be if somebody collared their boat?" queried Dick.

"On the island."

"Yes, ass, of course they'd be on the island—with no chance of getting off it!"

"But how can you get hold of the boat?"

"I can swim like a fish."

"If they saw you coming—"

"They won't."

And Dick began to strip under the willows. He stepped into the water some distance above the island and let the current carry him down to it, a few strokes carrying him far enough out. Sidney watched him anxiously as he disappeared into the bushes on the island. The fishermen evidently had no suspicion of the invasion. But to get to the boat Dick would have to pass very near them. Sidney watched the willows where the boat was moored. He soon saw a head appear amongst them. Then, with a sudden bound, a figure sprang out into the boat, a knife flashed on the painter, and vigorous push sent the boat out from the shore. The deed was done!

The three Duffites started up in amazement. But the boat was beyond their reach. Dick had got

hold of the oars, and was vigorously pulling towards the bank, where Outram awaited him.

"Hi, there! What are you up to? Bring back that boat!" shouted Knowles.

Dick didn't take the trouble to reply. He ran the boat on the bank, and Outram seized the painter. Then Dick sprang ashore, and began to rub himself dry, as far as it could be done with a couple of pocket-handkerchiefs, and then donned his clothes.

All the while, the Duffites on the island kept up a volleying of threats, entreaties, and abuse, none of which had the slightest effect upon the Ratcliffites. At length Knowles gave it up in despair.

"What the dickens are we to do?" he exclaimed. "I can't swim, and you chaps can't. We're prisoners here unless they send us back the boat."

"And they won't do that," said Jones.

"No. I say, they've got us this time."

"Try and make terms with them," suggested Foster.

"I s'pose there's nothing else to be done." The chief of Duff's juniors raised his voice again. "Hallo, there!"

"Hallo!" called back Dick, who had by this time finished dressing. "Hallo, Duffers!"

"We want that boat."

"Really?"

"We must have it."

"Rats!"

"Will you come to terms? We'll own ourselves done."

"Not good enough," said Dick decisively.

"What do you want, then?" asked Knowles, looking

uneasy.

"You're licked, ain't you?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, you must sign a document to that effect—all three of you—something in this style. 'We three stupid Duffers

confess ourselves licked, and we beg the pardon of the gentlemen of Ratcliff's House for having been impertinent to them upon various occasions. And you must all sign it.'

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Outram. But it did not seem a laughing matter to the unfortunate Duffites.

"I'll see you hanged first!" roared Knowles, in a rage.

"All right. I won't persuade you. Come on, Sid. We'll have a row up the river."

"Stop a bit," called out Knowles. "You've got us at a disadvantage, Esmond. If we stay here we sha'n't be able to do our prep, and we shall get into a row to-morrow."

"Thank your own obstinacy for that."

"Let us have the boat, and—"

"On the condition I've named; no other."

"We've no pen or ink here, or paper," pleaded Knowles.

"I've a fountain-pen and a pocket-book."

"But—"

"No more buts. Do you agree?"

Knowles looked

dismally at his chums.

"You can't do anything else," said Jones.



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"We can't stay here all night," declared Foster. "We shall have to give in, then. We'll give him the paper, but we'll raid Ratcliff's House some time and get it back."

He called out to Dick:

"We'll do it, Esmond!"

"That's sensible. I'll check the pocket-book and the pen across to you. You'll write it plainly, and put your usual signature, or the bargain's off. And no tricks when I bring you the boat, you know. It's a truce back to St. Winifred's. Promise?"

"We promise."

"All serene!"

And Dick wrapped up the pocket-book and the fountain-pen in his cap, tied it up with string, and pitched the bundle across to the island. Knowles picked it up.

It was a bitter pill for the Duffites to swallow, but there was no help for it. The words dictated by Esmond were written out upon a blank sheet, and signed by the three juniors of Duff's. Then the pen and the pocket-book were returned in the same manner.

Dick opened it, and read out the confession of surrender:

"We three stupid Duffers confess ourselves licked, and we beg the pardon of the gentleman of Ratcliff's House for having been impertinent to them upon various occasions.

"Cyril Knowles.

"Robert Foster.

"Edward Jones."

The two Ratcliffites laughed loud and long.

"Take it, Sid, and cut off to the school," said Dick. "The founders have given their word, but I don't want to tempt them."

And off went Outram.

"Thank you, Duffers," said Dick, politely. "That will do nicely. Now you can have your boat. I shall have that valuable document framed and hung up in my study."

"He'll do it, too," muttered Knowles to his chums. "But it won't hang there long. But mum's the word about that."

Dick punted across to the island, and took the three Duffites and their tackle aboard.

"Had much sport?" he asked pleasantly.

"No," was the short reply.

The truce was observed—to the credit of the Duffites be it said, for the temptation was strong to pitch the grinning Ratcliffite into the river. And it was with doleful faces that the three fishers returned to St. Winifred's.

## CHAPTER 8.

### A Bold Venture—An Encounter and a Mystery.

DICK kept his word. The document signed by Knowles, Foster, and Jones was pasted upon a sheet of cardboard, and placed in a gorgeous gilt frame, from which a portrait of Lord Kitchener had been ejected for the purpose. It hung in the study which was shared by the three leaders of the Ratcliff juniors, and every youngster in the house grinned and chuckled before it time and again.

It was regarded as an irreclaimable confession of inferiority by the Duffites—a proof in black and white that Ratcliff's was the top house at St. Winifred's.

The juniors of Duff's House were, of course, about as wild as they could be. That confession of defeat in their leader's handwriting was a standing humiliation to them, and the jokes of their rivals about it goaded them to fury. Knowles's position was shaken, and he knew that he either had to get that document back or resign the leadership of Duff's juniors. But to penetrate the enemy's fortress was no easy task.

He talked it over with his chums. A night attack could scarcely be carried out without interference by either prefect or masters. And in the daylight it would be impossible to penetrate to Esmond's study unobserved. At length Knowles decided to go alone upon the enterprise at a late hour, and effect by stratagem what could not be done by force.

And a few nights later a golden opportunity occurred. To reach Dick's study he would have to pass Talbot's door, and the captain of the school generally kept his door open after the juniors had gone to bed, to see that none of the youngsters came down on surreptitious errands. It was this circumstance which had made Knowles long hesitate. But upon this particular night the captain was absent, having been allowed to visit an uncle who was ill. He was to return the following morning. Evidently this was Knowles's opportunity. He was in luck.

As Goring was just as watchful for delinquent juniors as Talbot, Knowles had decided to leave the dormitory by a rope from the window. Late that night, when only the elders were supposed to be awake, he slid down the rope and reached the ground.

"All right?" whispered Foster from above.

"All right. Watch for me."

"You bet."

And Foster cautiously pulled in the rope. Knowles, keeping close to the buildings, reached Ratcliff's House, and in a few moments was ascending the dim staircase with cautious steps, the juniors' studies being on the first floor. No one was about, and he gained the upper corridor unobserved.

He paused and looked along it. No light came from Talbot's door—but—he looked again—yes, it was open! Why was the door open when Talbot was away? the boy wondered, puzzled. Was anybody there? It was not likely.

At any rate, he was in for it now. With beating heart he stole along the corridor upon tiptoe.

Then his heart gave a great leap as he drew nearer to Talbot's door. For a sound came from the dark room, which told him that somebody was there. He stopped, and, acting upon the first impulse that came to him, silently opened one of the study doors on his left, and stepped quickly inside. He partly closed the door, keeping it about an inch ajar, and watched the dimly-lit corridor.

He wanted to see when the coast was clear, so that he could safely proceed. Besides that, his curiosity was aroused, and he was vaguely uneasy. The captain's bedroom and study adjoined; but what could anybody want in either while Talbot was away, and without a light, too? Could it be a burglar?

He had waited nearly five minutes before a figure emerged from Talbot's room and came silently down the corridor towards the stairs. As he passed under a gas-burner, the startled Knowles obtained a clear view of his features. It was Gerald Goring—as white as death!

He passed on quickly and disappeared down the stairs. Knowles came out into the corridor, trembling a little. The look upon Goring's face had frightened him. What had the prefect been doing in Talbot's study? What was he doing in Ratcliff's House at all? Why did he look like that?

Knowles was deeply disturbed. He knew how Gerald Goring hated Talbot, and he had not too high an opinion of the prefect. He felt that there was something mysterious afoot, though he could not guess in the least what it was.

As he passed Talbot's bedroom, he opened the door and glanced in. The blind was up, and the pale moonlight streamed into the room. He could see nothing unusual in its aspect.

He hurried on. Whatever the mystery was he felt that he could not fathom it.

A few minutes later he was in Dick's study. He struck a match and at once his eyes fell upon the trophy of victory. He took down the frame and carried it to the window, where in the starlight, which was sufficient for his purpose, he scraped the paper off the cardboard with his penknife, destroying almost every vestige of the document of surrender. This done, he took a brush from his pocket, and, dipping it into Dick's inkpot, wrote one word across the scraped board, in large capitals:

"RATS!"

He chuckled as he thought of the feelings of the Ratcliffites when they viewed it upon the following morning. He restored the frame to its place on the wall, and left the study. Five minutes later he had quitted Ratcliff's House as cautiously as he entered it.

His chums were on the watch at the dormitory window. The rope came sliding down, and Knowles knotted it under his arms, and, with a dead lift effort, the Duffites got him back into the dormitory.

"All right?" asked Foster.

"All!" And Knowles gave a description of his proceedings in Esmond's study. A chorus of chuckles answered him, as the Duffites thought of the discomfiture of Dick and his friends on the morrow.

But of the encounter with Goring Knowles did not say a word. It was not till the next day, when he was alone with his two friends, that he confided the strange circumstance to Foster and Jones. Both were equally amazed.

"It looks awfully queer," Foster said slowly. "You chose last night to visit Esmond's study because Talbot was away, and it looked as if Goring chose it for the same reason."

"Yes, it does. But what could he want there?"

"That's too deep for me."

"Better keep mum," suggested Jones. "Goring clearly didn't want to be seen, and he's likely to cut up rusty if he finds out that you spotted him."

"Yes—that's true enough, Ned; but I wish I knew what it all meant. I can't help thinking that there's something underhand in it. Gerald Goring's just the chap to bring discredit upon Duff's House, and give those Ratcliff rats something to crow over us about. Hang it! What did the fellow want in Talbot's quarters?"

But none of them could find a satisfactory answer to the question, though a new and terrible light was shortly to be thrown upon it.

**NEXT WEEK!**

**"FRANK DUDLEY, DETECTIVE," and JACK, SAM, AND PETE.**

## CHAPTER 9.

False Friendship—The Missing Banknote—Dark  
Suspensions.

"YOU wanted to see me, Goring?" Talbot spoke in his usual frank, cheery way as he entered Gerald Goring's study. Goring nodded, but he did not meet the eyes of the young captain of St. Winifred's.

"Yes, Talbot. Sit down, will you?" The prefect's manner was unusually cordial. "I want to speak to you about——"

"I say, Goring"—Gibson put in his head at the door—"can you come here a minute? Oh, you're engaged, I see! Excuse me!"

"Don't mind me," said Talbot.

"Well, just pardon me a minute, then," said Goring.

And he went out of the study.

In a few minutes he returned.

"Sorry I've kept you waiting!" he said.

"That's all right, You were saying——"

"Ah, yes! It strikes me that that ridiculous rivalry between the two houses is getting out of hand," Goring went on. "It gets worse every term. It seems to me that it's time the seniors of both houses put their heads together in a friendly spirit to do something to put a stop to it. Don't you think so?"

"Well," said Talbot slowly, "I don't wholly disapprove of that rivalry, for it keeps the youngsters up to the mark in many respects. Still, I admit that it's carried too far sometimes. I'm glad, I'm sure, to hear you speak like this, Goring, and, in the way of friendly co-operation, you won't find me backward."

"I don't deny that we have had our rubs," said Goring, with a great air of frankness. "I've often thought that you took advantage of your position as captain to unduly favour your own side; but I'm willing to admit that I misjudged you, and a fellow can't say more than that. If you're willing to work with me to put the two houses upon a friendlier footing, why, there's my hand!"

Talbot grasped it warmly.

"You give me a great deal, of pleasure by this, Goring," he said. "I've had some hard thoughts of you at times, but you've set them all at rest now. We'll work together, as you say, and remember only that we belong to good old St. Winifred's, and not to Duff's House or Ratcliff's House."

And, after a little more friendly talk, the captain of the school took his leave.

When he was gone, Goring's expression changed. A sneering smile dawned upon his face.

"Yes; how nice we can be when we've got the captainship we want!" he muttered. "Perhaps we won't be so nice when we're kicked out of it."

A little later Harrison, one of Duff's seniors, strolled in. He found Goring looking over the table among the papers and books, with a puzzled and anxious expression upon his face.

"Gibson asked me to ask you—— But what are you looking for, old man?"

"A five-pound note."

"You don't mean to say you've lost one?"

"Well, I laid it on the table half an hour ago, and it's gone."

"Wind blown it about somewhere!"

"I've hunted round the room."

"Anybody been in the study?"

"Only Talbot."

"Talbot? What did he want in Duff's House?" asked Harrison, in surprise.

"He came to have a talk with me about keeping the juniors in order; but, of course, he couldn't have taken it!"

"Of course not!" agreed Harrison, with a heartiness which made Goring bite his lip.

"Still," the senior continued, "you'd better have a jolly good look for it, Goring. It's beastly unpleasant for money to get lost, to say the least."

"It would be thundering unpleasant to me!" growled Goring. "I received it only two days ago, and I shall have no more this term, so, if it's gone, I shall be broke for weeks."

"But it can't be gone."

But a diligent search of the study failed to reveal the missing note. At length the two stopped and stood looking at each other.

"The devil, Harrison, this looks ugly!" said Goring seriously.

"You're sure you laid it on the table?"

"Yes; I was going to ask Mr. Duff to change it for me, and I put it out ready. Then Talbot came in, and——"

"It's madness, Goring!" said Harrison uneasily.

"I know, and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"The note was lying there when Gibson called me out of the study for a minute. I remember now that I didn't notice it when I came back."

"You mean that Talbot——"

"What does it look like? He was alone here, and when I came back again the note was gone."

"But it's incredible!"

Goring shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you know the number of the note?"

"No; but it could be ascertained."

"It's—it's horrible!"

"Horrible or not, the note's gone, and there's only one way of accounting for it," said the prefect obstinately. "You can see that for yourself."

Harrison made no reply.

"However, don't say anything about it yet. I must think what's to be done. I don't want a disgrace if it can be helped, but I can't afford to lose five pounds."

"For Heaven's sake, don't be hasty!"

"I won't take any steps at all until this evening. That'll give us time to think it out."

Goring kept his word. That evening he confided the circumstances to a number of seniors of his own house, and asked their counsel. Almost everyone declared his belief in Talbot's innocence, and advised Goring to avoid being hasty. It was finally decided that he should go over to Ratcliff's House and have a quiet talk with Talbot.

"If he gives it back, we'll let the matter drop," said Goring, "although I despise a thief. Yet the poor devil may be hard up. It may have been a sudden temptation to him which he couldn't resist; and we don't want a scandal."

"I don't know," observed Harrison. "If he took it, he ought to be shown up. We don't want a thief for captain of St. Winifred's. But I don't believe that he took it."

"It looks suspicious," Gibson remarked, with a shake of the head.

"The difficulty is this," Goring went on—"that a banknote is so easily destroyed. If I speak to Talbot, and he denies that he has it, what am I to do? For then he won't try to pass the note. He'll just burn it to save himself from danger."

There was a long silence. The seniors looked at each other without knowing what to suggest.

"You'll have to speak to the doctor," said Gibson, at last. "If he won't give it up, he'll have to be searched before he can make away with it. If he's innocent, that's the only thing that will clear him, and so he can't object."

"Then I won't speak to him in his study. He would call it an insult, and chuck me out, and then burn the note. I'll tackle him in a place where he'll be under a good many eyes. Some of you fellows ought to be at hand to see fair play. He's bound to be in the gym now. I'll speak to him there."

And Gerald Goring went to seek Talbot, followed at an interval by the others.

## CHAPTER 10.

## A Terrible Accusation—Dick Esmond Speaks Out.

THE gym was pretty full. Dick and his chums were there, and so were a good many Duffites; but the presence of the captain and a number of seniors of both houses kept the rival juniors quiet. The Ratcliff youngsters were exasperated by the change which had come over their trophy the previous night, and once again they had had to confess themselves "done" by the daring Knowles. They were in the right humour for a scrimmage, and there would probably have been a tussle in the gym but for the presence of the elders.

When Gerald Goring entered he walked straight up to Talbot, who was chatting with two or three other fellows.

"Can you spare me a few minutes in private, Talbot?" he asked, coldly and formally.

Talbot looked surprised.

"It is a matter of importance," added Goring.

"All right, then."

Talbot nodded to his companions, and stepped aside with Goring. A good many curious glances were directed towards them.

"I dare say you can guess what I want to speak to you about, Talbot."

"Not in the least."

"It's about the five-pound note."

"The—what?"

"You don't understand?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about?" said Talbot, with a touch of impatience.

"H'm! When I left you alone in my study this morning, I left a five-pound note lying on the table."

"Well?"

"When I came back it was gone."

There was no mistaking his tone. Talbot turned crimson, and then deadly pale.

"Do you dare to accuse me?"

"I don't accuse anybody. I want the money back, that's all. If it's given back to me, no more need be said about the matter."

"And you think I took it?"

"Do you want me to speak plainly?"

"Yes."

"Well, I know you took it, then!"

Talbot clenched his hand and half-raised it. Goring started back, changing colour perceptibly.

"Take care, Talbot. Violence won't improve your case."

Talbot's hand fell to his side.

"I know it. I shall not use violence—yet. So you're willing to hush the matter up? That's generous of you. I'll show you how much I appreciate your generosity." He turned away from Goring and spoke in a loud, clear voice: "Listen, here, all of you chaps of St. Winifred's! Goring says that he has lost a five-pound note, and he accuses me of stealing it when I was in his study this morning."

There was a buzz of indignant amazement.

Goring looked pale and fidgety, Talbot brave and resolute. More than one onlooker remarked that Goring looked a good deal more like the accused than the accuser at that moment.

"What do you mean, Goring?" demanded several fellows hotly. "Are you off your dot?"

"I mean what I say," replied Goring, with some firmness.

"I didn't want to make the thing public, but since Talbot has chosen to do so, I shall speak out. There was a five-pound note upon my table when I left Talbot alone in my study this morning. When I came back a few minutes later it was gone. I didn't like to believe that he took it, but there's no other way of accounting for it. I demand an investigation, anyway."

"I have no wish to deny you that," said Talbot calmly.

"The suspicion is an insult, for which I shall call you to account later. I do not believe that you really believe that I am guilty."

"He doesn't." It was Dick Esmond's voice, and the leader of Duff's juniors was pushing his way forward, his eyes flashing fire. "He doesn't believe it, Talbot. He lies, and he knows it, and I can prove it!"

Talbot looked at the excited junior in amazement. Goring ground his teeth.

"What do you know about it, youngster?" asked Talbot.

"I know that Goring hates you, because he couldn't get in as captain, and I know that he has plotted to get you into disgrace."

"You infernally cheeky brat——" began Goring.

"Hold your tongue!" said Talbot fiercely. "Now, Esmond, just explain how you know all this."

"I heard Goring plotting with Gibson," answered Dick unhesitatingly.

Instantly every eye turned upon Gibson. He had turned a sickly white.

"Look at him!" cried Dick triumphantly. "Do you want any more proof than his face?"

"You cheeky brat!" hissed Gibson. "You startled me with your lies, but——"

"I'll startle you a bit more before I'm done!"

"Go on, Esmond," said Talbot.

And Dick went on to tell all that he had heard that day behind the hedge. There was a loud murmur when he had finished.

"What have you to say to that, Goring?"

"Lies!" answered the prefect. "You all know that there's never been any love lost between Talbot and me, and I may have run him down in speaking of him, and possibly have said I'd like to get rid of him from St. Winifred's, but certainly I never said any more than that. I suppose that little hound caught a few words and misunderstood them, and imagination supplied the rest."

It was a good defence, well and coolly spoken. The listeners exchanged doubtful glances.

"I wasn't alone, Talbot," said Dick quickly. "Outram was with me; he heard all that I heard."

"Do you corroborate Esmond's statement, Outram?"

"Every word of it," Sidney answered promptly.

"Of course he does!" sneered Goring.

Talbot reflected for a few minutes. Then he spoke in manly, ringing tones:

"Friends, I hope there's nobody here believes me guilty. I am absolutely innocent. And I may say that I believe every word Dick Esmond has spoken. But the matter has got to be thoroughly sifted out. I am going straight to the doctor. Gerald Goring, you will kindly come and repeat your accusation in his presence. Esmond and Outram had better come, too."

And as Talbot walked towards the door a loud cheer burst forth, testifying to the trust the boys of St. Winifred's reposed in their young captain.

## CHAPTER II.

## The Search and the Discovery—Innocent or Guilty?

THERE was a deep and painful silence in the study of the kind old doctor. The principal of St. Winifred's looked from one to the other of the boys before him, almost doubting his ears.

Had he heard aright? George Talbot accused of theft—Talbot, the brave and generous young captain of the school, the best liked fellow at St. Winifred's, and the one for whom the doctor felt the most esteem!

"It is a horrible mistake, I am convinced of that," the doctor said at length in a low, pained voice. Then he looked doubtfully at Dick Esmond. "Esmond, are you quite sure that you have correctly reported the words used by Goring and Gibson; that you have not allowed your dislike of Goring to—to lead you to imagine——"

He paused, his kindly but keen, grey eyes reading the face of the junior. Dick's reply was respectful, but very fair.

"I am quite sure, sir."

"And you deny it all, Goring?"

"Absolutely, sir!" Goring had gone too far now to recede, and he had no choice but to brazen it out. "Esmond perhaps caught a few careless words, and his imagination did the rest, if he is not wholly lying. Most of the Ratcliff fellows take it for granted that I am jealous of Talbot about the captainship, and Esmond in particular hates me bitterly."

The doctor hemmed. He could not but recognise that there was more than a "mistake" here, and that one side or the other was deliberately lying.

"Outram, kindly inform Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Duff that I wish to see them in my study."

The two house-masters, considerably surprised and wondering, came in answer to the summons.

"Kindly step into the next room for a few minutes, boys. Don't go away. Wait till I call you."

They obeyed. The door closed.

"Please sit down, gentlemen," said the doctor. "I want to consult you upon a very painful subject."

And he informed them of what had taken place. They listened in amazement.

"This is terrible!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "It is impossible that Talbot can be a thief!"

"And yet," said Mr. Duff gravely, "it is surely impossible that any boy could be wicked enough to bring such an accusation without grounds. Goring must, at least, believe what he says; he cannot be actuated simply by dislike and jealousy of Talbot, as Esmond hints."

"But what of Esmond's story?"

"Goring's explanation is reasonable."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I can speak upon that point. I can vouch for Esmond's habitual truthfulness. Upon at least one occasion I know he risked punishment rather than tell a lie."

"Frankly, I cannot say as much for Goring," said Mr. Duff. "He has never struck me as a youth of high principle. But I should be extremely sorry to find that he could be guilty of such baseness as this."

The doctor passed his hand across his brow.

"What is to be done?" he said sadly.

It was a difficult question.

"The only course to be taken, it seems to me," said Mr. Duff slowly, "is to search Talbot and his belongings."

"Horrible!"

"Yes, no doubt; but it is the only way to prove either his innocence or his guilt. I understand that since the accusation he has had no opportunity of disposing of the stolen note, if it is in his possession; therefore, if he has it, a search will reveal it. For his own sake I advocate this painful course."

"My opinion exactly," agreed Mr. Ratcliff.

"I suppose you are right," the doctor said slowly. "Call the boys in, please."

The boys came back into the study. The doctor was very pale and perturbed. He wiped his pince-nez and put them on.

"Talbot," he said with an effort, "have you any objection to a—a search being made?"

Talbot coloured deeply.

"I have no objection to anything that you should consider advisable, sir," he answered quietly.

"My desire is, of course, to prove your innocence. I cannot—I cannot believe that you are guilty!"

"Thank you, sir," said Talbot gratefully, while Dick whispered to Outram that the doctor was an old trump.

"That shall be done, then."

The doctor looked at the two house-masters. Both drew back from the unpleasant task. Finally the doctor rang for Perkins.

The porter looked astonished when he learned what he was required for. But under the doctor's orders he searched Talbot thoroughly. The captain submitted with quiet calmness. But no banknote was forthcoming.

"We shall now proceed to Mr. Talbot's rooms," said the doctor. "Perkins, kindly precede us and light the gas." As they went upstairs the eyes of almost the whole school were upon them. All St. Winifred's was discussing the scene in the gym. A crowd, with as many Duffites as Ratcliffites in it, followed the doctor, and waited in painful silence in the long, wide corridor to hear the result of the search. Dick, Outram, and Goring remained in the corridor with the rest, only the masters entering the room with Talbot. The door was left open, however, so Dick could see Perkins making the search.

A quarter of an hour passed painfully slowly. Desk and drawers and papers were gone through without result. Talbot stood calmly proud and confident. The masters' looks were more anxious than his.

The search, at a sign from the doctor, was extended to the bookcase. Hateful as the whole affair was, the doctor considered it best to be thorough. If the stolen note were concealed anywhere in Talbot's room it was best to bring it to light. Perkins took down the books one by one and shook them, so that any paper between the leaves would fall out. He came to a huge "Fox's Book of Martyrs," a present to Talbot from a maiden aunt, and which Talbot had probably never once looked into. As Perkins shook this volume something white fell out and fluttered to the floor. A tremor ran over everyone present. Was it a bookmark, or—a banknote?

It was a banknote! Perkins picked it up in silence and handed it to the doctor. Dr. Chaloner took it with fingers that visibly trembled. He wiped his glasses; perhaps his kind eyes were rather dim just then.

"Goring!"  
The prefect stepped into the room.  
"What was the number of the note you lost?"  
"I did not observe it, sir; but it can easily be ascertained. I can write home—"

"It is not necessary," said Talbot in a strange, dry voice. "That banknote is not mine, Dr. Chaloner."

"You admit it is not yours?"  
"I state that it is not."  
"You confess—"

"I confess nothing. I swear that I never saw that note before; that I do not know who placed it in my book!"

Talbot's look was dazed, almost wild. He seemed utterly shaken by the finding of the note. Was this a sign of conscious guilt?

He collected himself with an effort.  
"Doctor! Dr. Chaloner! You don't believe this! You don't believe me a thief!"

The tears started to the good old doctor's eyes.  
"Heaven knows I am sorry, Talbot, to— But how came Goring's banknote in your room—and hidden away so carefully? Explain that if you can."

Talbot pressed his hand to his throbbing forehead. What could he answer? He felt as if he were going mad.

The silence was terrible. At last he spoke.  
"I—I cannot explain. I—I did not put it there. Heaven knows I did not!"

The doctor shook his head sadly, and made a movement to turn away.

"Stop, sir! I—I believe I can tell you who put it there. It is a part of the plot; it is done to ruin me!"

"I should counsel you not to make so serious an accusation hastily, Talbot. You allude to Goring?"

"Yes, sir."  
Goring sneered.

"It is easy to say that!" he exclaimed. "You know very well, doctor, that if any-

body belonging to Duff's House came rummaging round Ratcliff's House he would be spotted at once."

"Yes, that certainly seems to me to be the case," said Mr. Duff; and Mr. Ratcliff nodded. The point was well taken.

Talbot had now recovered his calmness.  
"I am innocent," he said firmly. "No doubt Goring chose his moment for coming here. Probably last night, when I was away from St. Winifred's."

The doctor turned a troubled look upon Goring. He did not know what to believe.

"What were you doing last evening, Goring?"  
The prefect appeared to consider.

"I was in the gym up to nine o'clock," he said. "After that I talked awhile with Mr. Duff; then I played chess in my study till bed-time with Gibson."

Talbot's eyes flashed.  
"Gibson!" he exclaimed. "You hear that, sir? That is no alibi. It was Gibson whom Dick Esmond heard him plotting with! Gibson is his accomplice!"

"It's a lie!" growled Goring.  
"What am I to believe?" exclaimed the doctor. "Go now—leave me! I must think."

And he went back to his study, accompanied by the house-masters, his brow deeply lined. Long the three men sat in council.

The result of the search sent a shudder through St. Winifred's. In most minds the finding of the note seemed to clinch the matter. Even Dick was staggered for a moment. But his faith in Talbot held true. It was a conspiracy, and he and his chums felt sure of it.

Gerald Goring went back to Duff's House looking grave and concerned, taking care to let no sign of triumph appear in his face. But in truth his triumph was mingled with deep uneasiness, and he was far from being satisfied. Gibson was waiting for him in his study.

"This is a cursed business, Goring!" Gibson said in a low voice. "I wish we hadn't begun it!"

Goring shrugged his shoulders scowlingly.  
"It's too late to think of that now. We planned it carefully enough; there could have been no hitch but for that infernal junior. What horrible ill-luck that Esmond should have got wind of our little game! But for him—curse him!—there could have been no talk of a conspiracy. The finding of the note would have convicted Talbot, and all his denials would have gone for nothing. Now all is uncertain. Still," he continued thoughtfully, "so long as we stick to our story and don't give ourselves away I don't see how we can possibly be bowled out. Keep a stiff upper lip and we shall come out all right."

But even while the prefect was speaking the truth was being brought to light, and by an agency he had never dreamed of.

CHAPTER 12.  
Knowles is a Trump  
—Brought to  
Light.

WHILE the boys of St. Winifred's were discussing the discovery of the banknote in Talbot's study, and arguing for or against his innocence or his guilt with an excitement which knew no abatement, there was one boy who kept apart from the rest, his mind in a tumult of doubt and fear and horror.

It was Cyril Knowles.

Back to his memory had come vividly the scene of the previous night—of Gerald Goring coming out of Talbot's study, with white face and stealthy demeanor, and creeping away down the corridor like a thief in fear of detection.



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What had he been doing in Talbot's rooms? Knowles had asked himself the question the night before without being able to find an answer. But now, what a flood of ghastly light was thrown upon it!

What had Gerald Goring been doing there? Was it not only too evident what he had been doing? He had been placing the banknote in Talbot's book—a book which he knew the captain was not likely to open—and the next day he had asked Talbot over to his quarters, and pretended to miss the note when he was gone! Was it not all clear, with a horrible clearness?

Knowles, with his pride in the house he belonged to, would naturally have been very slow to believe the accusations Ratcliff's juniors were freely making against his prefect—only firmly fixed in his mind was the picture of Gerald Goring slinking out of Talbot's study like a thief in the night. And that picture seemed to be burnt into his brain.

What should he do? What could he do? Doubt and horror struggled in his mind. If he spoke out, if he denounced Goring, it was black shame for Duff's House. He shuddered at the thought of it. And then—to testify against his own prefect, the chief of his house! Would that be loyal? But, with a courage and decision which did him the greatest credit, the boy thrust from him the specious temptation which whispered to him to remain silent and let things take their own course.

He was very pale and perturbed when he called his two chums aside to tell them his decision. Both Jones and Foster were looking disturbed. They had not forgotten what Knowles had told them, and he saw that their conclusions were the same as his own.

"We must speak out," Knowles said, in a hurried and agitated voice. "You know very well what Goring was doing when I saw him last night?"

Foster nodded.

"It looks like it."

"It will be a horrible disgrace to Duff's House," said Jones hesitatingly. "I s'pose it—it wouldn't do to keep it dark? It will give those Ratcliff rotters a fearful pull over us."

"That can't be helped. We should be cads to be silent and let Talbot suffer."

"Only Goring's our prefect—"

"Yes, but he's guilty—"

"Who's guilty, you rotters?"

It was Dick Esmond's voice. He passed the three Duffites as they stood in conclave, and he had caught the last words. He stopped and looked at them with flashing eyes.

"Look here, Esmond—"

Dick clenched his fists.

"Not a word against Talbot! Do you hear? I'll—"

"Don't be an ass, Esmond! I tell you Talbot's innocent—we know it. I'm going to the doctor."

"What!"

Knowles poured out what he knew. Dick listened open-mouthed, and grasped Cyril's arm.

"Come on! Come to the doctor. Don't lose a second!"

He hurried Knowles away breathlessly, unconsciously keeping the grip on his arm, as if afraid that he might disappear into the earth if he let him go for a moment. Jones and Foster followed.

Dr. Chaloner started as a loud knock came at his door.

Dick rushed in, almost dragging the breathless and panting Knowles. The doctor adjusted his pince-nez, and stared at them in an amazement that was shared by Mr. Duff and Mr. Ratcliff.

"What does this mean, Esmond?"

"Talbot's innocent, sir, and Knowles can prove it!" panted Dick.

"What do you say?"

"Tell him, Knowles."

And Knowles told his story. The doctor's troubled face grew darker and darker as he listened.

"Did you tell this to anyone at the time, Knowles?"

"Yes, sir—to Jones and Foster."

"He did, sir," said both the boys at once.

The doctor passed his hand across his brow.

"I believe you, my boys. Thank Heaven that this revelation has come before any greater wrong than suspicion was done to poor Talbot! It is very brave and noble of you to speak out as you have done, Knowles, and I shall not forget your conduct. I must see Talbot at once, and—and Goring. Good heavens, of what a depth of duplicity and wickedness that unhappy lad has been guilty! Esmond, tell Talbot I wish to see him."

The boys left the study. Outside, Dick turned to Knowles and gripped his hand.

"I say, Knowles, old man, I'm not much of a talker, but—but this is ripping of you, old fellow! And—and I'll tell you what—if you like to call Duff's the top house of St. Winifred's for the rest of the term you can do it, and I'll see that nobody on this side has anything to say!"

And then Dick tore off to seek Talbot. The captain was in his study in a mood of the deepest dejection. He had made up his mind, sadly enough, that he must leave St. Winifred's. Dick burst in upon him like a whirlwind.

"Talbot, old chap, you're innocent—I mean, your innocence is proved, and the doctor wants to see you!"

Before the captain could reply, Dick darted away, to spread the good news, and as Talbot made his way to the doctor's study he had to pass through a crowd of enthusiastic youngsters, who cheered him till the old roof of St. Winifred's rang again.

The truth had been brought to light at last, and punishment fell heavily upon the guilty. The desperate Goring would have tried to brazen it out, but Gibson confessed all when he found how much was known, in the hope of obtaining mercy. Gerald Goring was ignominiously expelled from St. Winifred's, and he left the school unregretted by a single person. Gibson, as less guilty, was allowed to stay to the end of the term, but the general contempt of his schoolfellows made him glad when the time came to go—and he did not return.

Of the rivals of St. Winifred's—of their fun, feuds, and frolics—we would fain write more, but space forbids. Let it suffice to say that they are rivals still, but good friends and jolly schoolfellows at bottom for all their rivalry; having quarrels enough, and fights, too, but always ready to stand by each other like true British boys, if need arise.

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