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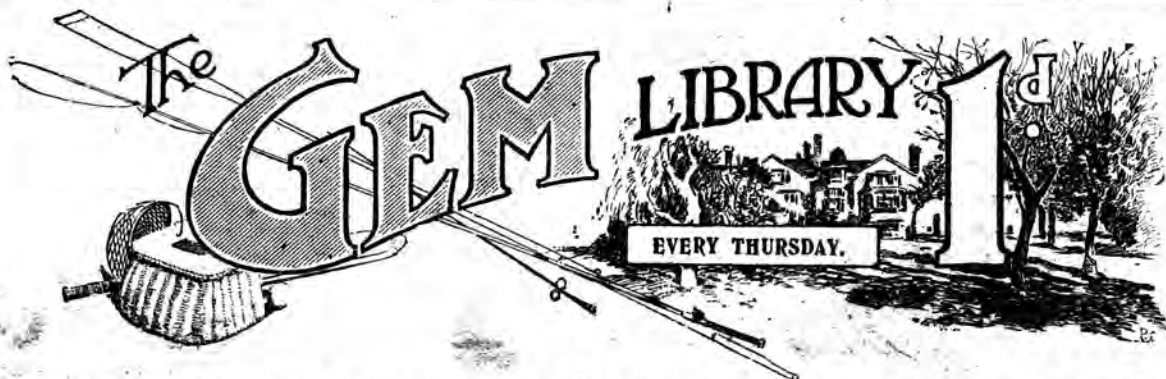
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A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Figgins & Co. are Astonished.

"BLESSED if I can understand it!" said Figgins. He stood in the quadrangle at St. Jim's, looking after a spare figure that was crossing towards the New House. Figgins, of the Fourth, belonged to the New House, and that spare figure was Mr. Ratcliff's—Figgins's House-master.

Figgins stared after Mr. Ratcliff in blank amazement. He was so bewildered that he was quite lost to his surroundings; and he did not see three cheerful-looking youths strolling over from the direction of the School House.

They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—otherwise known as the Terrible Three—and they looked at the amazed Figgins, and then at one another. They were quite close to him, but he evidently did not see them.

"Poor Figgy!" murmured Monty Lowther. "It's come at last! There have been signs of it for some time; but he's fairly off his rocker now!"

"Fairly babbling," said Manners, with a shake of the head.

"Perhaps it's sunstroke," suggested Tom Merry charitably. "Let's wake him up and see. I say, Figgins."

"Blessed if I catch on at all!" said Figgins.

"I say, Figgins."

"It was Ratty right enough, but— My hat! I can't understand it!"

"I say, Figgins!" bawled Tom Merry in his ear.

Figgins started, and looked round.

"Hallo! What do you want?"

"It isn't a question of what we want, but of what you want," said Tom Merry. "I think a strait-jacket would be about the thing."

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

"Better hold his wrists," suggested Monty Lowther. "He doesn't look safe. There's a wild look in his eyes."

Figgins retreated a pace, and doubled his fists.

"Hold on!" he said. "What's the little game? What are you getting at?"

"Look here," said Tom Merry. "If this isn't insanity, what is it? What do you mean by standing here in the broad daylight with a face like a—"

"Gargoyle," suggested Lowther.

"Like a gargoyle," said Tom Merry, "and muttering to yourself? What's the matter with you? If you're not off your rocker, and it's not sunstroke, what is it?"

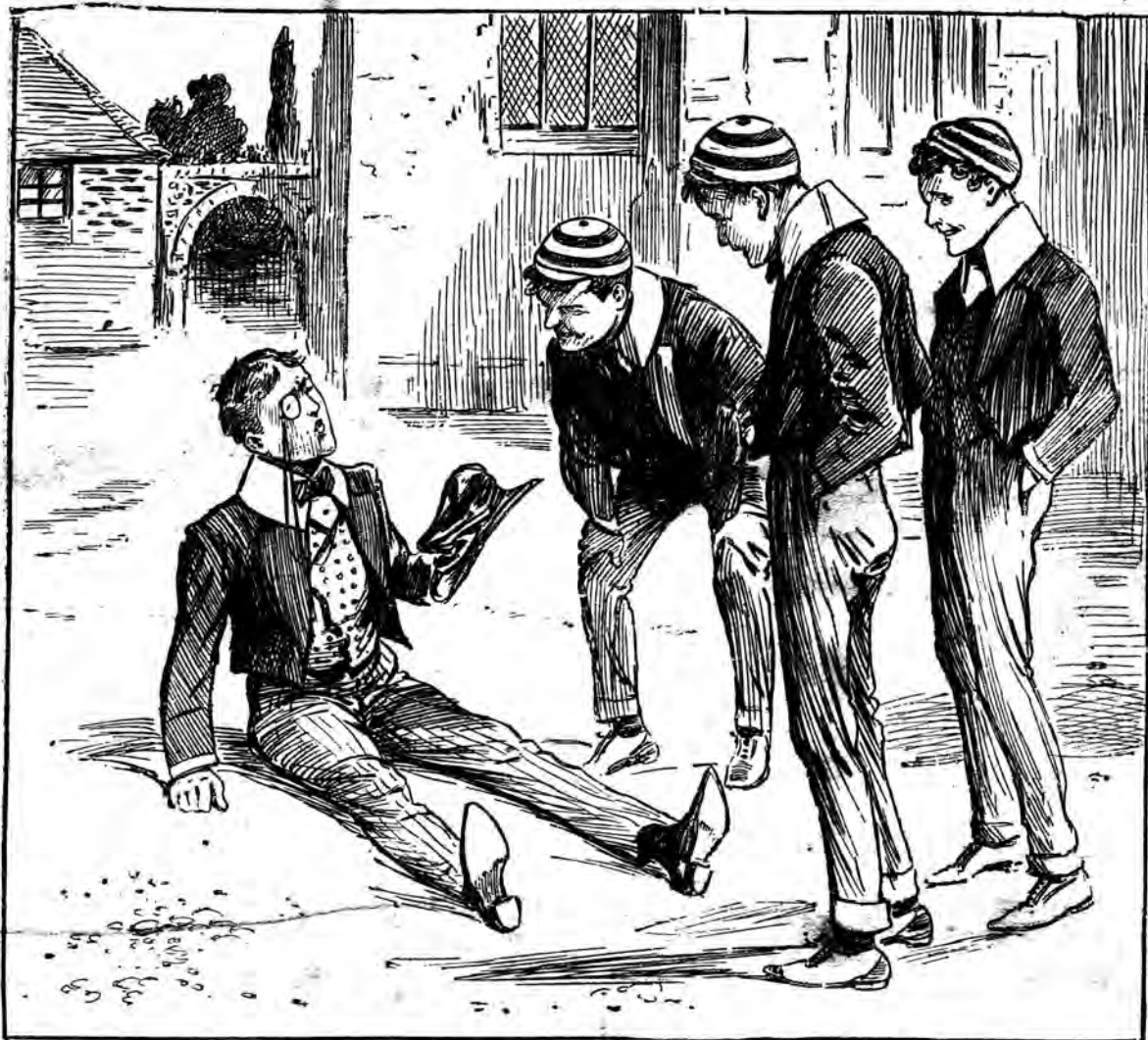
A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

Figgins grinned.
 "Didn't you see it?" he asked.
 "I saw nothing but a silly ass."
 "Well, a chap couldn't help being astounded. You know my House-master, Ratty? What do you think of his temper as a rule?"
 "Rotten!"
 "Beastly!" said Manners.
 "Unspeakable!" said Lowther.
 "Well, that's about right. Now, suppose a chap bolted right into Ratty without seeing him, and nearly knocked him over, what would you expect him to do?"
 "Scrag him."
 "Play him alive," said Lowther.
 "Exactly. Well, I just bolted into him, and nearly knocked him over, and he—"
 "Told you to come into his study?"
 "Gave you five hundred of Virgil?"
 "No," said Figgins slowly and impressively. "He patted me on the head, and said: 'Never mind, my little man.'"
 The Terrible Three chuckled.
 "Very good, Figgins—very funny indeed, but you must try again. You can't expect old birds to take in a thing like that."
 "Honest Injun!" said Figgins.
 "Look here, what are you giving us?" demanded Lowther. "You biffed Ratty, the very worst-tempered master that ever mastered, and you tell us he patted you on the napper, and said—"
 "Never mind, my little man," said Figgins. "Solid fact!"
 "Do I sleep, do I dream," murmured Manners, "do I wonder and doubt? Are things what they seem, or is visions about?"
 "My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "If you say it was so, Figg, it was so, but—sure you haven't gone to sleep standing up like a horse, and dreamed it?"
 "Look here," said Figgins, "it happened. I'm not trying to explain it. But it happened. I could swear to that before any Society for Psychical Research. I don't pretend that I understand. You know, Shakespeare said 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy—'"
 "Yes, I think I know Shakespeare said that," assented Tom Merry; "I think I've heard it quoted about fifty million times, within a dozen or two. The only thing I can think of about Ratty is that he must be ill. Keep an eye on him. It's the duty of a good junior to look after his House-master."
 "Blessed if I can understand it!" said Figgins.
 The Terrible Three couldn't understand it, either. But the breakfast-bell rang just then, and they went in to discuss a more important matter—breakfast.
 Tom Merry & Co. went into the School House, and Figgins slowly followed in Mr. Ratcliff's footsteps to the other House at St. Jim's—the New House. In the porch he met his chums, Kerr and Wynn. They were standing with an expression of bewilderment on their faces, which showed that they, too, had experienced a shock.
 "Coming in to breakfast?" said Figgins.
 "Breakfast!" murmured Fatty Wynn.
 As a rule that was a word to conjure with with Fatty Wynn, but just now it seemed to have lost its force. He only stared at Figgins. Figgins shook him by the shoulder.
 "What's the matter with you, Wynn?"
 "I can't understand it."
 "Can't understand what?"
 "Old Ratty."
 Figgins gave a whistle.
 "Has he been starting on you?" he asked eagerly. "Has he tapped you on the topper, and called you a little man?"
 "No," said Fatty Wynn. "Tell him, Kerr."
 "There's something wrong," said Kerr seriously.
 "Ratty came in just now, and he stopped as he was passing us, and said—what do you think?"
 "What on earth did he say that for?" said Figgins, mystified.
 "Ass! I don't mean that he said that!" said Kerr testily. "I mean what do you think he said?"
 "Oh, I see! Blessed if I know! Did he call you a little man?"
 "No. He said 'Figgins ran into me just now. Tell him I hope he did not hurt himself.'"
 "My only hat! And what did you say?"
 "I? I couldn't say anything. You could have knocked me down with a steam-hammer."
 "It's not surprising," said Figgins slowly, "it's more than surprising. It's—it's astounding. Has anybody ever known Ratty to be in a good temper before?"
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"Perhaps when he was very young," said Fatty Wynn, "not lately."
 "And now—"
 "Oh, it's past understanding," said Kerr. "No good trying to work it out. Euclid is a joke to it."
 "Let's get into breakfast," said Fatty Wynn. "Now I come to think of it, I'm hungry, but I was so astonished I quite forgot it."
 "By Jove, you must have been astonished!"
 They went into the dining-hall of the New House. The New House at St. Jim's was much smaller than the School House, and the Fifth Form and the Fourth breakfasted at the same table. Mr. Ratcliff was master of the Fifth, as well as House-master, and so he took the head of the table where Figgins & Co. sat. As a rule, Mr. Ratcliff was not liberal, and though the diet at St. Jim's was generous, Mr. Ratcliff did his best to be sparing with it. It was an old grievance with Fatty Wynn that sometimes whole rashers of bacon were sent off the table which he could very well have eaten if Mr. Ratcliff had cared to recognise the fact that he had an excellent appetite.
 But Mr. Ratcliff was not finished in his new line of surprising the New House fellows. He asked Fatty Wynn if he would like a third helping, and Wynn was so surprised that he almost forgot to say that he would.
 "My word!" murmured Figgins. "This is all right! Either Ratty's ill, or he's got a screw loose; and, anyway, it's all right for us."
 "Yes, rather!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "I say, Figg, do you think I could venture to ask him for some more?"
 "What are you going to do with it if he gives it to you?" asked Figgins innocently. "Put it in your pocket?"
 "Oh, don't be an ass, Figg! I'm going to eat it. You know I always get jolly hungry in this weather."
 "Or any other weather," said Figgins. "But it's all right. Ask him, and let out another button in case of accidents."
 "If you please, sir—"
 Mr. Ratcliff looked at Fatty Wynn.
 "Would you like another helping, Wynn?"
 "Yes, sir, if I may, sir?"
 "Certainly, my boy! You should not be afraid to ask," said Mr. Ratcliff.
 The whole table gasped. Was the man who was speaking in that kindly tone really Mr. Ratcliff, the crustiest and rustiest master at St. Jim's—or any other school?
 What was the matter with Ratty?
 Fatty Wynn passed up his plate, and beamed like the full moon as he received a liberal helping.
 Other juniors, encouraged by Fatty Wynn's success, followed his example, and that morning there was nothing sent down from the table.
 Figgins & Co. looked at one another when they came out after breakfast. Figgins touched his forehead significantly. "Absolutely off it!" he remarked. "But it's all right for us!"
 And the Co. agreed that it was all right for them.

CHAPTER 2. The Sprinters.

"GET out of the way, there!"
 Tom Merry looked round. He had just come out of the School House after breakfast with Manners and Lowther, and, catching sight of Blake and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, in the distance, he was going over to speak to them, when Figgins's voice fell upon his ears.
 As he was on the School House side of the quad, of course, the dignity of a School House fellow wouldn't allow him to get out of the way.
 Figgins & Co. were coming along in line at top speed. Figgins's long legs covered the ground easily, and Kerr, the active and wiry Scotsman, kept easy pace with him, but Fatty Wynn, in the middle, was labouring like a heavy old ship in a rough sea.
 Those extra rashers at breakfast were telling on Fatty Wynn, and as he kept up with Figgins and Kerr, he began to wish that Mr. Ratcliff hadn't been so generous. He was breathing laboriously, and his fat face was streaming with perspiration; but he could not stop, for Figgins and Kerr had a hold on him either side.
 "I say, stop a bit!" stuttered Fatty. "I—I'm winded, Figg!"
 "Rats!" said Figg. "If you were winded you couldn't speak."
 "I—I—I—"
 "Why don't you save your breath for running, Fatty? You know jolly well you've got to get into form, and you're coming right round the quad before brekker."
 "Oh, really! But—"



"What's that you've got there, Augustus?" asked Lowther curiously. "Is it an opera hat or a concertina?"

"Come on! Hi, there, you School House bounders, get aside!"

The Terrible Three had stopped, and they stood in line directly across the path of Figgins & Co. There were sweet smiles upon their faces as they waited for the New House trio to reach them.

"Are we going to get aside, my sons?" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather—I don't think!" said Monty Lowther.

"Same here, and many of 'em!" grinned Manners.

"Get out of the way!"

"Sweet voice, isn't it?" said Lowther. "I really think Figgins ought to be a choirboy, or a bargeman, or something, with that voice."

Blake and D'Arcy, being School House boys, of course came over to stand in line with Tom Merry, and bar the path of the New House sprinters, and Bernard Glyn, of the Shell, strolled up at the same moment.

"Oh, let's get round the beasts!" grunted Figgins.

"We don't want a row now in the middle of a sprint."

"I—I say, Figgy, I—I'd rather have a row than keep on at this pace!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Suppose we stop and give 'em a licking?"

"Bosh! Keep on!"

And they kept on, changing their course so as to avoid the solemn row of School House boys. But Tom Merry uttered a word of command, and the row of juniors moved along in line, and in a moment were planted firmly again in the path of Figgins & Co. The trio had no choice but to charge or halt—and they halted. Figgins was simply bristling with wrath.

"Do you think you look pretty standing there?" he bawled.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy put up his eyeglass and surveyed Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!" he replied. "Without béin' conceited, I weally think I look wathah neat, for one, deah boy!"

"Are you going to let us pass, or are you not going to let us pass?"

"Not!" said six voices cheerfully.

Figgins & Co. glared. Only Fatty Wynn was glad of the rest. He was pumping in air like the pump of a diving apparatus. The extra rashers were avenging themselves.

"Look here," said Figgins. "I dare say you are funny."

"Not at all, deah boy. I wegard you as wathah funnay."

"We're sprinting," said Figgins.

"My hat," said Jack Blake, in a tone of wonder, "they call that sprinting! I thought they were doing an easy stroll."

"Sorter saunter," said Monty Lowther.

"And taking their time about it," said Manners.

"Only one degree better than lying down, as far as I could see," Bernard Glyn remarked. "If you sprint like that, Figgy, you'll want an electric shock to make you go on the cinder-path."

Figgins & Co. glared, and glared again. But glares had no effect whatever upon the School House fellows.

"I've heard before that these chaps think they can run," said Tom Merry, addressing his companions in a confidential way.

"Amazing!"

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S WEEK-END."

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A Grand Tale of the Boys of St.
Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

"Of course, I've seen them run when there were School House chaps after them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But on other occasions amble would be nearer the mark."

"Rats!" howled Figgins. "We'd run against you any day in the week!"

"Oh, I've no doubt you could run against me! You ran against Ratty this morning."

"I don't mean that! I mean—"

"Oh, never mind what you mean! You can't run for toffee!"

"We'll run against you!"

"We're ready!"

"Ass! We'll run you on the cinder-path, or cross country, for anything you like!" shouted Figgins. "We'll hare and hounds you till you haven't a leg left to stand on!"

"Now you're talking," said Tom Merry. "I've half a mind to give you a chance. It would be a gentle stroll for us."

"A quiet afternoon walk," said Lowther.

"Nuff said!" exclaimed Figgins, exasperated beyond all patience. "If you don't clear, we shall charge!"

"How much will you charge?" asked Lowther.

"I'll jolly soon show you! Go for 'em!"

And the New House trio charged. The School House fellows stood like rocks to stop them, but the impetus of the charge was great. Blake was bowled over, and he bumped against D'Arcy, who sat down in the quad, clutching at his hat. Figgins rolled across him, and there was a squelch from the hat as it bumped down under the weight of Figgins, and was transformed into a Gibus hat at one fell swoop.

"Bai Jove, my hat!"

Figgins scrambled up and dashed on. Kerr was at his heels, and Fatty Wynn labouring behind. Fatty certainly would have wanted rescuing if the School House fellows cared to pursue. But they were gathering round D'Arcy.

Not that they were sympathetic. They were laughing. D'Arcy was sitting on the ground; rumped and dusty, with his silk hat in his hand. The expression of his face was quite enough, Blake declared, to make a cat smile audibly.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

"What's that you've got there?" asked Lowther curiously.

"Is it an opera-hat or a concertina?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Let me help you up," said Manners, taking a grip with both hands upon D'Arcy's hair.

"Ow! Leggo, you wottah! I can get up vewy well alone."

D'Arcy staggered to his feet. He looked at his crushed hat, and he looked at his comrades. They were laughing hysterically.

"I wogard you as a set of wottahs!" said D'Arcy witheringly. "This hat was almost new—I only bought it in Liverpool the othah day. Now it is wuined!"

"Yes, it does look rather ruined," Tom Merry said thoughtfully. "You could still use it for the opera, when you go with your noble governor, or you could use it to keep white mice in, or something of that sort."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Or it would do for a plaque on the wall of the study," suggested Blake.

"I wefuse to continue this twivulous discussion," said Arthur Augustus. "I call upon you to back me up in giving those New House wottahs a feahful thwashin'."

"Certainly!" said Blake. "Lead the way, and buck up!"

D'Arcy waved his hand.

"Follow me, deah boys!"

And he dashed off at top speed towards the New House, on the track of Figgins & Co., who had already disappeared. It did not occur to him to look round and see whether the juniors were following him or not. He had nearly reached the New House, when he was struck by the fact that he could hear no footsteps behind him.

"Come on, deah boys!" he panted.

There was no reply.

D'Arcy turned his head.

He was alone!

The juniors were standing in a group over by the School House, looking after him, apparently very much interested in his progress.

"Go it!" called out Monty Lowther, waving his cap.

D'Arcy's feelings were too deep for words for a moment.

He jammed his eyeglass into his eye and glared at the juniors.

"The—the wottahs! They're not followin' me at all!"

He stopped, and turned back. Tom Merry and his companions walked into the School House, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy arrived a minute later.

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S WEEK-END."

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Ratcliff Takes the Shell!

"It's not half a bad idea," Tom Merry remarked.

He made the remark in the Shell class-room, when the juniors had taken their places for morning lessons. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was not there yet, though he was usually prompt at his desk. The juniors were filling in the time with chatter, which was likely soon to turn to horseplay.

Monty Lowther looked at his chum.

"What isn't a bad idea?" he asked.

"About the running."

"What running?"

"You heard what Figgins said. He's willing to run against the School House—"

"Jolly well hurt his napper if he did!"

"Lowther, my son, don't be funny. There is a time for all things, except for your jokes. They are barred."

"Then why are they like football boots?" asked Lowther, undisturbed.

"That's an old friend, too," said Tom Merry. "Joking apart, it's a good idea to get up some sprinting with the New House. We haven't licked them for some time, and it's high time they were put in their places. What?"

"Good wheeze."

"I think a paper-chase would be about the thing. It's some time since we had one, and if Figgins & Co. choose to be hares, I'll back up the School House to catch them. Next half-holiday it would be ripping. What do you say?"

"Right-ho! That's what I say!"

"We've got some runners in the Shell," Tom Merry went on. "Yourself, and Manners, and me, we can run; then there's Clifton Dane, and that new chap from Liverpool, Glyn—I think he can run. Can you run, Glyn?"

"I imagine so," said Glyn, with a smile. "I've done some. I have done the hundred yards in one-tenth seconds."

"Rats!"

"Fact!"

"When did it happen?"

"Last Saturday, at my dad's house down at the village. I made a new electric battery," explained Glyn, who was the inventor of the School House, and usually in trouble for some one or other of his contrivances. "I tried it on my sister Edith's pet dog. Of course, I wasn't going to hurt him, but you could have heard him talk from one end of Rylcombe to the other. Edith took a tennis-bat to argue with me, and I did the distance from the house to the gate in one-tenth of a second—at least, it seemed like that."

Tom Merry laughed. Lowther broke in eagerly—there was the chance for a pun, and Monty Lowther never missed a chance like that.

"I see," he remarked. "You couldn't stand the racket."

"Oh, don't do it, Monty!" said Tom Merry imploringly.

"Blessed if I don't get my old governor to send you down medicine for it!"

"That was a jolly good pun!"

"It may have been once, but puns aren't like wine—they don't improve with age. But to go on with the washing. We can get a good pack in the Shell and the Fourth Form, and give old Figgins a run for his money."

"I wonder where Linton is?" said Manners, glancing at his watch. "He's not usually late, and now it's more'n five minutes."

"He was looking seedy last night," Tom Merry remarked. "I hope he isn't ill."

"My hat, I hope not! You remember last time he was ill, Ratty took his place, and we had a high old time!"

The class-room door opened, and the buzz of voices died away at the sight of Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's.

The entrance of the Head showed that something unusual was happening, and the boys were all attention at once.

"I regret to have to tell you that your Form-master is indisposed this morning, my boys," said Dr. Holmes. "Mr. Ratcliff will take the Form in his place."

And he went out, leaving a silence of dismay behind him.

The juniors exchanged hopeless looks.

No master at St. Jim's had ever been anything like as unpopular as Horace Ratcliff. The School House boys, as a rule, were able to avoid him, except those among them who happened to be in the Fifth. On an occasion like this,

however, there was no avoiding him. If he took the Shell the juniors would be fairly under his thumb—and Mr. Ratcliff was not a man to use authority lightly. He always drove hard. And Tom Merry & Co. knew that they were especially obnoxious to the New House master. They had had their little difficulties before.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry at last, in a tone of resignation. "I suppose it means a few lickings and a big crop of impots."

"And gatings for Wednesday, instead of hare and hounds," said Lowther grumpily. "I do think it's rather unreasonable of Linton to go about falling ill like this."

"Cave! Here's Ratty!"

Mr. Ratcliff entered the room. He was looking unusually cheerful. His Form was being taken by the Head, while he took the Shell that morning. He gave the juniors a nod and walked up to the desk.

"There's trouble coming," said Lowther. "See how cheerful he looks. That always means that he's going to be nasty."

"It's a curious thing," murmured Glyn.

Tom Merry looked at him.

"What's a curious thing?"

"Why, Ratty is disliked by everybody here, but my sister thought he was rather a decent chap," said Glyn. "He knew my governor in Liverpool once, and he called at our house the other day. I must say he was more agreeable there than he is here, and he talked painting with my sister Edith till I nearly fell asleep. I was going to show him over my workshop, but he kept on talking to Edith, blessed if I know what for."

"I suppose every sort of animal has its agreeable moments," said Lowther. "Look out, he's got his eagle eye on us!"

"Someone was talking," said Mr. Ratcliff.

His glance was on Manners. Glyn looked up.

"It was I, sir," he said.

"You must not talk in class, Glyn!"

Glyn could only stare. Was it really Ratty who gave that gentle reply?

"He's laying for us," murmured Monty Lowther. "This is some new game he's playing. He thinks he'll encourage us, and then catch us on the hop."

"Blessed if I understand it," said Glyn, unconsciously repeating the words of Figgins.

"I'm jolly well going to jape him, and chance it," said Lowther. "May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. He's bound to pick on us."

"Yes, rather! Only be careful."

"That's all right."

While Mr. Ratcliff was looking into the master's desk, Lowther calmly scratched a vesta under his desk, and lighted the fuse of a repeating cracker. It was a daring "jape" for the class-room, but Lowther, in the full conviction that he would soon be punished anyway, was reckless.

He slung the cracker into a corner by the blackboard,

and was sitting up looking very good and demure when Mr. Ratcliff brought his nose out of his desk.

"Now, boys—" began Mr. Ratcliff.

Crack! A loud report interrupted the New House master. He gave a jump, and the lid of his desk came down with a bang.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

"What—what—what is that?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

"I—I—I—"

The boys were all on their feet, some amazed, some laughing. Mr. Ratcliff looked round him dazedly.

"What—what was that explosion?"

There was no reply. The smell of gunpowder, and the shell of the cracker on the floor, apprised Mr. Ratcliff of what had happened. His face grew very sour, and his brow very stern.

"Boys!"

"That's Ratty again!" murmured Tom Merry. "His old voice."

"Boys, who has dared to play this trick in the class-room?"

The Shell sat silent now.

Ratty in a temper was not to be trifled with, and every fellow was feeling glad that he hadn't played the trick, with the exception of Lowther, and he was beginning to wish that he hadn't.

Mr. Ratcliff glared at the class, and seemed about to break into an explosion himself, but he did not.

Some thought seemed to occur to him with a calming effect, and the thundercloud slowly dispersed from his countenance.

"This is very wrong," he said mildly. "Surely you must know better than to make a mock of discipline in this way?"

The Shell gasped.

Ratty might have taken the occurrence in many ways, any way, except this. He might have gated the whole Form, or called in the Head, or caned every boy himself, or given the whole class enough impositions to keep them busy for a week.

And instead of that, he was taking it lying down! Wonders apparently would never cease.

"We will proceed with the lesson," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I trust that the boy who played that foolish trick will reflect over his action, and feel sorry for it."

Monty Lowther flushed crimson. He would have stood any punishment like a Spartan, but this complete change in Ratty's methods took him quite off his guard. He stood up in his place with very red cheeks.

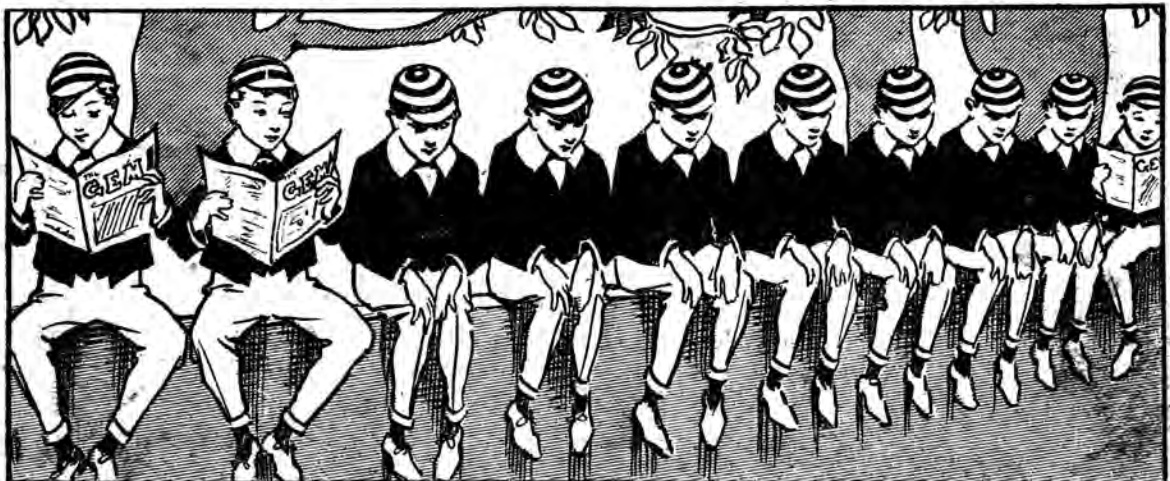
"If you please, sir, it was I!" he said. "I am sorry."

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him.

"Very well, Lowther. As you have owned up to it, and you say you are sorry, I will allow the matter to drop. You may sit down."

Monty Lowther sat—or rather fell—into his seat. He wore a dazed look for the rest of the morning.

THREE New Readers. See what happens next week!



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CHAPTER 4.

Bernard Glyn is in High Favour.

MR. RATCLIFF had apparently made up his mind to keep the juniors of St. Jim's in a perpetual state of astonishment. His forgiveness of Monty Lowther—whom the best-tempered of masters might have punished with reason—was only the beginning. He went on from one surprise to another. Gibbons, the dunce of the Shell, had everything wrong as usual, but Mr. Ratcliff did not rag him as was naturally expected. He spent a patient ten minutes explaining things to Gibbons which he had explained to him before that morning, and which his own Form-master had explained to him a dozen times, at least. And when Gibbons failed to understand, as usual, Mr. Ratcliff let him down quite gently.

Gibbons himself was surprised, and he thought that he must have done extra well, as he was not nagged or ragged. He looked very pleased with himself when the ordeal was over. Mr. Ratcliff did not look pleased, but he was patient, amazingly patient. Gore, the cad of the Shell, taking advantage of the Fifth Form-master's unexpected placability, proceeded to work off a common enough jape by pretending not to understand the simplest things, at the same time assuming an air of patient and docile inquiry that would have deceived most masters.

Even that failed to "draw" Ratty.

He was patient with Gore, and when Gore went a little too far, and it was quite clear that he was "rotting," even then Mr. Ratcliff only told him to sit down.

Then Bernard Glyn came into prominent notice. Glyn was a new boy at St. Jim's, the son of a famous engineer who lived near the school. He was following in his father's footsteps in many respects, and his inventive genius had already caused trouble in many quarters. His latest was a clockwork rat, surprisingly like the real thing, which he kept in his desk. He was showing it to Tom Merry when it slipped from his hand, and before he could recover it it was scuttling along the floor in a very lifelike way.

Glyn whistled under his breath.

"Hang it! It's making straight for Ratty."

And it was.

Ratty was pointing out something on the blackboard when he caught sight of the rat, and gave a start.

"Dear me! A rat in the class-room! Shush!"

That "shush" would have scared away a real rat, but Glyn's rat ran straight on. Mr. Ratcliff naturally wasn't prepared for that, and he gave a yelp as the thing ran over his foot, and caught in the leg of his trousers.

"Ow! Hooroo!"

He shook his leg violently, but the rat hung on—by its teeth, as the House-master supposed, in reality by the legs, which had caught in the cloth. Mr. Ratcliff stamped in affright, and the rat clumped on the floor, and then the sound showed him that it was not a living rodent.

It lay on its back, with the legs still working, and Mr. Ratcliff looked down at it with an angry brow.

"Scandalous!" he exclaimed. "Whom does this belong to?"

"If you please, sir, it is mine," said Glyn.

"Yours, Glyn? I am surprised—"

"I didn't mean to let it get away, sir. I was just showing it to Merry—"

That was not exactly a judicious confession to make in the class-room, and the juniors waited for the vials of wrath to be poured out.

But the vials did not pour.

Mr. Ratcliff looked angry for a moment, but that was all. A benevolent smile chased away the frown upon his face.

"You must be more careful, Glyn," he said mildly.

"Yes, sir," said the delighted Glyn. "I will, sir."

"I commend your—er—predilection for—er—mechanical pursuits," said Mr. Ratcliff. "But they must be kept within limits."

"Oh, yes, certainly, sir."

"You may sit down, Glyn."

After that, an earthquake might have happened without surprising the Shell very much.

During the remainder of the morning, Mr. Ratcliff seemed to select Glyn especially for little kind attentions, and though the Liverpool boy was somewhat slack in his work, through thinking of other things, Mr. Ratcliff never once found fault with him.

When the class was dismissed, they discussed the wonder as they went out, many explanations being offered, the most plausible being that Ratty was "off his rocker!"

The master beckoned to Glyn to stay behind as the class went out, and the other juniors waited for him in the passage, wondering what the New House master could have specially to say to a School House boy.

Glyn was looking dazed when he came out.

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"What is it?" asked Manners, tapping him on the shoulder. "Has he confided to you the secret cause of these sudden attacks?"

"No; he's asked me to tea."

"To which?"

"To tea in his study."

The Shell fellows stared at Glyn blankly.

Some of the masters had had very promising pupils to tea in their studies certainly, but Ratty never.

The New House master was turning over a new leaf with a vengeance.

"Tea in his study!" said Monty Lowther faintly. "You're sure he hasn't told you to go there for a licking?"

Bernard Glyn grinned.

"Quite sure. Tea in his study was what he said."

"Ratty never has fellows to tea. Even the New House prefects don't get asked to his study."

"And if he wants to begin a new line, what on earth has he picked on Glyn for?" said Clifton Dane. "He might have asked someone nice like—like myself, for instance."

"Or me?" assented Tom Merry, with a nod. "But to ask a chap who might electrocute him for a joke any minute—"

The Liverpool lad laughed.

"Well, he's asked me," he said. "That settles it."

"But why?"

"Haven't the faintest idea."

"And are you going?" asked Gore.

"Yes, rather. I couldn't very well refuse."

"Not much," said Tom Merry. "An invitation from a House-master is like a command from the King—it can't be declined with thanks. Bad form!"

"That's it. I shall go."

"Rather rough on you, old son."

"Well, it can't be helped, and I dare say it will mean some decent grub," said Glyn. "I can stand it. It's no catch having tea with Form-masters, of course. You have to be so jolly well-behaved, and then the tea's always lukewarm, and the bread-and-butter thick, and not much jam. You never like to take what you want. Still, it's not the worst thing that can happen to a chap at school. I'd rather go there to tea than to be licked."

"Why, yes, any sensible fellow would."

"I wonder if you could take in a few friends, as Dig did that time Lefevre of the Fifth invited him to tea," said Lowther thoughtfully.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It wouldn't do with a Form-master."

And Bernard Glyn shook his head.

"Can't jape a master like that."

And the inventor of St. Jim's put his hands in his pockets, and walked away, wondering. Why was Ratty so nice to him? Glyn racked his brains to find a solution to the problem, but it would not come. He simply could not understand it.

CHAPTER 5.

A Little Offering.

THE Shell did not see much of Mr. Ratcliff for the rest of that day, as Mr. Linton was well enough to take his class in the afternoon. Mr. Ratcliff took the Fifth as usual, and proceeded to astonish the Fifth as he had astonished the Shell. It was seldom that the Fifth Form was dismissed without some of its members having impositions to write out; but on this occasion the impositions were conspicuous by their absence. And when Mr. Ratcliff found Lefevre talking to Hart under his very nose, he only gently reminded him that the class-room was not the place for general conversation; a gentle reproof that so surprised Lefevre that he sat for some minutes with his mouth open, just as it was when Mr. Ratcliff interrupted him, and looking comically like a fish just taken from the water.

The Fifth Form were dismissed that afternoon in unusually high spirits. No one had been caned, no one had been threatened with a report to the Head, no one had writhed under Ratty's bitterly sarcastic tongue—there was not even an imposit. to be done in the whole Form.

The fellows were almost too surprised to be pleased.

"He's laying for us," said Lefevre. "Ratty's got some awfully deep game on, though I can't quite see what it is."

And the others agreed that it must be so, although they couldn't see what it was, either.

Mr. Ratcliff left the Form-room with a quiet and thoughtful air, and as he went into the quadrangle he met Mr. Railton of the School House. There had never been much love lost between the two House-masters at St. Jim's. The rivalry of the Houses seemed to some extent to extend to the House-masters; though, as a matter of fact, Mr. Railton had always been willing to live on amicable terms. Mr.



There was a roar of laughter as the swell of St. Jim's dropped exactly into the middle of the stream, sending up a mighty spout of water. "Ow! Groo!"

Ratcliff's sour and suspicious temper had prevented that. He had a great love of interfering with others, and at the same time he deeply resented the most trivial and fancied encroachment upon his own sphere. The House-masters had gradually fallen upon merely nodding terms, and the politeness between them was sometimes almost painful. But Mr. Ratcliff had apparently added the School House-master to the list of those who were to be astonished, for he stopped as he met Mr. Railton.

"What a pleasant afternoon!" he said.

"Pleasant indeed!" said Mr. Railton, somewhat surprised.

"It is a poetical time of the year," said Mr. Ratcliff. "What is it the poet says—'In the spring a young man's imagination—'"

"A young man's fancy," said Mr. Railton, with a smile, "lightly turns to thoughts of love."

"Ah, yes, that is it! What wonderful lines!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"They are good lines certainly."

"They express the feelings of the human breast at this season of the year," Mr. Railton. Have you not felt your heart expand under the influence of the—er—the vernal breezes?"

"I—I haven't noticed it," said Mr. Railton, wondering whether his colleague had been drinking. "I suppose we all feel a little cheered in the springtime."

"The heart expands," said Mr. Ratcliff. "The frozen sources of—of—in fact, the frozen sources melt, and—er—and all is young again."

"I am glad you feel it so."

"I am afraid we have been somewhat on cold terms of late, Railton," said the New House-master.

"Oh, not at all!"

"Yes, we have; and I fear it was my fault. We had disagreements during a certain vacation which was spent at sea. It was my fault."

"Oh, no, no!" said the School House-master, utterly astounded. "I dare say I was as much to blame."

"I insist that it was my fault," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I was harsh. I hope we shall pull together better in the future, Mr. Railton. It would be better for the school. We should be able to help one another in many ways."

"That is very true. I am sincerely glad to hear you say so, Mr. Ratcliff, and I shall certainly not be backward."

Mr. Ratcliff held out his hand, and the School House-master grasped it very heartily, as they parted. Mr. Railton was pleased—but amazed. Such a change in Mr. Ratcliff was the last thing he had ever looked for. It was a pleasant change, but—but what on earth did it mean?

Mr. Ratcliff walked on to the New House. Taggles, the school porter, was coming from the direction of his lodge with a large cardboard box in his hand, carrying it by the string. It bore on the outside the name of a florist in Rylcombe.

"This 'ere is for you, sir," said Taggles, touching his hat surlily. "Shall I take it in, sir?"

Taggles saw no reason why Mr. Ratcliff shouldn't take the box into the house himself. Ratty never by any chance gave him a tip, and Taggles—like many other persons in this unreasonable world—didn't see why he should work

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for nothing; leaving his wages out of account in considering the matter.

Mr. Ratcliff's expression brightened as he saw the cardboard box.

"Thank you, Taggles," he said; "I will take it."

He took the box, and began to fumble in his pocket.

"Stay a moment, Taggles. I wish to give you—er—a slight remuneration."

Taggles could not have walked away then if he had wanted to. He remained rooted to the spot in astonishment.

Mr. Ratcliff fumbled under his gown, and extracted a coin from a pocket. It was a sixpence, and he placed it in Taggles's palm.

Then he walked on. Taggles looked after him, and scratched his head. Then he bit the sixpence to make sure that it was a good one. It was good enough! The porter wore a half-awake look as he slowly departed.

Mr. Ratcliff entered the New House, and went directly to his study. There he opened the box, and found a really handsome bouquet packed carefully within. There was a florist's bill attached, which Mr. Ratcliff removed. He sat down at his desk, and spent the next quarter of an hour in writing the three words—"Dear Miss Glyn" upon eight sheets of notepaper in succession. This somewhat unaccountable performance finished, he rose and paced the study till the striking of the hour warned him that time was flying. Then he sat down again, and started on a fresh sheet of notepaper—"Dear Miss Glyn."

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff. "I am usually a very facile letter-writer, yet I cannot think what to put next. It is surely a very harmless and a very civil thing to send flowers to a charming young lady; it is absurd that I should be at a loss for words in a letter to accompany the gift."

He rubbed his forehead, and gnawed the handle of the pen. Neither operation afforded him relief. Finally he made a desperate dash, and wrote a few lines, and placed the note in the flowers, and then he carefully secured the box again. The next question was, how to get them to Glyn House.

"I cannot trust this to the page," murmured Mr. Ratcliff. "It would—er—also excite remark. The box would be indubitably broken if sent through the post. I will—er—take a little stroll in the direction of Glyn House this evening, and leave the box with the lodge-keeper."

Mr. Ratcliff picked up the box and left the study. In the passage a portly dame was coming along, and she stopped as she saw the House-master. It was Mrs. Kenwigg, the dame of the New House.

"Ah! I presume you were coming to my study, Mrs. Kenwigg?" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir. You asked me to come and speak to you when you came in after school," said Mrs. Kenwigg. "Is it anything wrong with the housekeeping, sir?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Kenwigg; nothing of that sort," said Mr. Ratcliff, colouring a little as he saw the House-dame's surprised look turned upon the flower-box. He coughed, and set the box down against the wall. "Ahem! I shall have tea in my study this—er—this afternoon, Mrs. Kenwigg."

"Yes, sir."

"I have a young friend coming to tea with me, madam—a youth, belonging to the—er—to the Shell Form."

Mrs. Kenwigg could only stare.

"I desire to have something palatable to a youth of tender years placed upon the table," said the House-master, wrinkling his brow thoughtfully. "I am not intimately acquainted with the habits of young persons in this—er—respect. I know they like a great deal to eat—at least, I believe that is the rule."

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"They are fond of sweet things, I believe, such as jam pies—"

"Jam what, sir?"

"Pies," said Mr. Ratcliff firmly. "Jam pies and cream puddings and ginger-beer. These things, and other—er—comestibles of a similar character, are generally devoured with great eagerness by youthful persons. I have observed this."

"Yes, sir!" murmured Mrs. Kenwigg.

"I desire to have a really well-spread table," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I wish the—er—the youth to feel at home. I think I can trust to your judgment, Mrs. Kenwigg."

"Certainly, sir!"

"One point more—expense is no object. No object at all," said Mr. Ratcliff impressively.

"Very well, sir," said Mrs. Kenwigg faintly.

"The youth who is coming to tea is Master Glyn, of the Shell. He is coming at—er—half-past five. Will you have everything prepared?"

"Very good, sir."

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And Mrs. Kenwigg moved away in a dazed state. Mr. Ratcliff walked on, a faraway look upon his face, forgetting the box he had placed on the floor. A fat junior had just come downstairs, in time to hear the concluding portion of the interview. He stood rooted to the stairs, too amazed to move; and when the House-master moved away, Fatty Wynn scuttled off to Figgins's study to tell the news.

CHAPTER 6.

Nothing for Fatty.

"RATS!" said Figgins.

It wasn't a polite remark; but what it lacked in politeness it made up in emphasis. Figgins simply couldn't believe it.

"It's a fact!" said Fatty Wynn.

"I say rats! Ratty have a fellow in to tea?"

"Fact!"

"A junior, too!"

"Solid fact!"

"And a School House boy!"

"I heard him say so."

"Now, look here, Fatty, don't you start in business as a funny man!" said Figgins, wagging his forefinger warningly at the fat Fourth-Former. "It doesn't suit your style of beauty, and you can't take us in at any price."

"It's honest injun!" said Fatty Wynn.

"But it's impossible," said Figgins argumentatively. "You must have gone to sleep on the stairs and dreamed it. It was the rabbit-pie you had a while ago; that must be the explanation."

"I tell you Ratty's going to have Glyn of the Shell in to tea," said Fatty Wynn obstinately. "It's a fact. And I think it rotten. There's no harm in a House-master having a chap in to tea—Railton in the School House simply swarms his study with prefects—but I think a House-master might be patriotic. He ought to have asked a New House chap. I don't say I like Ratty; but I'd have gone to tea with him if he had asked me."

"Jolly certain of that," said Figgins. "You'd go to tea with Charles Peaces or Dick Turpin if you were asked. Where are you off to now?"

"I'm going to speak to Glyn," said Fatty Wynn, moving towards the door. "I dare say he will feel a bit strange in the New House, you know, especially as he's a new boy at St. Jim's; and I'm thinking of offering to go with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn affected not to hear the laughter, and he left the study and went in search of Glyn of the School House. Figgins rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I suppose it's the fact," he said; "Fatty was giving it to us straight. It's of a piece with Ratty's latest developments. It'll be a case of de-de—what do you call it?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Kerr. "Do you mean deuced?"

"Of course I don't! De-de-de lunatico inquirendo," said Figgins. "That's it. Inquiry into whether Ratty's off his rocker, you know. Of course he is—right off. The thing's as plain as anything. When he began tapping a chap on the napper and calling him a little man, it showed which way the wind was blowing. Now he's asked a junior to tea. Blessed if I should feel safe in his study if I were Glyn. He might take a violent turn next—you never know with maniacs."

Meanwhile, Fatty Wynn had discovered Glyn. He had ventured into the hostile precincts of the School House, and he found Glyn in his study. The inventor of St. Jim's was selecting the cleanest collar from a box. He had to put on the best appearance possible for the state visit to Ratty's study.

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"I say, Glyn," said the fat Fourth-Former, looking in, "can I come in a minute? It's rather important."

"Oh, certainly!" said Glyn. "Take a seat in that armchair, will you?"

"N-n-no, thank you," said Wynn, edging away from the armchair. He had heard of the little surprises the inventor's study contained for unsuspecting visitors, including accidental electric shocks and collapsible armchairs. "I don't want to sit down. You are going to tea with my House-master, aren't you?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I dare say you'll feel a bit strange, going into the lion's den, as it were," said Fatty Wynn. "Ratty is a queer old bird, and you want to know him."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Well," said Fatty, coughing a little, "if you like, I'll come with you. I know the ropes, so to speak, and I'll be your guide, philosopher, and friend, as it were, and see you safe through. I know Ratty like a book, and—and I know he'd be glad if you took in a friend with you."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Well, no; but I feel quite sure that—"

"That you'd like a feed in his study?"

"N-no; I wasn't going to say exactly that—"

"That's what you mean, I expect. Sorry; I can't take you. Ratty said nothing about bringing a friend, and if I took one I should take Tom Merry or Blake."

"Look here—"

"Sorry, I can't stop. I've got to go and have an extra wash."

And Bernard Glyn nodded cheerfully and walked out of the study, leaving Fatty Wynn alone and wrathful. The fat Fourth-Former looked after him, and then slowly followed him out, and in the passage he met the chums of Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy. They stopped him at once.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur D'Arcy, putting up his eyeglass. "Here's a New House wotah! I am surprised at his cheek in comin' into a respectable House."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "I suggest rolling him downstairs. He would go down like a barrel."

"Yaas, wotah."

"Here, hold on!" said Fatty Wynn, in alarm. "Pax! I came here to speak to Glyn. It's all right."

"I wufuse to wegard it as all wight. I weally considah it the wupwah capah to woll this young wastah downstairs."

Fatty Wynn made a desperate rush for the stairs, and Blake gave a shout and clattered his boots on the linoleum to give him an impression that he was pursued. Fatty went down the stairs three at a time, and reached the ground floor before he discovered that he need not have hurried. From above came a sound of laughter. The fat Fourth-Former gasped for breath.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "Fancy making a chap run for nothing on a warm afternoon! I'm quite out of breath."

And at a more moderate pace he returned to the New House. His look told Figgins and Kerr of the result of his mission.

"No go?" asked Figgins sympathetically.

"No," grunted Fatty Wynn. "I think it's about time we put those School House rotters in their place."

Figgins chuckled.

"We've just got up a little jape for their especial benefit, Fatty; while you were thinking of grub."

"What's the idea?" asked Fatty, eagerly enough. He felt that he ought to be avenged, somehow, upon somebody, for his disappointment with regard to the feed, and the breathless rush downstairs in the School House.

"I suppose you know that Dame Taggles's stock of pies and tarts is sometimes—well, sometimes a little—a little wanky?" said Figgins.

"Yes, rather! She never works the wanky ones off on me, though," said Fatty. "If you want some shopping done, you can rely on me."

"I don't, my son. I only want to draw your attention to the fact. Mrs. Taggles's compositions have a long life—but even Dame Taggles draws the line somewhere, and at certain times she clears out the remnants—tarts that have gone wanky, and pies that would soon walk away if they weren't chucked. Now, I've bought up a choice selection of the last lot, that were just going to the dust heap—the wangiast tarts, the shriekiest pies, the fearfulest puddings—"

"What on earth for? If you think I'm going to eat—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I wasn't thinking of standing you a feed with them, Fatty. Look here!"

Figgins drew a brown paper parcel from the cupboard, and opened it on the table. It contained a choice assortment of pies and tarts that certainly could never have been offered for sale with any chance of success. They were the

oldest of Dame Taggles's old stock. Fatty Wynn, in his hungriest moments, would have drawn a line there.

The fat Fourth-Former sniffed expressively.

"My hat! Why, they're talking. How much did you give for that lot?"

"A tanner," said Figgins; "and cheap at the price, considering. I'm going to jam them into a box, and send them to Study No. 6 in the School House, with the compliments of the New House. They'll think it's a treat from home, you see; and I'd like to see their faces when they open the box and catch the whiff."

"My word! And it's whiffy!"

"It will be a good jape," said Figgins, grinning. "Funds have been low, I hear, in Study No. 6, lately, and this lot will come in welcome—till they open it. We want a box of some sort. Have you got one?"

"I saw an old cardboard box in the passage," said Fatty Wynn, "somebody had chucked it out of a study, I suppose. If it's still there, I'll get it in."

"Buck up, then!"

Fatty Wynn went to look for the box. The box he was thinking of was the one Mr. Ratcliff had left in the passage. The House-master, thinking of his young guest, almost due now, had quite forgotten the box, and it was still there. Fatty Wynn picked it up and carried it away to Figgins's study.

"Good!" said Figgins, looking at it. "It's a thick, strong box, and it will do rippingly. Seems to have come from the Rylcombe florist originally. Is there anything in it?"

"Only some old flowers," said Fatty Wynn, turning the box out into the study wastepaper-basket. "No good, I suppose. The box will do all right."

"It won't hold the lot," said Kerr.

"Never mind; it will hold enough for the purpose. We'll put in the lightest things, to save the postage."

And Figgins packed a quantity of tarts and puffs and other delicacies—all of an extremely ancient state—into the box, and put a rabbit-pie on top—that rabbit-pie being the most emphatic, so to speak, of the whole selection.

On top of the rabbit-pie was placed a card bearing the inscription: "With the Compliments of the New House."

"There," said Figgins, "I think that's all right."

"Absolutely OK!" said Kerr. "I'll take it to the post, while you take Fatty round the quad. for a sprint before tea."

"I—I think I'll take it to the post, Kerr," said Fatty Wynn; "I don't want you to have the trouble, and I don't feel quite up to a sprint. I'd like to—"

"Look here, you've got to get into running form."

"Yes, but there's plenty of time. I'll take it to the post."

"Oh, just as you like!"

Figgins put the lid on the box, and tied it with the original string. Then he addressed it in pencil, to Jack Blake, School House, St. Jim's.

"Now, you take it," he said. "Come and get your running things on, Kerr. I hear that the School House are going to challenge us to a paper-chase, and you and I will have to be in form, anyway. Cut along, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn took the box by the string and left the study. But he had no intention of going immediately to the post. He walked away quietly to Mr. Ratcliff's study, and remained outside the door, waiting for Bernard Glyn. Fatty Wynn was getting peckish, and he meant to pursue the subject once more with Bernard Glyn. After the instructions he had heard Mr. Ratcliff give Mrs. Kenwigg, tea in the House-master's study seemed enticing. Fatty Wynn did not mean to miss it over any trivial question of personal feeling in the matter.

He affected to be greatly interested in a picture on the wall, as a pretext for lingering there, and he stood the box down, meanwhile, very near the place where he had found it. In a few minutes Glyn came along, looking very bright with his newly-washed face and well-brushed hair, and his clean collar. He grinned at the sight of Fatty Wynn, guessing what he was there for.

"I say, Glyn—"

"Sorry I can't stop," said Glyn, and he tapped at the House-master's door.

"But look here—"

The door opened, opened by Mr. Ratcliff himself. He greeted Glyn with a gracious smile.

"I am glad to see you, my boy. Come in. Er—is that you, Wynn? Do you want anything here, Wynn?"

"N-n-no, sir," stammered Fatty.

"Then be off. What are you moving that box for? Let it alone."

"The—the box, sir," stammered the junior, who had stooped to pick up the box containing the gifts for Study No. 6.

"Yes. Give it to me."

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There was no denying a House-master. Fatty Wynn handed over the box, and Mr. Ratcliff took it into his study, and placed it on his desk. It occurred to him that it felt somewhat heavier than it had been before, but he did not pay any special attention to the fact. That it had been tampered with never occurred to him.

Fatty Wynn walked away in a state of considerable disgust. He met Figgins and Kerr just going out in their running clothes.

"Where's that box?" asked Figgins. "Aren't you going to post it now?"

"Ratty's got it."

"Ratty! How?"

"He made me give it him."

Figgins whistled.

"Then there'll be a row! You are a precious sort of an ass, too! The jape's done in. Ratty will growl when he opens that box! Come on!"

"I'm going to the tuckshop—"

"No, you're not; you're coming for a sprint!"

"But I'm hungry."

"Never mind, a sprint will make you hungrier."

"But—but look here, Figg—"

"Nuff said. Come on."

And the fat Fourth-Former was dragged away. In a few minutes more he was puffing and blowing on a rapid sprint round the quad.

CHAPTER 7.

Tea with Mr. Ratcliff.

MR. RATCLIFF looked at his youthful guest, and coughed. He looked at the tea-table, and coughed again. He wished that he had identified himself a little more with the youthful life in his House. Entertaining a youngster was quite a simple matter to Mr. Raiton, over the way. But to Mr. Ratcliff the task was new and strange, and decidedly difficult.

"Pray sit down," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Glyn was feeling as awkward as Mr. Ratcliff. He was not a shy boy as a rule, but to be shut up in a tete-a-tete with a master whom he had always regarded with awe and dread, and who was evidently constrained, was enough to make any fellow feel awkward. He sat down on the edge of a chair.

"The tea is prepared," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I trust—er—that you will find it—er—agreeable. Do you care for jam-pies?"

"Jam-pies, sir?"

"Ah! I see that the cook has, after all, neglected to send up the jam-pies. I will ring for them, also the tea."

Mr. Ratcliff touched the bell. A trim maidservant brought in the tea in a minute or so, but there was no trace of the jam-pies. They were non-existent. Mr. Ratcliff was going to inquire for them, but he coughed instead, and the maid left the room. Mr. Ratcliff sat down at the table.

"Pray draw your chair up to the table—er—my young friend."

His young friend did so.

"Do you take your tea—er—strong—er—er—weak, Glyn?"

"Both, sir—I—I mean, weak, sir."

"Ah, I am glad to hear you say so, Glyn. Strong tea is very bad for the nervous system, and a youth engaged in your—er—scientific pursuits, needs to keep his nerves in a state of order. You are—er—I believe—an amateur electrician, and—er—and so on," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you take sugar?"

"If you please, sir."

"And milk?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff had unconsciously filled Glyn's teacup to overflowing, and it slopped over as he passed it to the boy. He passed him the milk-jug and the sugar-basin, and Glyn was left to solve the problem of how to introduce sugar and milk into an already overflowing cup, without making it overflow. Glyn was good at scientific problems, but this one baffled him, and he sat in doubt. His saucer was already pretty full, and would not hold much more.

There was bread-and-butter and watercress to begin with, and they began. Mr. Ratcliff had intended to grace the meal with light and entertaining conversation, but subjects seemed to be lacking.

Observations upon the peculiarities of the Greek language would have come easily to his lips, but were not likely to interest Glyn. He could have discussed painting, but he already knew that Glyn did not care much about that, and knew less than he cared. As for Glyn's scientific pursuits, they were a sealed book to Mr. Ratcliff. The New House-

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master could not have told how a simple electric-bell was fixed, and Glyn's talk on such subjects would have been Sanskrit to him.

Mr. Ratcliff cudgelled his brains for a topic, and meanwhile a chilling silence reigned in the room, broken only by the slight sounds of the tea-table.

Silence, as usual in such a case, became more oppressive the longer it lasted, until it seemed too venturesome an effort to think of breaking it.

Glyn masticated bread-and-butter and watercress, and looked at his tea, which he was not drinking. He liked plenty of sugar and milk, and there was not room for any, and he was far too constrained to venture to pour a portion of the superabundant tea into the slop-basin.

If Mr. Ratcliff had ever cared to know anything about boyish pursuits, he would not have lacked a topic; and he was paying the penalty now for his long indifference upon those points.

"Will you have a little more tea, Glyn?" he asked.

In the aching silence of the study, his voice seemed to come like thunder, and Glyn gave a start.

"Er—no, thank you, sir."

"Dear me, you have not started yet! Is the tea quite to your liking?"

"Er—it's all right, sir."

"Very good. I suppose," said Mr. Ratcliff desperately, and thinking that any remark on boyish sports would be as judicious as anything he could say—"I suppose you are playing a great deal of football now?"

Glyn grinned.

"Football's over, sir."

"Dear me, so it is. I—I mean cricket."

"Yes, sir. I do some practice."

"You will be playing in the—er—the House matches?"

"I don't know if I shall get into the first eleven, sir—I mean the junior first. It rests with Tom Merry."

"Ah, yes! No doubt."

Cricket did not seem to pan out well. Mr. Ratcliff passed the cake, and Glyn helped himself. His tea was getting cold, and at last, with a very dry face, he made an effort and swallowed some of it, and then milked and sugared the rest. The cake was certainly good, and the tarts that followed it were fresh and nice, and Glyn began to feel a little more comfortable.

"I—I hope you like that tart, Glyn," said Mr. Ratcliff, after another long interval of silence.

"Yes, sir, very much."

"I am sorry there are no jam-pies. Are you very fond of jam-pies?"

"I don't think I've ever had any, sir."

"Ah! The tarts, however, are good. There is also ginger-beer. Will you have some ginger-beer?"

"Not with my tea, sir, thank you."

"Ah, yes, I forgot. I suppose you will be spending the next half-holiday at your father's house?" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, no, sir! We're getting up a paper-chase."

Mr. Ratcliff drank his tea, and thought. It was two or three minutes before another remark was made. Glyn had a good appetite, and the tea and the tarts made him more at home. He felt less constrained now, and he ventured to ask for another cup of tea. There was a slightly vacant smile upon Mr. Ratcliff's face, as if he were thinking of beatific things, and he started out of a reverie to comply with Bernard Glyn's request.

"Tea—yes, certainly."

He emptied the remains of Glyn's tea absentmindedly into the milk-jug instead of the slop-basin, and began to pour out fresh tea. Glyn watched him in astonishment.

"Of course, it is very pleasant for you, your father having taken up his residence so near the school," Mr. Ratcliff remarked.

"Very, sir."

"It enables you to enjoy many—er—many a little—er—run into the bosom of the family, so to speak," said the House-master. "It must be very pleasant for you to see your father so frequently, and your—er—sister."

Mr. Ratcliff unaccountably coloured over the last word. He was still pouring away at the tea, though both cup and saucer were running over into the tray. Glyn wondered what was the matter.

"It's very nice, indeed, sir, but—"

"Surely there is no 'but' in such a case," smiled Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, no, sir, I didn't mean that, but—but you're pouring all the tea away into the tray, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff started, and sent a jet of tea into the sugar-basin.

"Dear me, so I am."

He stopped pouring. It was time, for the tray was simply swimming. The House-master looked somewhat confused,

As his silk hat was glued to his forehead with perspiration, and his collar was damp and clinging, love-sick Mr. Ratcliff was glad that Miss Glyn's eyes were not turned upon him as he came towards her.



and Glyn could not suppress a grin. There was silence for some minutes.

"Your—er—sister is older than yourself, I believe?" said Mr. Ratcliff, who seemed determined to come back to that subject, whether he could think of an intelligent remark to make upon it or not.

Glyn stared, as well he might.

"Why, of course, sir—about ten years older."

"Ah, yes, of course! A—er—most charming girl, Glyn."

"Yes, sir, Edith's all right," said Glyn; and then he chuckled. "She's got a temper, though," he said confidentially.

"Dear me! Really?"

"Yes, rather, sir. You should have seen her when I gave her pet dog an electric shock. Of course, I didn't hurt him, but he made a row. Dogs always make a row if you give them electric shocks. Of course, it was only a mild one; I wouldn't hurt an animal. But women never understand anything, you know," said Glyn, with the masculine superiority natural to the ripe age of fifteen.

"Dear me! I should never have thought it! Is it not rather thoughtless of you to—er—to electrocute—"

"Electrify, sir."

"Ah, yes—to electrify your sister—I mean your sister's pet dog? By the way, did I hear that Miss Glyn was engaged to be married?"

"I don't think so, sir," said Glyn, wondering what business that was of Mr. Ratcliff's. "She isn't, anyway."

"Ah! I am glad of that—I—I—er—I mean to say, how—how surprising! That is to say, I—I really forget what I was going to say."

Glyn looked a little alarmed. Mr. Ratcliff's manner was so very strange. The New House-master drank his tea to cover his confusion, and some of it went the wrong way, and he began to cough. The coughing left him very red and flustered.

Glyn watched him, a strange suspicion dawning in his mind.

The mere thought was enough to send him into an explosion of laughter, but he controlled it.

Mr. Ratcliff's amazing change of ways during the past day or two—his kindness to Glyn in particular—and now the invitation to tea in the House-master's study—Mr. Ratcliff's interest in the question whether Edith Glyn was engaged or not—all these circumstances, added to one or two others Glyn had observed during Mr. Ratcliff's visit to Glyn House, opened his eyes at last.

"My only hat!" he murmured to himself.

"Will you—er—have a little more cake, Glyn?"

"No, thank you, sir."

Glyn was anxious to get back to the School House and confide his new discovery to his friends there, and the tarts ceased to tempt him.

"Another tart, Glyn?"

"No, thank you, sir."

"Another cup of tea?"

"I am quite finished, sir, thanks."

"Er—very good!" Mr. Ratcliff rose, and Bernard Glyn rose, too. His face was grave, but his eyes were dancing.

"I hope you have—er—made a good tea, Glyn?"

"Excellent, sir, thank you. It was very kind of you to ask me, sir."

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"Not at all, not at all, my boy!"

"I think my sister will be so pleased, sir," said Glyn demurely, "when she hears how kind you have been to me."

It was a feeler, to make sure that his surmise was correct, and the perfectly idiotic smile of gratification that came upon Mr. Ratcliff's face was proof enough for Glyn.

"He wants me to butter him up to Edie," murmured Glyn to himself. "Oh, my hat! My sides! How shall I hold out till I get away?"

"I—I should—er—very—should be very glad to know that I had pleased Miss Glyn in any way," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Good-bye, Glyn! I hope I shall see you again."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

The House-master shook hands with the junior, and Glyn departed. He went across the quad, as he might have gone down a running-track. Mr. Ratcliff picked up his hat, and got into his coat. It was time for his little stroll down to Glyn House with the flowers.

"Dear me," he murmured, as he picked up the box, "it seems to be heavier, doubtless owing to some atmospheric action upon the flowers! I trust that my little gift will prove acceptable to—er—to the charming young lady."

If Mr. Ratcliff had known what had taken the place of the flowers inside the box, he would not have felt very trustful about it. But he did not know, and he put on his hat, and left the school, feeling very well satisfied with himself and things generally.

CHAPTER 8.

A Case of Spoons.

G LYN burst into Tom Merry's study.

"I say, you chaps—ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three were at tea. Monty Lowther was pouring out the tea, when Glyn burst in like a thunder-bolt, and Lowther jumped, and poured the tea over Manners. Needless to say, Manners jumped too.

"You ass!" he roared, springing up, and knocking his chair flying backwards. "Ow! I'm scalded!"

"Oh, never mind!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, you're not scalded! The ass—"

"It wasn't my fault," growled Lowther. "Do you think I was wasting the tea scalding you on purpose? That dummy startled me, bolting into the study like that."

"Chuck the rest of the tea over him."

"Good! So I will."

"Hold on!" gasped Glyn. "Pax—don't—chuck it! I mean, don't chuck it. I've got news—shrieking, amazing news. I know what's the matter with Ratty."

Monty Lowther set down the teapot, and Tom Merry jumped up. All three of the chums of the Shell stared at Glyn.

"You know what's the matter with Ratty?" demanded three voices in unison.

"Yes."

"And what is it?"

"He's spoons on my sister Edith."

"What!"

"Fact!"

There was silence in the study—the silence of blank astonishment.

That Mr. Ratcliff might be insane—that he might be playing a deep game—that he might be under the influence of hypnotism or drink—all these things were possible, and had occurred to the Terrible Three.

But that Mr. Ratcliff might be in love—

"Oh, tell that to the marines!" said Monty Lowther, breaking the silence. "What's the good of bringing a yarn like that here?"

"It's the solid truth. Funny, ain't it?"

"Funny isn't the word, if it's true," said Tom Merry. "How do you know?"

Glyn explained his reasons. The Terrible Three listened attentively, and they had to agree that it looked very probable.

"We ought to have guessed it," said Monty Lowther, at last. "You remember the symptoms Gussy shows when he's in love? Upon the whole, Ratty has been giving it away, if anybody had had the sense to see it."

"Looks like it. My hat! Ratty in love!"

"A case of spoons!" chuckled Manners. "Your sister is a stunning girl, Glyn, but—fancy Ratty having the cheek to fall in love with her. Surely she won't look at him?"

Glyn sniffed.

"I should say not! Why, the chap's off his chump, you know. I don't suppose Edith will ever marry at all, as she's got me to look after her, but as for marrying Ratty—Ha, ha, ha! My word! I wonder what she would say if she knew?"

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"Suppose you enlighten her?" grinned Lowther.

Glyn shook his head decidedly.

"Not much! She might take the tennis-racquet to me again. I told Ratty she had a temper, you know, and he seemed surprised. He should have seen her the time I gave her dog an electric—"

"Poor old Ratty!" said Tom Merry. "It's the spring that does it, you know. In the spring a young man's fancy—"

"Bai Jove, you chaps are lookin' excited!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking into the study. "Is there anythin' goin' on?"

"Yes; we've found out the secret."

"What secret?"

"What's the matter with Ratty?"

"Bai Jove! I should be vewy pleased to know what's the mattah with Watty!"

"He's spoons on Glyn's sister."

The Terrible Three expected D'Arcy to burst into a roar of laughter. But he didn't. He jammed his monocle into his eye, and took a survey of the chums of the Shell.

"I do not regard that as a mattah for wibald mewwiment," he said. "Miss Glyn is a most charmin' gal, as you are all aware. It is not likely that she will evah look at a chap of Watty's type. There is a disappointment in store for Watty, and I am vewy sorry for him."

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "Here's Gussy giving us a lesson, as usual; and he's jolly well right. Good for you, Gussy!"

"I weally do not wish to appeah in the light of givin' anybody a lesson," said D'Arcy. "I have a gweat howwah of appeawin' pwiggish, deah boys. But I weally think that it is wuff on Watty, and I am goin' to back him up, for one."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther. "We could get a lot of fun out of this—"

"I should wefuse to have a hand in it, and I twust that on weflection you will think bettah of the ideah," said D'Arcy. "Pway tweat the mattah with pwopah respect. Any fun on the subject would place Watty in a doocid awkward posish."

"Well, he's been rough enough on us, hasn't he?"

"Yaas, wathah! But it is the duty of a Chwistian to weturn good for evil; and besides, Watty has been turnin' ovah a new leaf lately. I wegard this as bein' pwobably the turnin' point in his caweer. I know that—"

"Oh, of course Gussy can give us points on this subject!" grinned Lowther. "He's an old hand, so to speak. Gussy on love would make a good article for the 'Weekly.'"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Gussy's right," said Tom Merry, "we'll let Ratty alone."

"Yaas, wathah! I wish it to be distinctly undabstood that I am backin' up Watty in the mattah."

And D'Arcy gave Lowther a severe look through his monocle, and quitted the study. He looked in again in a moment.

"Bai Jove, I forgot to tell you what I came for! Will you chaps come along to No. 6 to awwange about the panah-chase?"

"Yes, when we've finished tea."

"Wight-ho!"

And the swell of St. Jim's departed, fully determined to "back up Ratty," though what form the backing up was to take, and what good it was likely to do Ratty, did not seem very clear.

CHAPTER 9.

The Gift.

M R. RATCLIFF seemed to be walking on air as he left the gates of St. Jim's, and turned into Rylcombe Lane. His usually sour face was very cheerful, and the smiles that occasionally wreathed it were a little vacant. Sometimes he walked very fast, and then again he would drop into a slow walk, and once or twice he stopped altogether and looked at the sky. An observer would certainly have surmised that Mr. Ratcliff was a little weak in the head, or else that he was under some influence that had thrown him entirely off his usual balance. The latter, as we know, was the case.

Near the village a private lane led to the gates of Glyn House, the dwelling-place of the adored, as Mr. Ratcliff would have termed it. Mr. Ratcliff came in sight of the gates. They were open, and on the lawn within he caught sight of a form, the mere glimpse of which made his heart beat faster.

A fast-beating heart is nothing novel to a young lover, but to a gentleman of Mr. Ratcliff's ripe years it was somewhat uncomfortable. It made him feel short of breath, and he was conscious of a damp perspiration all over his

skin. However, he controlled a desire to walk very quickly away from the spot, and entered the gates of Glyn House.

Miss Glyn was seated upon a rustic bench under a wide-spreading tree, and she looked very charming in a white dress and a summer hat. She was reading, and did not see Mr. Ratcliff.

The House-master was glad of it. The afternoon was warm, and the walk had been an unusually long one for Mr. Ratcliff, who was unaccustomed to exercise. He was feeling a little tired and hot, and he had become conscious of the existence of corns upon his feet. Shooting pains in the toes were ill companions for love in the heart; but so it was. His silk hat was glued to his forehead with perspiration, and his collar was damp and clinging.

Under the circumstances, he was glad that Miss Glyn's eyes were not turned upon him as he came towards her.

In the shade of the tree, sheltered from the glare of the sun, he would feel more at his ease to face her eyes.

He found himself hoping devoutly that she would not raise her eyes from her book till he had reached her; but, as a matter of fact, the girl had now become conscious of his presence, and she was looking at him under her lashes without raising her head.

She smiled slightly, and wondered what Mr. Ratcliff wanted, and what could have happened to make him so flustered.

But she did not raise her head till his shadow fell across her book, and then she looked up with a little start.

"Dear me," said Mr. Ratcliff, "I hope I did not startle you!"

"Not at all," said Edith.

Mr. Ratcliff was jerking at his hat. But dried perspiration had fastened it to the skin, and for the moment it would not come off. The House-master grew very red, and he almost gasped with pain as he finally tore the hat away. Edith did not appear to notice anything of it.

"It is very warm," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, it has been a beautiful day."

"I dare say," remarked the House-master—"I dare say, Miss Glyn, that you are surprised to see me this afternoon."

"Oh, I am sure papa will always be glad to see you, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Y-e-e-s." Apparently papa's gladness was not exactly what Mr. Ratcliff wanted; but he did not pursue the subject. "I—I have taken the liberty, Miss Glyn, to—to—to—in fact, to—to—to—"

"Yes," said Miss Glyn.

"To—to—to bring you a slight—a slight—er—what may be termed a slight offering," said Mr. Ratcliff, placing the box on the seat beside the girl. "I—I trust that you will not be offended."

"Certainly not!"

"You are—er—fond of— In short, I think you will like my little—er—gift," stammered Mr. Ratcliff.

"You are very kind," said the girl, in wonder.

She read the florist's name on the box, and guessed that it contained flowers. She noticed, too, that the name of Blake, of the School House, was pencilled there, in the form of an address, a fact that had escaped Mr. Ratcliff's attention in his preoccupation. But that might only have meant that Blake had been to the florist's to order the flowers for Mr. Ratcliff, and the girl was far from suspecting anything like the real state of affairs. A gift of flowers from Mr. Ratcliff surprised her, and made her feel a little uncomfortable, she hardly knew why. She untied the string of the box.

Mr. Ratcliff was breathing more freely in the shade of the tree. He watched the girl as she unfasted the string.

There was a little more colour in Edith Glyn's cheeks than heretofore, and the House-master noted it.

After all, was not the present a favourable moment to speak?

Mr. Ratcliff, so far, had not given much thought to the practical aspect of the question—that a millionaire's daughter was not likely to marry a House-master in a public school—that a charming girl like Edith Glyn was not at all likely to care for a man fifteen or twenty years her senior.

He had been too busy, like many lovers, with thinking about himself and his personal feelings, to have any thought to give to that aspect of the affair.

He revolved the matter in his mind, and determined to put his fate to the touch while Miss Glyn still had the flowers in her hands.

The girl raised the lid of the box.

A curious smell came from within, and she looked sur-

prised, and then she looked into the box, and gave a violent start.

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Yes, my dear Miss Glyn, I— He broke off. There was no mistaking the girl's expression, and he recollected at that moment Bernard Glyn's declaration that the charming Edith had a temper. "You—you are not angry with me?"

"If this is meant as an insult—"

"A-a-a-an insult!"

"Or if it is a freak—"

"Miss Glyn!"

"I fail to understand the humour of such a joke, Mr. Ratcliff! I must request you to take these horrid things away, and—"

"Horrid things!" Mr. Ratcliff remembered the price he had paid for the flowers to an extortionate florist, and felt a little indignant. "Horrid, Miss Glyn! Surely the flowers cannot have withered already?"

"Flowers! Did you think there were flowers in this box?"

"Certainly!"

"Look, then!"

Mr. Ratcliff looked, and jumped clear of the ground.

"With the compliments of the New House!"

That sentence, in Figgy's sprawling hand, met his eye first of all, and then the rabbit-pie, and then the whiffy tarts and puffs.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes almost started from his head as he looked at the unique collection of ancient stock from the school shop.

Miss Glyn looked at him. There was a smile stealing over her face now. She realised that it was the House-master, and not herself, who was the victim of a joke.

"Miss Glyn! How—how can this have happened? I—I trust you do not believe me capable of—of—of—of perpetrating such a—a—a brutal jest?" gasped the unfortunate House-master.

The girl laughed.

"I suppose you have been the victim of a joke, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"I—I—I suppose so! There were flowers in that box when I fastened it up, and now—now—now— Oh, it is incredible!"

"It is very curious."

"Someone must have tampered with it. Dear me, I know that handwriting; it is Figgy's! I will—"

"Pray do not punish Figgy's," said Miss Glyn. "I should be very sorry!"

"But he deserves—"

"I should not like to be the cause of Figgy's being punished. Pray let the matter rest where it is."

"For your sake, Miss Glyn, I will pardon him; but—but it is infamous!"

"It was certainly in very bad taste."

"The wretched boy! How can I apologise?"

"Pray do not trouble to do so. I should like you, however, to take the—the box away with you," said Miss Glyn demurely. "I thank you very much, but I cannot put these—er—these pastries to any use!"

Mr. Ratcliff was crimson as he fastened up the box. Miss Glyn rose to her feet, and closed her book.

It was evident that the interview was over, and Mr. Ratcliff's chance was gone.

"Good-bye!" he said despondently.

"Good-bye, Mr. Ratcliff! And—you must not send me any more flowers!"

Miss Glyn disappeared towards the house. Mr. Ratcliff slowly walked away, carrying the offending box, which he pitched into the nearest ditch as soon as he was clear of the grounds of Glyn House. His visit could not be called a success.

CHAPTER 10.

Called to Account.

"**R**UN!" said Figgy disdainfully. "Of course, we'll run—with any rotten runner in the School House, and leave you miles behind!"

"Done!" said Tom Merry. "You and Kerr will be the hares, then, and the School House will find the pack. Of course, the New House chaps can join the pack, and if one of them catches you, I give in. My idea is that I shall collar you."

TOM SAYERS

IN THE
"MARVEL"
ONLY!

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S WEEK-END."

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 56.
A Grand Tale of The Boys of St.
Jlm's. By Martin Clifford.

"And my idea," said Blake, "is that I shall collar him."

"And my ideah, deah boys, is that I shall collah the wastahs!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wathah fancy myself as a wunnah, you know."

"We'll start tearing up the paper this evening, then," said Digby. "Here's some paper scribbled on in Gussy's scrawl; that will do for a start!"

"Hold on—pway hold on!"

"What's the matter?"

"That's my fashion article for the ewwrent numbah of 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

"Yes; I know it is!"

"You—you uttah wottah! There is the fwuit of hours of welflection in that article!" said D'Arcy, snatching the precious paper from Digby. "I wegard you as a beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll find enough old exercise-books and newspapers," grinned Figgins. "When is the paper-chase to come off?"

"Wednesday afternoon."

"Right you are! I suppose all the lower school will be running? We'll jolly well give you a run for your money, too!"

"Rely on us for that," said Kerr.

Jameson, of the Third, put his head in at the door.

"Figgins is wanted!"

Figgins looked round in a leisurely way.

"Did you address me, Jameson, my son?"

"Yes; you're wanted in the New House!"

"A doctor will be wanted in the New House, too, to attend to a cheeky kid named Jameson!" said Figgins darkly. "Cut off!"

Jameson grinned.

"But you're really wanted," he said. "It's Ratty."

"What does Ratty want?"

"You!"

And with that somewhat brief information Jameson cut off, dodging a Latin Grammar hurled at him by Digby.

Figgins rose from his graceful seat on the corner of the study table.

"If Ratty wants me, I'd better go," he remarked. "It's bad form to keep a House-master waiting!"

"And jolly painful in its results, too!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it's settled," said Figgins. "We run you on Wednesday afternoon, and you can tear up all your old rubbish for scent, including all your contributions to the 'Weekly.' Nighty-bye!"

And Figgins and Kerr left the study.

Figgins was looking surprised as he crossed to the New House. He didn't really know what Ratty wanted. Besides, the fact that Ratty had grown so soft and kind of late, Figgins could call nothing to mind that required punishment. He was not always in such a happy state, but just now he could not remember a single rule he had lately transgressed.

"Blessed if I know what Ratty wants," he said to Kerr. "Perhaps it's a new phase of his lunacy. He may be going to give me a tip."

"Not likely!"

"Well, no, it's not likely," assented Figgins. "Ratty's changed a lot, but perhaps not to that extent. He may be uneasy in his conscience about having had a School House chap to tea, and cut his own House, and perhaps he wants to ask me to bring a few friends in."

Kerr shook his head; it did not seem at all probable to him. Figgins made his way at once to Mr. Ratcliff's study, and the look on Ratty's face showed him that he had not been sent for on a pleasant matter. Ratty was quite the old Ratty again, as far as looks went.

"Figgins, you have acted in a disgraceful manner!"

Figgins turned red.

He had his faults, and was always prepared to be hauled over the coals for them, but he had never acted in a disgraceful manner in any way in his life, and he wasn't going to take such an accusation calmly.

"Indeed, sir, I haven't!" he exclaimed. "I don't know what you're alluding to, sir; but I certainly haven't done anything of the sort!"

"Don't dare to contradict me, Figgins!"

"No, sir; only I haven't acted in a disgraceful manner!"

"What do you call this?" said Mr. Ratcliff, breathing hard, as he thrust under Figgins's nose that fatal slip, "With the compliments of the New House!"

"That, sir? I wrote that!"

"I know you did; I knew your hand at once! How dare you?"

"It was only a joke, sir!"

"You call it a joke? I have promised not to punish you," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I shall, however, endeavour to point out to you in suitable words the enormity of your action!"

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"But—but it was only a joke, sir! I didn't mean any harm. We're always japing one another."

Mr. Ratcliff stared.

"Figgins! You and the—the person that it was sent to, are always japing one another?"

"Yes, sir; nearly every day in one way or other. It's only a joke! It was a little surprise for the bounder when he opened the box, sir!"

"Bounder! He! Whom? Are you alluding to Miss Glyn as a bounder?"

Figgins's jaw dropped.

"Miss Glyn, sir?"

"Yes. It was Miss Glyn that box was sent to!"

Figgins's face was a study.

"I left it out of my sight for a time," said Mr. Ratcliff, "and this trick was played. The flowers intended for a lady were replaced with a—a—a foul assortment of stale and exceedingly unpleasant comestibles."

"Great Scott! Did Miss Glyn open it?"

"Yes, certainly she did."

"I—I—I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Figgins sincerely enough. "We found the box, and there were only some old flowers in it—"

"Old flowers!" I paid a half-guinea for those flowers to-day."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir. I didn't know they were any good. The box was kicking about the passage, and—"

"I happened to leave it in the passage."

"We—we thought we might use it, sir, as it was kicking about. We chucked the flowers away, and put those things in the box for Blake, sir. When you took it away from Fatty Wynn we thought you knew we were going to jape Blake, sir, and were confiscating the box. We never dreamed it belonged to you, sir. I hope you don't think we'd play a trick like that on a lady, sir?"

Figgins's tone was too sincere for him to be doubted, even by the suspicious House-master.

"Very well, Figgins; I believe you."

"Thank you, sir."

"Did you not find a note in the flowers?"

"We didn't look for one, sir. We really didn't look at the flowers at all. We just shoved them out into the waste-paper basket in the study."

"Very well, Figgins. You may go."

Figgins went.

Mr. Ratcliff went at once to Figgins's study, and in the waste-paper basket he found the crumpled flowers, and his note still in the midst of them. It was proof, if he wanted it, that Figgins had told him the truth. Innocent as Figgins had been, that would not have saved him from severe punishment if Mr. Ratcliff had been in his old mood. But the softening influence of Eros had had a wonderful effect upon the House-master, and it really seemed as if punishment was to become a thing of the past in the New House at St. Jim's.

"My only summer hat!" said Kerr, when Figgins explained to him. "It was a ghastly mess, and no mistake! Some of us ought to explain to Miss Glyn."

Figgins nodded.

"I shall apologise to her first chance I get," he said. "I don't want her to think I could do a caddish thing like that on purpose."

"Rather not."

And Figgins, wondering what Miss Glyn must think of him, was rather worried about the matter. It was likely to weigh upon his mind till he found an opportunity of explaining and apologising. Meanwhile, Figgins & Co., like the chums of the School House, were busied with preparations for the big paper-chase.

CHAPTER 11.

The Paper-Chase.

"**A** H! You are perhaps—er—going home this afternoon, Glyn?" said Mr. Ratcliff, after school on Wednesday, as he met Bernard Glyn in the passage. The meeting was not accidental on Mr. Ratcliff's part.

"No, sir," said Glyn.

"I—I was—er—thinking that I would walk with you as far as Glyn House," went on Mr. Ratcliff, unheeding. "I find that a stroll in this charming early summer weather is an excellent thing for the—ah—digestion."

"I'm not going home, sir," said Glyn, his heart sinking at the thought of being compelled by politeness to walk home that afternoon with Mr. Ratcliff, instead of joining Tom Merry & Co. in the paper-chase. "You see, sir, my sister is over at Wayland this afternoon, and so I—"

"Oh, Miss Glyn is not at home?"

"No, sir; and my gov—my father's in Liverpool just now, and so I haven't anything to go home for."



"Shush!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Ow!" and he shook his leg violently; but the rat hung on.

"Very good!" said Mr. Ratcliff, glad that he had made the discovery before he took the trouble of walking to Glyn House. "Miss—er—Glyn is at Wayland?"

"Yes, sir. She's gone to visit some giddy cottager who has a pain in the back, or something or other."

"How very kind and charitable of Miss Glyn!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir, ain't it?"

The House-master would have liked to ask some more questions, but he did not care to do so; but Glyn, who was distinctly amused by the fact that Mr. Ratcliff could not see that he guessed anything, went on glibly:

"You may have heard of the old person, sir—a Dame Carter, the widow of a soldier killed in the war. She lives in the cottage on the edge of the wood."

"Ah, yes, just so," said Mr. Ratcliff, greatly delighted.

He walked on, and ten minutes afterwards he was quitting the gates of St. Jim's. His silk hat had had an extra brush, and he had new gloves on, and—wonder of wonders—a flower in his coat. Taggles looked at him as he went out, and wondered. Glyn looked at him, and grinned. He was still grinning when Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder. "Time for the meet," said Tom Merry. "What's the joke?"

"Ratty."

"Oh! What's the latest from Ratty?"

"He's just got out of me that my sister's visiting Dame Carter in her cottage near Wayland, and he's gone off there to try and see her," grinned Glyn. "My only hat! I shall have to tell Edith next Saturday. It's too good to keep!"

"Well, never mind Ratty. Come and get into your things."

It was a cheery crowd that gathered on the edge of the common. Quite three score of juniors were there for the start, looking very fit and well in their running-clothes. Jack Blake sported a bugle, with which he was already making the welkin ring by way of practice.

Figgins and Kerr were in red shirts, to distinguish them from the pack, and they carried big bags of scent slung over their shoulders. Figgins's long, slim legs attracted much attention and many comments, to which he replied only with disdainful sniffing.

Fatty Wynn had joined the pack, but how much running he would do was a question. He had lately demolished a very substantial dinner, and he had crammed his pockets with sandwiches to be prepared for a possible attack of hunger en route.

"Five minutes' start," said Tom Merry. "Who's going to start you?"

"I am quite willin'—"

"Ass! You belong to the pack!"

"I wufuse to be called an ass. I—"

"Here's Kildare; he'll do it. Kildare, old chap, will you start us?"

The captain of St. Jim's looked round with a smile. He was passing along on his bicycle. But Kildare was always obliging. He jumped off the machine, and leaned it against a bush.

"Certainly!" he said.

"Thanks awfully! Long-legs is to have five minutes."

"Look here——" said Figgins.

"Off you go!"

"If you School House kids catch us," said Figgins, "I'll eat what's left of the scent. I'm ready."

"Same here," said Kerr.

"Off!" said Kildare, taking out his watch.

The two hares started off. The pack gave them a cheer as they started. They went at an easy trot, and disappeared among the furze of Rylcombe Common.

"Time's up, isn't it, Kildare?" asked Wally, the younger brother of the great Augustus, when two minutes had elapsed.

Kildare laughed.

"Not yet."

"Sure your watch isn't slow?"

"Weally, Wally, I wegard your impatience as bad form, and I should not object to Kildare inflictin' a slight chastisement."

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

"Jolly ripping day for a run, isn't it?" said Tom Merry. "Lemme see. It's across the common, through the wood, and round the old castle, and then back round Wayland and Rylcombe. Jolly good run?"

"Yaas, wathah! I am afraid there won't be many of you chaps in at the finish with me, deah boys."

"If you're in at the finish, Gussy, we'll subscribe and get you a tin medal."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We've got to catch Figgins, if only to put the New House in their place. You fellows buck up, and keep close to me," said Jack Blake.

"I'd rather get close to Figgins, if you don't mind," remarked Monty Lowther urbanely.

Blake, who was raising his bugle to his lips, lowered it, and glared at the jester of the Shell.

"Look here," he said. "If Lowther's going to be funny, there will be trouble on this paper-chase. We've got a hard run before us, and we can't be expected to put up with Lowther's funny business as well."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Time!" said Kildare.

"Bai Jove, it's time, deah boys!"

The bugle sang out, and the pack started. Kildare watched them off, and then remounted his bicycle and rode away. The pack streamed across the common in fine style, the bugle waking the echoes every second or two.

Lowther tapped Blake on the shoulder. Blake shook off his hand.

"Here, you hold on to Tom Merry!" he exclaimed. "You can't expect me to help you along. I expect I shall have to carry Gussy presently."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I wasn't holding on!" exclaimed Lowther warmly. "Don't be an ass! I want to speak to you. Shut up with that bugle. You ought to sound it when you sight the hares, and not shove in obligatos all the time."

"If you know more about paper-chases than I do, Lowther—"

"If I knew less I'd—"

"Hurrah! There they are!"

A patch of scarlet showed among the green bushes. The hares were sighted. Blake rang out a long, long call on the bugle, and bestowed a glare of defiance upon Monty Lowther.

The pack broke into a faster run. They were keeping well together so far, and there were few laggards. The run was pretty certain, however, to thin them down before long.

The red shirts disappeared into the wood, and the pack went trampling along the footpath in a stream, following the trail of the torn paper.

"By Jove, I am glad to be out of the sun!" said Arthur Augustus, gasping. "It is weally a vewy warm aftahnoon for wunnin'!"

"I warned you not to come," said Lowther. "I told you you weren't up to it."

"Yaas, I wemembah you makin' that impertinent remark. Lowthah."

"Faith, and they're making for the Feeder!" said Reilly. "They're going to jump it, me darlings, and that will thin us down."

"Never mind; come on!"

Ta-at-ra-ra-tara!

"Blake can see them!"

"This way, my sons!"

The trail of paper had left the path, and trickled through the bushes. The hare had taken the most surprising turns. Figgins, who had done training as a Boy Scout in that wood, knew every turn of it, and he was leading the hounds a dance.

The way led towards a stream that flowed through the heart THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 66.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S WEEK-END."

of the wood, called the Feeder—a feeder of the Ryll. On its banks the St. Jim's juniors had once encamped when they were "playing Indians," and the ground was well-known to them.

The hounds streamed out of the trees upon the rugged, grassy bank of the little stream, that reflected the sunlight glimmering through the treetops overhead.

There was a fresh shout.

"There they are!"

Down the stream ran the trail of paper, and at the end of it the hares could be seen. It was a wide part of the stream, and Figgins was in the act of jumping it. Figgins's long legs, which had caused so many remarks, stood him in good stead now. He cleared the stream like a buck, and landed safely on the other side, and stood ready to give a hand to Kerr.

Kerr slung over his bag of scent first, and then took a little run, and sprang. He landed in shallow water on the other side, and it came up to his calves, and Figgins grasped him by the shoulder as he reeled, and dragged him into safety.

"Bai Jove! They've done it!"

Figgins and Kerr looked back at the hounds, and waved their hands derisively, and disappeared into the trees on the further side of the stream.

The pack streamed down to the point where they had jumped, and stopped there. The jump was a big one.

"I'm going round," said Fatty Wyan.

"I wegard it as somewhat dewogatory to our dig to go round," said D'Arcy. "I wathah fancy myself as a jumpah, too."

"Jump it, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah! I have no objection to showin' you fellows a good example."

"Go it!"

"Way for Gussy! Make room!"

"Take a little run, old dear!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway stand back, you fellows. I want woom to get a wun. I shall have to wun like anythin', you know."

"Room for Gussy!"

"Stand back there!"

"Go it, Gussy! Don't be all day!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and receded from the bank of the stream to get a good run for the jump.

The other fellows stood round grinning. They had had a sharp run, and they wanted a "breather" before taking the jump, but nobody believed that D'Arcy would succeed in clearing the water.

"Pway keep the coast cleah, deah boys! I'm just goin' to wun."

Arthur Augustus started. He gathered speed as he ran, and came down to the bank in fine style—and stopped!

"Jump!" roared a score of voices.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Jump, you beggar!"

"I wefuse to jump! I shall wequire anothah wun."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason for wibald mewwiment. I had not exactly calculated the distance, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy backed away to his previous starting-point, and calculated carefully. Then he broke into a trot, and charged down to the bank, and again came to a dead halt in the rushes instead of jumping.

"Yah! Jump!"

"Undah the circe—"

"Jump! You can't do it."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. I will twy again, and this time I will show you boundahs how to jump a little stream like this."

"You can't do it!"

"Bai Jove! I will demonstrwate to you."

And D'Arcy, determined this time to jump, started on a run, and came down to the bank like a champion of the cinder-path—and jumped.

Splash!

There was a roar of laughter as the swell of St. Jim's dropped exactly into the middle of the stream, sending up a mighty spout of water.

"Ow! Groo!"

D'Arcy disappeared for a moment, and came up puffing and gasping. He struck out, and gained the opposite bank.

ANSWERS

A Grand Tale of The Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

The juniors were doubled up with laughter. Arthur Augustus shook the water out of his clothes like a Newfoundland dog.

"Bai Jove! I'm wet."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom Merry hysterically. "Didn't you know the water was wet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a full minute before the pack could control their merriment sufficiently to follow D'Arcy. The best jumpers sprang across, and several floundered in the water, and had to be dragged ashore. Others went down the stream to find an easier crossing. The chase was taken up again; but, meanwhile, the hares had gained ground, and they were well out of sight when the pack went streaming through the wood again.

CHAPTER 12.

Figgins Explains!

FIGGINS chuckled as he ran, and Kerr joined in the chuckle. From behind, they had heard the echoes of splashing and laughter, and they knew that some, at least, of the hounds had come to grief at the stream.

"Sorry we couldn't stop to see 'em!" grinned Figgins. "Hallo! Look there! The Grammar cads! We don't want a row now."

Figgins and Kerr had come out of the wood, upon the slope leading up to the old castle—a favourite spot for picnics on half-holidays, both with the St. Jim's fellows and the boys of the Grammar School. Three youths had just appeared in sight ahead of them, and Figgins knew them at a glance—Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the chiefs of the Grammar juniors in their rows with the "Saints."

It was not an opportune moment for a meeting, for a row with the Grammarian trio might mean capture by the pursuing pack. Monk, Lane, and Carboy looked round, and grinned at the sight of the hares, and stopped in a line across the path.

Figgins halted, panting.

"Get out of the way!"

"Rats!"

"Look here, it's a paper-chase," gasped Figgins. "Don't be a cad; let's get on!"

"Say 'please' pretty," said Frank Monk, relenting.

Figgins snorted.

"I won't!"

"Then you sha'n't pass!"

"We'll jolly well knock you flying if you don't clear!"

"Right-ho! We're ready to be knocked flying."

Figgins hesitated. The fact that the Grammarians were three to two did not make him pause. But a fight just then might mean failure in the big run, and that was to be avoided at any price.

"Look here!" he said. "Don't be a cad!"

"Say 'please' pretty, and—"

"Please pretty!" gasped Figgins.

Monk chuckled.

"Let 'em pass, chaps!"

The Grammarians, grinning, drew aside, and Figgins and Kerr went pounding on up the rugged path to the ruined castle. They were in among the ruins in a few moments more, but they did not pause there. Figgins had intended to make a couple of minutes rest at that point, but the halt on the path had served the purpose. Without pausing in the old castle, therefore, the hares left a trail of paper fragments among the time-worn masonry, and ran out through a yawning gap in the castle wall, and continued on down the hill towards Wayland.

There was neither sight nor sound of the hounds, and the bugle was silent. Figgins and Kerr were evidently well ahead.

"This is ripping!" said Figgins, slackening down to an easier pace as they came into the dusty Wayland road. "We shall have time to stop for a drink of milk at Dame Carter's cottage."

"Yes, rather; and that's just what we want now. I feel as if I could drink a couple of gallons without stopping."

The dust of the country road was in their noses as they ran. A passing motor had churned it up into clouds. They left the road as soon as they could, and skirting the market town, they followed green paths towards the cottage where Mrs. Carter lived.

Dame Carter turned an honest penny in the summer by supplying cooling drinks to pedestrians who passed her cottage. It was out of the track of cyclists, but fellows who rambled in the woods often turned up there for light refreshments, as well as artists who came down in the summer to sketch. It was a spot well-known to the juniors of St. Jim's, and as Dame Carter combined cleanliness with cheapness, the juniors often dropped in there. Figgins and Kerr were glad enough when they came in sight of the little

cottage. The fresh milk sold by Dame Carter was really what it was supposed to be, and a more refreshing drink could not be desired.

"Here we are, kid!" said Figgins.

The juniors halted at the door, which opened directly into the little sitting-room, paved with red bricks. The change from the glare of the sunshine to the cool shade of the little room was blinding, and for a few moments the boys did not see that the room had any other occupant beside Dame Carter. The old lady, with her white hair fastened straight back from her forehead, made a charming figure, but not quite so charming as another that was there.

"By Jove!" murmured Figgins, as he caught sight of the second figure.

It was Edith Glyn.

The girl, who had seen Figgins before, recognised him, and a very cold look came over her face. She looked straight before her, and did not appear to be aware of the presence of the juniors after the first moment.

"Milk, please, Mrs. Carter," said Kerr, "and as quick as you like. It's a paper-chase, you know, and we've got to buzz off."

"Yes, my dears," said Dame Carter, hobbling from her chair. "Won't you sit down a moment?"

"Thank you, I will."

Kerr sat down, but Figgins remained standing, twisting his cap in his hands. He had wanted to see Miss Glyn, to apologise to her for the affair of the flowers, but he hadn't wanted to run into her presence like this—in such extremely scanty attire, blazing with the heat of the run, and with the perspiration running down his cheeks. But he took the plunge all the same.

"G-g-g-good afternoon, Miss Glyn!" he stammered.

The girl looked at him.

"Good afternoon!" she said.

"I—I—I am sorry," stammered Figgins. "I—I ought to explain—about that box, you know. It was a joke—"

"Indeed!"

"Please listen to me, Miss Glyn," said Figgins earnestly.

"It was a joke on the chaps in the School House. I was going to send that whiffy rubbish to Blake, make him think he'd got a feed, you know, till he opened the box, and— and somehow Ratty—I mean Mr. Ratcliff—got it mixed up, and—"

The girl's face cleared.

"Oh, I think I understand."

"I—I was afraid you'd think I meant it disrespectfully to you, Miss Glyn. I—I wouldn't have done anything of the sort for worlds."

"Not for worlds," said Kerr.

"I hope it's all right now, Miss Glyn," said Figgins anxiously.

The girl laughed.

"Yes, Figgins, it is all right now. I am sorry I believed that you had done that on purpose. It was not like you."

Figgins was greatly relieved in his mind. The juniors drank their milk, chatting cheerily with Miss Glyn the while, and left in a few minutes. The girl looked after them with a smile. She was not sorry for the interruption. She was spending an hour in Mrs. Carter's cottage, to talk to the old dame, and the subject was chiefly Dame Carter's rheumatism, and certain mysterious pains the old lady had had in her back, which she was doubtful whether to trace to rheumatism or lumbago. Miss Glyn was not an authority upon either rheumatism or lumbago, and probably she would have welcomed some more interruptions.

Figgins and Kerr, feeling all the better for their brief rest, left the cottage, and Figgins looked back the way he had come. The hounds were not yet in sight. But another figure was in sight—that of Mr. Ratcliff.

The New House-master was coming directly towards the cottage. He looked warm and tired, and had apparently taken a good time to walk through the wood to Wayland. He saw the juniors, and they raised their caps respectfully. Mr. Ratcliff signed to them to stop.

"Ah, you are—er—enjoying a little run, I see," he observed.

"Yes, sir; it's a paper-chase," said Figgins. "We're the hares!"

He meant that as a hint that they hadn't any time to waste; but Mr. Ratcliff did not appear to see it.

"You have just been to the cottage?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Now we're bucking up."

"Dame Carter is at home, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir! We didn't stay long, as we are in a hurry."

"Ah, I think I will call in at the cottage for some—some light refreshment after my long walk!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff. "I presume that—that Mrs. Carter is alone?"

"No, sir. Miss Glyn's there."

"Ah, indeed!"

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Mr. Ratcliff walked on, and the juniors broke into a run again. Figgins was chuckling.

"It's a case of spoons, and no mistake!" he said. "Young Glyn's right about that. Fancy Ratty spooning!"

"The funny thing is, he doesn't think anybody can see it," said Kerr, a little scornfully. "What on earth does he take us for?"

"Well, we didn't see it at first. I suppose it will be all over St. Jim's before long. Not very pleasant for Miss Glyn, either. Ratty really ought to have a little more sense."

"Can't see anything of the hounds," said Kerr, looking back.

"No; we're well ahead. We can take it easier for a bit."

And the hares ran on at an easier pace through the deep, scented woods, listening every moment for some sound of pursuit behind, and ready to put on a spurt at the sound of the bugle.

CHAPTER 13.

Rough on Ratty.

MR. RATCLIFF walked nervously towards the cottage, and paused outside for a full minute before he found the courage to enter. There was a murmur of voices from the open door, and he distinguished the soft tones of Edith Glyn. The voices paused, and Mr. Ratcliff stepped in.

He blinked in the dusk at the young lady, who looked surprised to see him, and not wholly pleased.

"Dear me, Miss Glyn!"

He raised his hat. The girl rose and bowed, and did not sit down again. She glanced at her watch.

"I am afraid I must be leaving you now, Mrs. Carter. I shall come again next week, and—"

"But sure it isn't half-past four yet?" said Dame Carter innocently.

"N-n-n-no; but—"

"You were going to stay till half-past four, you said," said the old lady, in wonder. "And I haven't finished telling you about the lumbago, miss."

Miss Glyn, with a helpless expression, sat down. Mr. Ratcliff fanned his warm brow. He was too tired from his long walk to take any especial note of what was being said, only he was very glad that Miss Glyn was not going.

"What can I get you, sir?" said Mrs. Carter, congratulating herself that her custom was extending from the boys of St. Jim's to the masters at the big school. "It's a great honour to me to see you under my roof, sir."

"Oh, not at all!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir. A little milk, sir—fresh from the cow—and some of the home-made cake, sir, that the young gentlemen are very fond of?"

"Ye-es," stammered Mr. Ratcliff, who was looking at Edith Glyn, and not thinking of refreshments at all, "I—I will have a little of—the home-made milk, and—a cake."

"Home-made cake, sir, and milk fresh from the cow," said Dame Carter, somewhat surprised.

"Yes, exactly. Some home-made cow, and a cake fresh from the milk."

Dame Carter went to get out the milk and cake. She could only conclude that the New House-master had been drinking, or that the sun had been too much for him. Miss Glyn was smiling slightly.

"A beautiful day, Miss Glyn," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Very beautiful."

"I—I presume that the—er—beautiful weather has tempted you to take a little walk?" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I am paying a visit to Mrs. Carter."

"Ah! I trust that my presence is not—not—not incommoing you, Miss Glyn, in your—er—visit to Mrs. Carter?"

"Oh, no!"

The girl's tone meant "Oh, yes!" but Mr. Ratcliff was far too obtuse to see that. He sipped the milk Mrs. Carter placed before him, and found it refreshing. He nibbled the cake. Dame Carter placed tea and cake before Miss Glyn, and as she would have been hurt if they had not been partaken of, the girl had no choice but to eat. As a matter of fact, she usually had tea in Mrs. Carter's cottage when she called. But she was not pleased to find herself taking tea tete-a-tete with Mr. Ratcliff. She was beginning to understand, and what she was beginning to understand did not please her.

Miss Glyn nibbled cake in silence. Mr. Ratcliff nibbled cake, and strove to find something to say. Before he could think of anything there came an interruption.

Three youthful forms loomed up in the doorway, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, called out in one voice:

"Milk—ho!"

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Then they saw the House-master and Miss Glyn, and coloured.

"I—I beg your pardon," said Tom Merry, raising his cap. "We didn't know there was anybody here but Mrs. Carter."

"Come in, young gentlemen!" said Mrs. Carter.

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Pray come in!" said Miss Glyn.

They came in and sat down. The pack was streaming up, and they all wanted milk and cake. Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip. The cottage was over-run, and the garden outside was swarmed. Some of the pack had dropped off in the run, but there were still forty juniors in the running, and most of them were in or around Dame Carter's cottage.

Miss Glyn was smiling demurely. She was glad of the interruption, and the expression on Mr. Ratcliff's face amused her.

She insisted upon helping Dame Carter serve her customers. She laughed gaily as she carried out milk and cake and ginger-beer to the juniors. The whole place was in an uproar with voices and the popping of corks and the gurgling of liquids.

Mr. Ratcliff sat still. He wished the juniors at the ends of the earth, or further. But he was helpless.

Fortunately, from his point of view, the pack had not many minutes to spare. The rest at Dame Carter's cottage was to be brief.

"Good-bye, Miss Glyn!" said Tom Merry, raising his cap. "Thank you very much!"

"Good luck!" said Edith Glyn.

"It was jolly ripping of you, Edie!" said Bernard Glyn admiringly. "I never knew you could be useful!"

And he dodged out of the cottage in time to escape a box on the ear.

The pack streamed away after the hares. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had asked for a cup of tea, and it was not yet made, but he said he would wait. Blake dragged him by the collar.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"I haven't had my tea yet, deah boy!"

"No time for tea. Come on!"

"It's all wight! I shall overtake you!"

"You couldn't overtake a mouse. Come on!"

"I must wemain till I have had my tea. I wegard it as a most weweshin' and coolin' dwink, and when I have had it I shall wun like anythin'."

Blake snorted. But for Miss Glyn's presence, he would have bundled D'Arcy out of the cottage in no time. As it was, he gave him a shake and left him. The hounds rushed on, leaving Arthur Augustus in the cottage. The swell of St. Jim's fanned himself with a cambric handkerchief.

"Bai Jove, it's warm!" he observed. "I twust that my pwesence is not disagweeable to you, Miss Glyn, if I wemain till my tea is weady."

"I shall be very pleased," said Miss Glyn, sincerely enough.

"I twust, Mr. Watcliff, that you do not object to my wemainin'?"

"Oh—er—certainly not!" muttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Thank you vewy much. I weally find wunning wathah exhaustin'," said D'Arcy, sinking into a chair. "As a mattah of fact, the wun ovah the hill has thwown me into quite a fluttah."

"Dear me," said Miss Glyn sympathetically.

"Yaas, wathah! And I shall have to wun like anythin' to catch those fellows up, too. Upon the whole, I don't think that a papah-chase is a weally sensible form of exah-cise. It is weally too much like work."

"And are you the last of the pack?" asked Miss Glyn.

"Oh, no! There are a lot of fellows dropped off, and some are still comin' on. Fatty Wynn is stickin' to it. I think he will stick to it till he gets here, and won't go any furthah. The last thing I heard him say was that he was hungry. Is that my tea, Mrs. Cartah? Thank you, vewy much!"

"I will pour it out for you," said Edith Glyn.

"You are vewy kind, deah boy—I mean, deah gal."

Edith laughed and poured out the tea. Arthur Augustus sipped it slowly. He was very comfortable where he was, and in no hurry to move. Mr. Ratcliff was gnawing his lips with impatience. He had looked forward to that meeting with Miss Glyn, and it was too bad for it to be endlessly interrupted in this way.

Arthur Augustus rose at last.

"I weally think I had bettah be goin'," he remarked. "Hallo, Wynn! I'm just startin'! Are you comin' with me? The fellows have all gone on."

Fatty Wynn came in, gasping like a fish, and flopped into a chair.

"I'm not going on."

"Bettah stick to it, deah boy. I'll give you a hand."

"I don't want a hand. I want some grub."

"Pway don't be a slackah," said Arthur Augustus, apparently forgetful of the fact that he had been resting himself for the last ten minutes. "I should be sowwy to have to wegard you as a slackah, Wynn."

"Rats!" said Wynn. "Hallo, I didn't see you, sir, and—and you, Miss Glyn! I—I hope you don't mind my having tea here?"

"Certainly not!" said Miss Glyn. "Why should I mind?"

"Well, I shall have to be goin'," said D'Arcy. "I am sowwy to see you slackin' like this, Wynn. Good-aftahnoon!"

And the swell of St. Jim's departed on the track of the hounds. Fatty Wynn was breathing hard. He did not particularly want the hares to be caught, as they were his own chums, and he certainly didn't want to catch them, if it involved taking a single step more without a solid meal first.

"What can I get for you, sir?" asked Dame Carter, who was beaming all over her face. Her confidential chat on the interesting subjects of rheumatism and lumbago was hopelessly interrupted and ruined. But she was doing a splendid trade, and that was more than a consolation. The profits of this afternoon alone would be enough to pay her rent for a month.

"Let me see," said Fatty Wynn meditatively. "I suppose you couldn't cook eggs and bacon, could you?"

"Yes, certainly, with pleasure!"

"Then I'll have eggs and bacon to begin with—six rashers and a dozen eggs for a start," said Fatty Wynn. "I'll have a go at the bread-and-butter while you're cooking them, so as not to waste time, and you may as well give me some ham. Put the cheese here, too, and then I sha'n't have to interrupt you. If you've got any sausages, you may as well cook them along with the bacon. I get awfully peckish at this time of the year. It's the weather, I suppose."

Miss Glyn rose to her feet.

"I will say good-bye to you now, Mrs. Carter. I hope to find you quite well when I call again."

"Good-bye, miss, and God bless you!" said Dame Carter.

Mr. Ratcliff also rose.

"Perhaps I may see you to the station, Miss Glyn," he remarked.

"I am not going to the station, thank you," said Miss Glyn. "I have a call to make in Wayland."

"That is on my way."

"Very good."

They walked along in silence. In the sunny High Street of the old market town, three youths looked at them, and exchanged glances. They were the Grammar School trio.

"Ratty, from St. Jim's," said Carboy. "He looks a bit more amiable than usual."

Frank Monk grinned.

"That's Glyn's sister," he said. "Young Glyn, of the Shell at St. Jim's, you know. A chap told me the other day that Ratty was spoons, and it looks like it. Fancy old Ratty!"

"Might chip him," said Lane. "Can't bother Miss Glyn, though. But I'd like to chip him. He gave me a box on the ear the other day, and it sings yet."

"Yes, he is a first-class beast," agreed Monk. "Never mind, our time will come. Come on; we want to get some ices before we go to the train."

Mr. Ratcliff walked with Miss Glyn to the door of a milliner's in Wayland, and there he had to leave her. He would willingly have waited for her, and conducted her elsewhere, but Miss Glyn evidently did not wish him to do so. Mr. Ratcliff, in spite of his obtuseness, was beginning to dimly realise that Miss Glyn was not likely to ever reciprocate his affection.

Miss Glyn entered the milliner's, and the House-master walked slowly down the street towards the station. He did not mean to walk back to St. Jim's—his corns were already giving him trouble enough. He took his ticket for Rylcombe, and when the train came in, he entered an empty carriage. He wanted to be alone to think over matters. But just as the train was on the point of starting, the door was suddenly dragged open, and three youths piled themselves into the carriage.

Mr. Ratcliff started up angrily.

He was not in a cheerful mood, and something of his old temper—suppressed for a time under the influence of softer emotions—blazed up in his sour face.

"Cannot you boys get another carriage?" he asked angrily. "It is intolerable that I should be annoyed like this."

Frank Monk stared at him.

"We didn't know you were here, sir," he said, with spirit. "And I suppose we can enter any carriage we please, if we pay for our tickets."

"Don't answer me, boy."

Frank Monk's eyes gleamed. The train was already in motion, and it was impossible to change carriages again, even if he had wanted to. But he didn't want to. Mr. Ratcliff's unpleasant manner had got his "back" up.

"Jolly close shave to catch this train," grinned Carboy.

"All through you stopping for that other iced Lane."

"All through your watch being wrong," said Lane.

"All through your being a pair of asses," said Frank Monk.

"I wonder how those St. Jim's kids are getting on with the paper-chase. They want us to show them how to run."

Mr. Ratcliff glared at the boys.

"Will you cease this silly chatter?" he demanded. "It annoys me."

"Have you bought up the railway, sir?" asked Monk, with mock politeness. "Is that a new bylaw you have passed?"

"If you are not silent," said the irritated master, "I shall chastise you!"

Frank Monk assumed an expression of great alarm.

"Oh, dear! I—I—I'm so afraid!" he stammered; and he began to sob into his handkerchief. "Ow, ow, ow! Boo-hoo!"

His comrades were not long in taking their cue from him. They dragged out their handkerchiefs and sobbed into them.

"Ow! Boo-hoo-hoo!"

"Yow-yow-yow!"

Mr. Ratcliff blinked at the three Grammarian juniors. He did not quite know how to take their tearful alarm, they were doing it so well.

"Will you be quiet?" he snapped.

"Ow! Boo-hoo!"

"I—I shall chastise you—"

"Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo-hoo!"

The train rattled into Rylcombe Station, with the three Grammar youths still weeping copiously into their handkerchiefs.

Mr. Ratcliff was very much annoyed. If the vociferous grief of the Grammarians should be seen, it might be very much misunderstood by a stupid public. The Rylcombe porter opened the door of the carriage.

"What's the matter 'ere?"

"Boo-hoo!"

"Nothing!" said Mr. Ratcliff hastily. "These—these disrespectful and altogether unpleasant youths have determined to annoy me."

"Boo-hoo!"

"What 'ave you been doin' to them?" said the porter, who knew Mr. Ratcliff well as a gentleman who never tipped. "N-treating the pore young kids, I'll be bound."

"Boo-hoo!"

"I—I haven't touched them. I—"

"Boo-hoo-hoo!"

Monk, Lane, and Carboy alighted, and wept along the platform. There were several people there, and they, of course, gathered round the spot. Mr. Ratcliff stepped out, looking very red and flustered.

"Shame!" said a stout farmer. "Been beating his poor boys in the train—his own flesh and blood! Shame!"

"Boo-hoo!"

"I—I—I, really—I—I—I—" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"They—I—I—"

"Shame! The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children oughter 'ear about this," said the Rylcombe porter.

"I—I—I—"

"Shame!"

Mr. Ratcliff fairly ran for it. Hoots and boos followed him. Outside the station he stopped to mop his perspiring brow. Three cheerful youths grinned at him, with all traces of grief gone from their faces.

"Good-bye, sir!"

And Monk, Lane, and Carboy marched off, chuckling, leaving Mr. Ratcliff to walk to St. Jim's, in a humour impossible to describe.

He reached the school, and entered the sunny old quadrangle, walking with slow and heavy steps, and with a sombre shade on his brow.

The annoyance of the incident of the train had passed; Mr. Ratcliff had already forgotten the Grammarians.

He was thinking of nearer matters; of the unmistakable manner of Miss Glyn, and of what he could not help deducing from it. He went towards the New House slowly. The quad. was very quiet, and the Houses had a deserted look. The New House echoed to his footsteps as he went in, and went straight to his study. There he locked himself in, and threw himself down into an armchair—to think.

His thoughts were not pleasant ones.

Mr. Ratcliff was taking himself severely to task, and

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looking at the matter quietly and practically, as he would have been wise to do earlier.

What chance had he? The salary of a House-master at a school like St. Jim's was a liberal one; but it would seem abject poverty to a millionaire's daughter. He was growing middle-aged and slow and testy, and Edith Glyn was a bright and happy girl. He realised that he had allowed a mere dream, a vision of impossibility, to throw him off his balance.

He rose at last, a determined expression upon his face.

"I have been a fool!" he muttered. "A fool—a fool! But it is over!"

He sat down at the writing-table, drew paper and pen towards him, and began to work, with a steady concentration that drove other matters from his mind.

CHAPTER 14.

Still Running!

FIGGINS paused and looked back. The hares had been going strong, and they were already a third of the way home on that great run when the blast of the bugle came faintly from afar.

"Hallo! That's Blake again!" said Figgins.

Kerr halted, panting.

"They can't be near."

The hares looked back. Behind them lay Rylcombe Wood, thick and dark. There were fields before them, green glinting in the sunshine.

To the branch of a high tree a form, diminutive in the distance, clung, and Figgins knew that it was Jack Blake's.

Blake had climbed a tree to sight them, and the note of the bugle told his comrades below that he had caught a glimpse of the hares.

Figgins chuckled as he resumed the run.

"It's all right! I wonder how many there are in the pack now! They won't be in at the death!"

"No need to lose time, though," said the cautious Kerr.

"Keep it up!"

They ran on merrily. The long run had, of course, told upon them, as it had told upon the pack. But they were still very fit, and ready for a hard spurt home. They ran through level fields, crossed a plantation, and came out upon the bank of the wide, rippling Ryll. The stream was crossed in this place by stepping-stones, and the two juniors sprang quickly and unhesitatingly from stone to stone, and reached the home bank. But before landing on terra firma, they went a score of yards up the stream in shallow water, and then plunged into the thick bushes on the bank.

"That will let them down, I think," said Figgins, with a chuckle.

And at a leisurely pace the hares ran on through the trees of Codicote Wood, towards Rylcombe Lane.

On the further bank of the river, at the stepping-stones, Tom Merry was the first to arrive.

He stopped there, taking care not to cross till he had made sure that the hares had done so. Figgins and Kerr's actions at the river had been hidden from the pack by the intervening plantation. Tom Merry went down the bank looking for the scent, and Blake, the next to arrive, went upstream. It was quite possible that Figgins might have waded some distance, and doubled back again. But there was no trace of the scent up or down stream for a score of yards.

The bounds one by one gathered at the stepping-stones, while their leaders were searching for a clue.

"Found anything?" asked Monty Lowther, as Tom Merry came back.

"No. What price you, Blake?"

"Nothing!"

"Then they've gone on."

"Faith, and let us go on, too, me darlings," said Reilly. "Follow your leader!" exclaimed Tom Merry; and he sprang upon the stepping-stones.

The pack followed, panting. Their numbers had woefully dwindled since the start upon the common near St. Jim's.

Sixty or more juniors had broken away at the signal from Kildare, but not more than forty had passed Dame Carter's cottage. Of these, more than half had dropped out of the race from that point. Less than a score followed Tom Merry's lead across the stepping-stones.

"No scent here!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he stepped ashore.

Blake gave a grunt.

"They've gone up or down the stream, then."

"Did you work that out in your head?" asked Lowther pleasantly.

Blake did not answer that facetious question, but went down stream to look for the scent. Manners went up stream and the rest waited. Lowther followed Blake to help him, and Herries followed Manners. Manners plunged into the

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bushes and stooped to look to and fro for the fragments of paper, and Herries walked right into him and nearly fell over him.

Herries gave a jump.

"Here they are, you chaps! Come on! I've got 'em!"

There was a shout, and the hounds streamed into the thickets. Manners gave a yell.

"Hands off, you ass!"

"Eh? Why, it's Manners!"

"Of course it is, idiot!"

"I—I thought—"

"I know you did, dummy!"

"Look here, who are you calling a dummy?" said Herries.

"Of course, I thought I'd got 'em, when I came upon a silly ass crouching about—"

"I was looking for the trail."

"Well, have you found it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"How can I find it with a howling lunatic grabbing hold of my back hair, and a lot more silly idiots asking me fat-headed questions?" demanded Manners crossly.

"Is that a conundrum?" asked Blake.

Manners snorted, and looked for the trail again. Herries leaned against a tree and breathed hard.

"I wish I had my dog Towser here," he remarked. "He'd jolly soon pick up the scent."

"Does he eat paper?" asked Glyn.

"I don't mean the scent—I mean the scent—"

"Jolly lucid, at all events."

"This way, I think," said Clifton Dane. "Look under the trees here."

"Bai Jove, deah boys, have you caught them?"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was, as a matter of fact, no mean runner, and the delay at the stream had given him a chance to come up. He did not look very red or flustered, either. The juniors fared at him.

"Hallo, where have you sprung from?" demanded Digby.

"I told you I should overtake you, deah boys."

"Have you had a lift on the way?" asked Glyn.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the Liverpool lad.

"No, I have not had a lift on the way," he replied; "I heard the question as twivulous. Have you lost the scent, chaps? Pewpaws you had better let me look for it, as I am in a hurry."

Manners gave a shout.

"It is!"

"No!"

Blake's bugle rang out, calling the hounds together. The pack rushed off through Codicote Wood, and now Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was with the foremost.

"Bai Jove, you know, I weally think I shall be in at the death," he remarked. "I always wathah fancied myself as a wunnah."

But no one replied; the juniors wanted their breath for running. The pack swept on as fast as the wood allowed, and as they came out of the trees again into the Rylcombe road, there was a shout.

"There they are!"

"Tally-ho!"

Ta-ta-ta-ra-ra-tara!

CHAPTER 15.

Skimpole is in at the Death.

BAI JOVE! There the boundahs are! Wun like anythin'!"

The hounds burst out into the road, and ran hard. The hares had taken things just a little too easily, and they were sighted—and closer this time than at any previous point in the run.

Figgins gritted his teeth.

"Put it on, Kerr," he muttered.

"Right you are."

The hounds, following by sight now, sprinted along the road. First came Tom Merry and Blake, neck and neck, and after them Clifton Dane—then Lowther, and Digby, and D'Arcy and Manners—and the rest strung out. In that hot burst six or seven more dropped off and gave up the chase.

"Bai Jove, we're gainin'!"

"Hurrah! Put your beef into it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Closer and closer! But Figgins and Kerr put on a spurt, and forged ahead once more. It was a hard and level run now, as hard a trial of strength as any on the cinder-path, and for some minutes the pace was terrific.

It was too fast to last.

Figgins tapped Kerr's arm, and swerved from the straight, and with an agile bound crossed a wide, flowing ditch, and plunged into a hedge. He scrambled through, and caught Kerr's hand as he jumped, and helped him over.

The manoeuvre was sudden and unlooked for. The hounds went racing on for some seconds, and they had shot well past the turning-point before Tom Merry halted. And then Blake biffed right into him, and he rolled on the ground, and several more of the hounds fell over them.

There was a wail from the midst of the tumbled heap.

"Ow! Get off my legs, you howlid asses!"

"Groo! Take your shoulder out of my eye!"

"Yah! Clumsy asses! Gerroff!"

Tom Merry sorted himself out and dragged himself up, somewhat dazed. Blake jumped up, and put a hand to a discoloured eye. Somebody's elbow had discoloured it for him, and it looked as if it would shortly be a beauty.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Here, let's get on!"

"Where have the bounders gone?"

Ta-ra-ra-tara!

The pack plunged through the ditch and the hedge.

Arthur Augustus followed, at the tail of the pack; but the pack was very small now. The hedge and the ditch had stopped more of them. There were now only seven pursuers in all on the track of Figgins and Kerr. The hares had thinned them down with a vengeance.

Figgins had intended to follow the road to St. Jim's, but he had been too closely pressed. And now he led the last lap through a terrible country for the runners. Over ploughed fields, over fences and walls, through ditches wet and dry, led the trail of the runners. There was a feeble note from Blake's bugle as the clock tower of St. Jim's came in sight in the far distance. Home was in view, but the way to it was still devious. Figgins and Kerr, running on steadily side by side, came to a high stone wall, and Figgins stopped.

"Up you go, kid!" he gasped.

Kerr scrambled over his chum's shoulders, and reached the top of the wall. Then, with his chest on the stone, he held down both hands for Figgins. Figgins scrambled up; and ten seconds later Blake was springing up, missing him!

Blake tried to clutch at the wall, but he could not do it. He shouted to his comrades.

"Buck up!"

Manners panted up with Tom Merry. Dane and D'Arcy reeled against the wall. The rest were hopelessly behind.

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Your shoulders, Dane."

"Here you are!"

Tom Merry scrambled over Clifton Dane's strong shoulders upon the wall. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy followed, and then Manners. The latter stopped to help Dane over. Jack Blake had made a jump, and caught the wall in his hands. But he was spent, and he could not drag himself over. He dropped back into the field. The three of them were out of it.

Of all the resolute pack that had followed the hares so far, only two were still in the running; Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry glanced for a second over his shoulder.

"It's between us now, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah."

They said no more; they needed their breath for the run. Figgins and Kerr were winding back to the road, and after them went the hounds hotly. A broad and flowing ditch barred the course of the fugitives, and Figgins, without stopping, cleared it at a bound. Kerr sprang after him, and fell short, splashing heavily into the ditch. The water splashed into the faces of the hounds, so near now were they.

Figgins turned back.

His grasp was on Kerr, and he dragged him from the water. Tom Merry and D'Arcy, not essaying the jump, came plunging through the ditch up to their armpits in muddy water.

"I—I'm done!" gasped Kerr, as Figgins dragged him out. "Keep on—leave me."

"Rats!"

"I—I—I'm done, old chap!"

"Stuff!"

And Figgins, who seemed made of iron, took a firm grip on Kerr's arm, and ran along helping him. Aided by the grip of Figgins, Kerr put on another spurt, running with teeth clenched hard, and lights dancing before his eyes.

D'Arcy lost his footing for a moment in the slippery mud, and reeled, pushing against Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell staggered and flopped bodily into the water.

"Bai Jove, I'm sowwy!"

Tom Merry's head came up, his face disfigured with mud. "Go it!" he managed to gasp. "Never mind me—catch them! Run!"

"Yaas, wathah."

And D'Arcy, scrambling from the water, broke into a rapid run on the track of the New House hares.

Tom Merry, who was half-choked and blinded with water and mud, dragged himself out of the ditch, and reeled exhausted against a tree. After a moment or two he resumed the run; but he knew he was out of it now. At the finish, all depended upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The honour of the School House was in the hands of the swell of St. Jim's.

The pack, as they came running on hopelessly behind, could see what passed. Figgins and Kerr were in the road now, running for the gates of St. Jim's. There were a crowd of fellows there, watching them come. Kildare and Darrel and Monteith and other Sixth-Formers in the crowd shouted encouragement. It had been a splendid run, and it was a fine finish.

But even yet the end was uncertain.

Arthur Augustus, with his monocle flying behind him, and an extremely determined expression upon his features, was running his hardest. And the swell of the School House, when he chose, was a fine runner.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Put it on, Figgins!"

"Dear me, Figgins appears to be running away from someone!" said a youth with a big forehead and a large pair of spectacles. "What is the matter?"

But nobody answered Skimpole. They were all too greatly interested in the close finish of that great run.

Skimpole blinked at the crowd in the gates, and blinked at the runners. He did not know that a paper-chase was on, and he was too short-sighted to see how matters stood. But Skimpole, the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, was good-natured to a fault. It was clear to him that Figgins was running away from somebody, and he thought at once of the Grammarians. He wondered why the other fellows did not go to the rescue; but that did not prevent him from going to the rescue himself. He ran out of the crowd at the gate.

There was a roar.

"Clear the way!"

"Get aside!"

Skimpole blinked round in amazement. Figgins and Kerr ran right into him, and, too utterly fagged to sustain the impact, they rolled in the dust of the road. The next moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sprawling over them.

Skimpole sat in the road and blinked.

"Dear me! What has happened?"

"Bai Jove, I've caught you!"

"Caught us!" spluttered Figgins, through a mouthful of dust. "You couldn't catch one half of us! It was that ass."

"Really, Figgins—"

"You—you—you—"

"I trust I have not inconvenienced you in any way, Figgins," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "I saw you running, and came to the rescue."

"Oh, jump on him, somebody!"

"Bai Jove, you are an awful ass, Skimmay! You have mucked up the wun, at the vewy finish! Of course, I should have caught them anyway!"

"Rats!" said Figgins.

Tom Merry came panting up.

"Well done, Gussy! It wasn't your fault that Skimmay was the only one in at the death. Will somebody kindly take Skimpole into a quiet corner and suffocate him."

"Bai Jove, the uttah ass ought to be suffocated, or somethin'! Of course, I had pwactically caught these boundahs."

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Figgins—"

"Well, I do—whole tribes of 'em!"

"Then if I were not so exhausted I should certainly administrah a feaful thwashin'. Undah the circs—"

"If you call this a win, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right, we don't. We'll call it a draw."

"Well, that's only fair," said Figgins. "I admit it was a near thing, and we'll run it over again with you with pleasure."

"Bai Jove, I'm weady, any time!" said D'Arcy.

"I'm jolly well going to get a wash and a feed," said Tom Merry, going into the gateway. "If you chaps turn up in my study in a quarter of an hour, you'll hear of something to your advantage."

And they turned up; and they enjoyed a feed that made Fatty Wynn, when he heard of it, wish he had stayed in to the finish of Tom Merry's paper-chase.

THE END.

(Another grand long, complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "Tom Merry's Week-end.")

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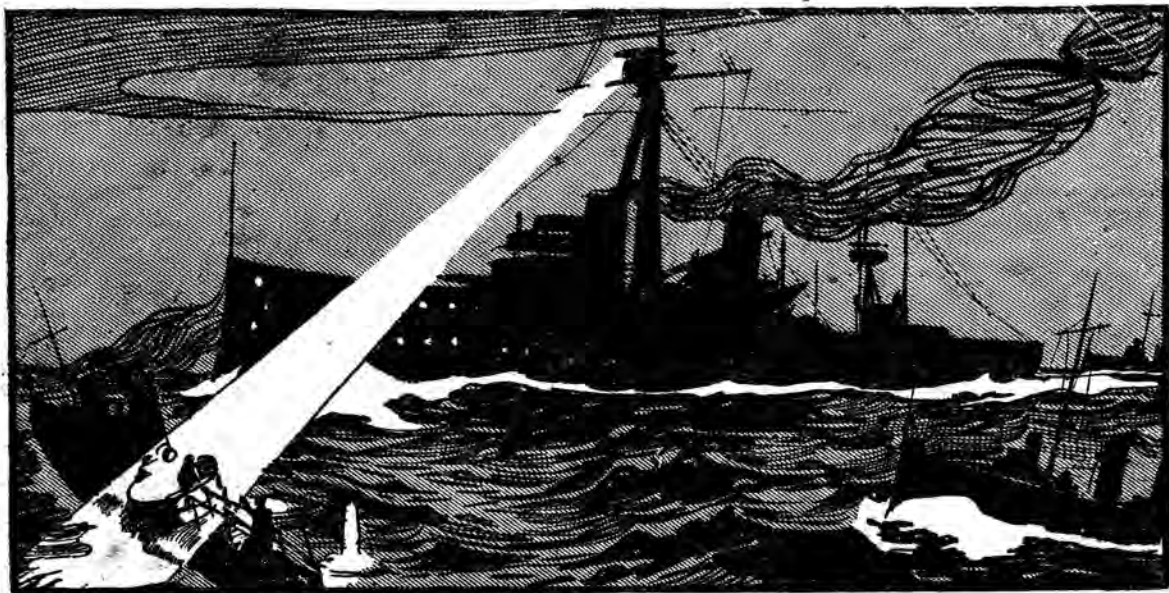
A Grand Tale of The Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S WEEK-END."

Please tell your Friends about this Story.—Ed.

BRITAIN AT BAY.



A Powerful and Stirring War Story.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz, the German commander.

At the time when this account opens,

London has been Bombarded and Carried.

Von Krantz had entered the City with his troops, and from the flagstaff on the Mansion House the German flag floated where none but British colours had been since London was built. London Bridge was blown up, and across the great river the remainder of the British troops and the half-starved millions of London waited in grim silence for the next move.

Sam and Stephen are chafing at their enforced inactivity, when Ned of Northey, a young Essex marshman and an old friend of theirs, sails up the Thames in his smack, the Maid of Essex, with a despatch he has captured from a German. This contains useful information of the landing of another German Army Corps, and Sam, having shown it to Lord Ripley, is given permission to go down river.

The boys have many exciting adventures, and one day Sam finds himself, together with a Lieutenant Cavendish, who has lost his torpedo-boat in destroying two German battleships, called to an interview with Admiral Sir Francis Frobisher.

The two are complimented on their performances, and the admiral offers Sam the task of running the steamer Blaine Castle, laden with provisions, from France, past the blockade into London. Sam agrees to make the attempt, and with Stephen's help eventually reaches London.

Shortly afterwards the two brothers fall into the hands of the Germans at Sheerness Fort, and are on the point of being executed, when the fort is bombarded by two British cruisers. The boys are thrust back into a cell, but the fort crumbles beneath the terrific bombardment, and they climb out over the debris on to a steep grassy slope, down which they allow themselves to roll.

(Now go on with the Story.)

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A Lucky Escape.

Where they would land there was no saying, but Stephen gave a gasp as he pitched over the edge of a straight wall and fell on something yielding, Sam plumping down beside him.

The boys scrambled up, to find themselves in a circular bastion, of which the only occupants were a wrecked 4.7 gun and four dead Prussian artillerymen, who lay round the dismantled piece. It was on one of these that Stephen had fallen. Sam took a quick, cautious look round over the smashed breastworks, and it showed him there was no immediate danger.

The entire fort was a ruin. It was torn to pieces, battered, riddled, and the earthworks were thrown up in fantastic shapes. So terrific had been the last stage of the bombardment that not a man appeared to be left alive. There were many dead gunners in every emplacement, many more were buried in the underworks, and prone, shapeless things that had once been men lay at the back, where the guard should have been, but where the death-dealing shells had burst with awful effect.

The boys could not see all of this, nor did they wait. They scrambled over the broken remnants of the fort, which was like a pie with the crust stamped in, and only halted at the outermost part, where an open space separated them from the nearest shelter—some bushes a couple of hundred yards away on the seaward side. Close by, in the last of the wrecked scarps, was another gun and its dead crew.

The two cruisers could be seen pounding away as hard as ever at the second fort, nearer Sheerness, and that one also was now weakening fast. It was raining hard, and the whole scene was desolate and gruesome as it could be. But the boys did not stay to notice the bombardment; they were full of the new hopes of escape, that grew stronger as they found no living enemy at hand.

"I wonder if we could reach those bushes without bein' spotted?" said Sam eagerly. "There must be some troops somewhere at the back, but it's no good skulkin' here. Somebody'll turn up in a minute or two. Come on, an' we'll make a dash for it."

Despite the need for hurry, Stephen stopped to pick up the carbine of one of the dead artillerymen, and snatched

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Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

the pouch of cartridges. With these in his hands, he jumped into the gap in the torn earthworks beside Sam.

Away to the right, inland, they caught sight of a group of riflemen doubling towards the fort. They hesitated a moment whether to run for it or hide; but the rain increased to a perfect deluge, blotting out everything as a heavy squall swept over the land, and away they dashed under cover of it.

The bushes were reached, and the boys, half-drenched, crouched behind them and took a quick outlook. It seemed very unlikely that they had been seen, so thick was the squall, nor could they see much ahead or around them.

Sam darted onwards again.

"Come on!" he said. "Make the most of this, and let's get as far as we can! There's a clump of trees back from the shore to the eastward!"

The trees loomed up before them through the rain after a hard run of five or six minutes at top speed, and the brothers stopped, panting, as the rain began to clear off and the squall passed.

"Thank Heaven!" said Sam fervently. "It's simply too good to be true that we're out of that! We never dreamed of gettin' out of that guard-room alive, except to be strung up! I really believe, with any luck, we shall come clear of it all!"

"What a day it's been!" said Stephen. "Well, we had a rest of sorts in the guard-room," he added, with a faint grin, "an' we haven't travelled far. We'd better devote ourselves to gettin' off the beastly island with whole skins now."

"What did you take that carbine for, you young ass? What's the good of loadin' yourself with that? You don't suppose you can shoot your way off Sheppey?"

"Nice little gun, an' it's got a sling," said Stephen. "I don't feel like myself without a rifle, and it never gets in the way. What about dodgin' out along the hedges now—we'd better push on. Think they'll send after us?"

"Not they—they're too busy—unless they saw us go. Keep close behind me now an' look nippy. It'd be cruel work to get dropped on now we've got so far."

There were few dangers in front of them for the next mile or so. They had reached a place from which it was possible to go right ahead under cover of the hedges, and save for one or two galloping scouts and messengers, who were seen and avoided, they had no troubles to contend with. It was different when they approached Minster and had to go inland to skirt round a busy array of infantry who were pushing south in a tremendous hurry, and the boys had to lie up for some time to let them go by.

Sam led the way back to the higher ground again as soon as he could, as there was better cover towards the cliffs.

"Wonder what these Hanover Rifles were in such a sweat about?" he said. "They were bein' shoved along at a rare pace! The firin' stopped away back off Sheerness, by the way. Suppose that means the other fort's silenced."

"There it goes again!" said Stephen, as heavy guns were heard to the northward.

"That ain't it; that's somewhere out to sea—not far away, either! Hallo!"

They came suddenly to a gap that opened through the high land and gave a wide view seaward. The first thing that caught Sam's eye and made him exclaim was the Orion, and behind her the Denbigh, flying along at every inch of speed they could raise straight for the Oaze Deep and the open sea to the eastward by the way they had come.

Away to the west, towards the Swin, three large ironclads were steaming in full pursuit, smoke pouring from their funnels and their guns booming heavily; but the racing cruisers were leaving them fast behind, though the big shells dropped barely short as yet.

"The German battleships comin' back!" said Stephen.

"Yes, an' too late!" returned Sam exultantly. "Frankie's cruisers have had time to smash the forts first! Hurrah! Lucky they weren't caught in range; one of those battleships could sink the pair in ten minutes! The cruisers have got the legs of 'em, an' off they go! Shoot away, you big, fat beggars—you'll never catch 'em now!"

"Good egg!" said Stephen. "But they're both better off than we are, for they've escaped already; while we've got the gauntlet of the German troops to run an' the Swale to cross before we can call our lives our own. Come on!"

"There's fightin' to the south of us too—away over the island towards Kent!" said Sam, stopping with a puzzled look.

"What the dickens can be up there? There ain't any British vessels up the Swale creek, it's certain, an' as for troops—how could they get across the water, even if there were any?"

Rapid musketry-fire was in progress between them and

the Kentish mainland without a doubt, and they could hear the drumming of small machine-guns.

"Some sort of a scrap's goin' on, it's a sure thing," said Stephen, with interest. "That must be what the German infantry we saw at Minster were hurryin' up for. They were doublin' that way full pelt. I say, let's get to a place where we can see what's up. It may mean everything to us."

"Right! Let's strike away inland, an' if we can get to the top of that bit of a hill there we shall be able to see without being seen from among the trees."

It did not take them very long to reach the point of vantage, though there were several Uhlands and scouts riding both ways from Sheerness and towards it, and all of them were galloping at full speed.

"They can't all be looking for us, can they?" said Stephen.

"Rats, no! There's something a jolly sight more important than us afoot; though I dare say by this time several of 'em have been warned of our escape, an' they'll make short work of us if we're seen."

"Not take us back to old Squareface?"

"No. Plug us, or jam a lance through us, on the spot. Thank goodness, even if we're caught, we sha'n't be hanged now! They're too busy to waste time playin' the fool. There go some more guns. Give 'em time to go by."

Along the road, not far distant, a field battery was swinging at full gallop, heading southwards like all the rest. Guns do not travel at such a pace unless they are wanted in a hurry, and the boys were more anxious than ever to find out what the action was, and where.

They dodged across the road as soon as the battery had passed, and taking to the fields again they reached the top of the hill where the clump of trees were.

It gave a good view over the rolling meadows and flat marshes beyond that stretched away to the Swale, which cut off the island from Kent. Out at the easternmost end of Sheppey, at Shellness, the body of troops they had seen there in the early morning had all left the place.

On the rising land just above the marshes, midway across the island, a hot fight was in progress. The irregular crackling of rifle-fire and the long rattle of Maxims was plainly heard, and the fringe of the fight was not more than a mile or two away.

"They're hammerin' each other like fun!" said Stephen excitedly. "Can you make 'em out?"

"I'd give a finger-joint for those field-glasses I stole at Colchester," said Sam. "We could tell what to do if we could only see what they're at an' which is which."

It was hard to make anything of the fight, for, as in nearly all modern warfare, both forces were well in cover, plugging away at each other furiously. Since the Boer War, men no longer stand up to be shot in the open.

"Only one thing's sure," exclaimed Sam, "some of our troops are there, an' they're holdin' the Germans back. Must be a forlorn hope, or something. How they got across the Swale is a puzzle we sha'n't know till we reach 'em. But that's what we've got to do."

"Our place is there," said Stephen eagerly. "If there's a scrap goin' on we're not fit to sneak off the island. There'll be some fine scoutin' work to be done, and, by gum, what a score if we could help to mop up that beggar of a Von Weissbaum! Let's get a move on!"

"Look here," said Sam suddenly, "it seems pretty clear our own side is on the north; they've outmanoeuvred the Germans. We could reach 'em by cuttin' round the base of the hills there, only it'll take half a day if we've got to go on foot an' stop every ten minutes to dodge scouts."

"It's the only thing to do, though. We must make all the speed we can," said Stephen, starting down the eastern slope of the hill. "We must run whenever there's a chance. Look at the Germans swarmin' up this way from Sheerness! They're bound to find us if we don't keep ahead. Come on—bunk for it!"

They scurried off down the hill as fast as their legs would carry them, and struck right away in the direction of the firing.

Before they had gone very far, however, they had to hasten out of their course and take to cover to let a troop of German dragoons go by—and even then they were nearly discovered by an aide-de-camp, who came galloping by on the other side of them.

"No good; this won't do!" said Sam impatiently, as they went on. "The fight'll be over one way or the other by the time we get there, at this rate."

"Why, you don't suppose our gettin' there is goin' to make any difference to it?" said Stephen gravely.

"Of course not, you young ass; but it'll make all the difference to us. If our chaps shift again before we reach them now, it's odds we never get to 'em at all. Turn down this chase here, an' let's run for it all the way, whether

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we're seen or not. We'll have to chance their bein' too busy to stop an' hunt down a couple of runaways. Unless we— Confound!"

He tripped and fell sprawling on his face, for between running and talking Sam had paid too little attention to where he was going. They were making their way down one of the long chases, or narrow, grassy paths with a hedge on either side, common on the island.

Sam fell pretty heavily, for his feet were entangled in something which he found, on rising, to be a large loose coil of wire rope, half-hidden in the long, dead grass.

He kicked his feet free from it and hurried on.

"I'd give one of my fingers for a couple of horses," he repeated earnestly. "Even one decent charger'd take the two of us. I'd wager my head on gettin' round to the fight in time if we'd a mount."

"Not much good talkin' about it," grunted Stephen. "I might lie up an' plug a scout; but then it's odds we couldn't catch his horse—it'd go gallopin' off. An' if we shot one, it wouldn't be any good to us, would it? Besides, I bar shootin' a horse, anyway—it ain't like shootin' a German."

"There comes another of those beastly Uhlans—right along this drive, too!" he added, jumping back into cover as a German horseman with a long lance appeared in the distance behind them at the end of the chase. "We'd better get through the hedge an' out of this."

"Confound him!" growled Sam, springing in beside his brother. "An' it's no good shootin' the fellow, as you say. His horse'd turn an' gallop off down the ride as soon as he was out of the saddle. Wish we could lasso the ruffian. However, it's no use—"

"Lasso him?" said Stephen, with sudden interest. "No, you can't do that; but, by Jove, I say! How would it be to trip him up with that wire? The horse, I mean. It's a soft fall on grass—not likely to hurt the horse. One end of the wire's fast, ain't it? An' with that horse we'd be with our forlorn hope yonder in twenty minutes, back to the colours again!"

"Trip him up!" said Sam blankly.

"Yes! I'll lead the fellow on, if you'll stand by with the wire. I'll show myself an' plug a shot at him, miss him, an' then run like blazes. He'll be after me with his old beapole like anything, an' you can tighten that wire an' try to bring him down. It's worth havin' a shot at. I can dodge him all right, even if you fail."

Sam cast a rapid glance down the chase. The Uhlans had disappeared, for though he was still riding towards them, a long dip in the ground hid him. He would soon be up the ride and in sight of them again.

"By Jove, we'll try it!" he cried. "Well thought of, Steve! It don't look like coming off, but let's try!"

"You take the wire, an' hurry up!" said Stephen, breaking through the hedge and vanishing.

Sam ran back along the chase as fast as he could lay his toes to the ground. They were over two hundred yards beyond the place where he had tripped, but he reached it in time, and seized the coil of wire.

It had been intended to fence a long gap in the hedge. One end was fast to a stout post close by, but the war, or some other cause, had caused the owner to abandon it. The other end of the coil was loose.

Sam darted across the chase, uncoiling the wire as he went, and allowing it to rest on the grass. It lay fairly evenly, save for a kink or two; he had no time to straighten it thoroughly. He chose a place in the opposite hedge, beside a tough young oak sapling, near which he crouched among the white-thorn bushes.

There was no sign of the Uhlans yet, and Sam began to fear he had turned back. A minute later, however, the man appeared over the rise a hundred yards off, cantering along with his lance upright.

Stephen was out of sight altogether, nor did Sam know where to expect him. Suddenly, about forty yards in front, the boy broke through the hedge, and stood in the chase.

He looked at the German as if in surprise, and the lancer himself was astonished genuinely. Stephen threw his carbine to his shoulder and fired, the bullet whistling close over the man's helmet; then, turning with a cry, he fled straight up the chase.

Instantly the Uhlans drove both spurs home and thundered after him, lance in rest. Stephen came sprinting by like the wind, whooping at the top of his voice; but he had cut things very fine in the matter of distance, and the glittering lance-head was not two yards from his back as he dashed past the post.

Sam heard the German's oath as he spurred his horse in, and heard, too, the wicked whistling of the lance-pennon as it rattled in the wind. At the last moment he sprang out, and snatching the wire rope tight he took a swift turn

with it round the stem of the young oak, and kept all his weight on the end.

There was a tremendous lurch as the wire met the horse above the knees—a wild plunge, and the sapling bent like a reed. The Uhlans shot out of the saddle, his lance striking the ground and snapping off short, while the horse rolled head over heels like a shot rabbit.

The Pig-headed Troop-Horse.

Sam dropped the wire as if it had burnt him, and sprang forward to seize the bridle of the kicking horse. It was a rough way of stopping a mount, and the first anxiety of both boys was lest the beast should be hurt.

They were soon free of any doubts on that head, for the big troop-horse, plunging and kicking most violently, scrambled to its feet and at once reared high in the air.

"Hang on to him!" cried Stephen.

"I'm likely to," grunted Sam, who, in spite of his strength, was nearly pulled off his feet. "Look sharp and jump up behind me when I mount!"

It was easier said than done, however. The horse, recognising the hand of a stranger and maddened by the sudden fall, behaved like a wild creature, plunging and striking out with its forehoofs, and spinning round like a teetotum.

It had taken no great hurt, save for a chafe across its forelegs and a headstall full of dirt. The Uhlans lay at full length on the turf, gasping, with the breath knocked out of him by the shock.

"Look alive!" exclaimed Stephen, jumping to help his brother. "Come up here, Persimmon! Steady, will you! Be quick, Sam; here's more of the beggars after us!"

In their haste to secure the horse, neither of the boys had kept a watch on the neighbourhood, and the first warning they had of danger was a full view of three more Uhlans with lances laid appearing over the rise and galloping towards the brothers as fast as their horses could tear.

With one spring Sam threw himself across the back of the captured mount, swung himself into the saddle, and held out a hand to his brother.

"Up behind me, quick!" he cried.

But the plunging brute, in spite of Sam's horsemanship, was all over the place at once, and Stephen was quite unable to get alongside him long enough to take a hold. He made one attempt and slid back heavily, while the Uhlans were coming up rapidly.

"It's no good!" he cried, rapidly unslinging his carbine. "They'll be on us by the time I get up, an' with a double load we shall be ridden down. Hold back a bit. I've time to fix up those three!"

"If you miss one of 'em we're done," said Sam. "Hold up, you son of Satan, will you!"

Stephen dropped coolly on one knee, and his eye glinted along the carbine's sights. The three Uhlans, not one hundred and fifty yards away, were coming up like the wind, one in front and two abreast behind.

The little rifle spat sharply. As it did so the foremost horse threw up its head and received the shot meant for its rider. The bullet severed the horse's spine, and down he went with a crash, the horse behind cannoning violently into him, and both horses and riders rolled over on the grass.

The third man came on faster than ever. The repeating lever of the carbine clicked as the spent cartridge was thrown out and the bolt closed again.

So close did the man come that Sam thought for a moment that the carbine had missed fire. The German, bending low in the saddle, his spurs set to his horse's flanks and his lance-head pointing straight for the kneeling boy, could neither turn aside nor rein back in that narrow lane. He had to come on, and he was almost upon the boys when the shot rang out, and, flinging up his arms, he pitched out of the saddle.

"Good shot!" said Sam, urging his horse right across the path and blocking the way. "I was thinking you'd left it a bit too late. Grab that beast there if you can!"

The dead Uhlans' troop-horse, however, had pulled up short on finding his rider out of the saddle and the way blocked. He whipped round and galloped back again with a snort, leaping over his dead comrade further up the lane, and flying after the unhurt horse, who had scrambled up and sped away.

"Stand by a moment! I'll catch that beggar for you if I can!" cried Sam; and driving his heels into the ribs of his own mount he dashed off in pursuit.

Of the two Uhlans who had come down in the collision, one was lying on the grass in a damaged condition, and the other scuttled through the hedge as fast as he could when Sam came charging down the ride. The young scout paid no attention to either of them, however—it was the horse he

wanted to overtake, for with a fresh mount apiece he knew they would have a better chance of reaching the British side.

His newly-captured steed was still intractable, however, and had a mouth as hard as leather. Sam could sit anything in the shape of horseflesh, but he soon found that with such a pig-headed brute he had not much chance of capturing the riderless troop-horse in front, and he had neither spurs nor whip. Once in the open he thought he would be able to manage it, but as soon as he was on the crest of the next rise he saw something that made him change his plans.

A squadron of cavalry was riding hard not very far away, and two more Uhlan patrols were on the right. A glance was enough to show that not only was it useless to go on chasing the troop-horse towards the enemy, but that if he did not make haste he would be cut off altogether. Wheeling round, he galloped as hard as he could back to Stephen, and reined the hard-mouthed troop-horse in.

"It's cut an' run," he said, "if we mean gettin' there at all. Jump up!"

There was less trouble about it this time, and in five seconds Stephen was up behind his brother and the horse was flying down the lane with the pair of them on its back.

"He can carry both of us as easy as winkin'," said Stephen; "we only bargained for one horse, an' we're lucky to get that. The wire brought it off finely—eh? I thought the blessed tree would be pulled up!"

"Jolly lucky it wasn't; you left little enough space between the fellow's lance an' your back, young 'un. Wish this precious lane'd come to an end; it's like runnin' up a water-pipe, and if any more come in at the back end—"

"It's done us a good turn, anyway. Here's the outlet—look! If you can skirt round that wood at the end, we ought to get a good clear start an' get over among our chaps."

"Hope so, for the whole country's scattered over with troops like flies on a newspaper," said Sam, as they dashed out into the open and skirted the wood; "an' it's hard enough to steer this great camel any way you want to go—he's got the head of a pig an' mouth like a broken bell-pull. Rummy horses they seem to deal out to their Uhlan troopers. Glory! There's another half-company of infantry away to the left," he added, wrenching the horse round and changing his course at the end of the wood. "One thing, nobody on foot'll catch us now, unless with bullets."

"It looks as if our chaps'll get eaten up anyhow, with all these troops swarmin' out after 'em," said Stephen.

"Don't know that. There aren't such a lot of men, only they're split up an' scattered about so. By gum, if our fellows yonder had a troop of cavalry they could cut up half these companies an' batteries that are fooling around. Now you can get a glimpse of where we've got to go," he added, as they came on to higher ground—"a long pull round by the left, an' we shall get in on to the British flank an' join 'em. They're holdin' out well."

"It'll be a proper scrap to peg out in," remarked Stephen. And Sam turned sharply away and made a long circuit.

They had left the bulk of the advancing Germans behind them; and those attacking the British force were far away to the right; but there were still one or two scouting parties and outposts in the way.

Going as fast as they did—for the troop-horse had plenty of speed—it was not very hard to avoid these; for everybody seemed more intent on the British lines and position than on any strangers. It was not a very usual sight for the Germans on Sheppey—a pair of khaki-clad youths on a Uhlan's horse—but the only man who gave chase had a tired mount, and was soon shaken off. All the same, as Sam said, it was more by luck than skill that they had got so far, for the captured steed went pretty well the road he pleased, and the bridle had not much effect on him.

"I believe the old dromedary's going to land us in harbour, after all!" exclaimed Stephen. "Unless—Hallo! Isn't that a German picket there—round the coppice?"

They only caught a glimpse of it for the moment—five German riflemen with a non-commissioned officer standing next a small coppice not far ahead. The next moment a shoulder of the coppice shut them out of view, and Sam thought he had not been seen, for they were all with their backs turned to the boys, intently watching the British position.

"Sharp to the left again, an' we can go on out of sight of 'em," said Stephen.

Sam attempted to turn at once. Any other horse would have answered to it; but whether it was that the trooper's mount refused to respond to any but his master's hand, or whether his temper was upset, he declined point-blank. Sam pulled his great fiddle-head right round; but the brute

charged on gaily round the corner, and in a few seconds was almost on-top of the picket.

"Great Scott!" gasped Stephen, trying to unsling his carbine—what for he hardly knew. It was all over in the wink of an eyelid.

The Germans whipped round, grasping their weapons as they heard the drumming of hoofs behind them. But the horse and its riders were already on top of them, and there was not even time to shoot.

Nor was there room to pass. They were standing in a gap between the coppice and a fence that ran down to it across the field. The big troop-horse did not seem to care whether there was room or not. He went slap through the picket, knocking two of the men flying with his massive shoulders, and upsetting the rest as if a railway-engine had charged into them. It did not even check his career. He went blundering on at full gallop, leaving a chorus of oaths and cries behind him; and only one solitary snapshot that missed its mark came from one of the rifles as horse and riders plunged through the next gap, and vanished out of sight down the steep slope beyond.

How Colonel Blake Tricked the Prussians.

"Cinders!" panted Stephen. "We must have captured a jolly earthquake, not a horse! He thinks he's a battering-ram! I'll bet my carbine he doesn't pull up till he gets to the sea—an' not then!"

"He must have shaken up the insides of one or two of those gaping beauties," chuckled Sam, contriving to swerve the horse enough to put a hedge between him and the top of the hill. "He pulled us through, anyhow; and we mustn't grumble, for we got him cheap. Look! There are our lines at last! Sit tight, now! One more gallop, and we're there!"

Right ahead, not half a mile away, was the flank of the little British force; and soon, as they rode out across the flat country between, the boys heard the whistle and whirr of the German bullets, fired from behind them to the right—not aimed at them, but at the British trenches.

The main attack was much farther to the right, and the boys had ridden far enough round to come up on the side. Yet there was ample room for shots pipping round them to make things brisk.

"Shove the camel along; don't let him slack off!" said Stephen. "You're as likely to get plugged by a stray bullet as by one aimed at you, as far as I've seen. I suppose our chaps'll spot who we are?"

There suddenly seemed a doubt about it, for as the troops lying in cover were neared, a bullet or two from their direction came very close, and one flicked a chip from the troop-horse's ear.

Sam rose in his stirrups, and holding his hand high in the air, shouted at the top of his voice.

The shots from in front ceased for the moment; but those from the distant German troops seemed to redouble, and Sam thought he had never been in a hotter corner.

A bullet rang on the barrel of his carbine, and glanced off with a scream, and a few moments later the troop-horse dashed right into the British position, while a cheer rose from the khaki-clad riflemen who were lying in cover. No sooner were they there than a shot struck the big troop-horse a handbreadth over Sam's knee, and he came down headlong in the midst of his stride, shooting the boys over his neck on to the turf.

"By Jove!" said a clear voice. "Where the dickens did you fellows come from? Get in here before you're pipped!"

A hand laid hold of Stephen's jacket, and he found himself hauled into a muddy trench, where Sam quickly followed. The speaker was a youthful-looking subaltern, at the right-hand end; and Sam no sooner set eyes on him, than he exclaimed in surprise:

"Hallo! Why it's Dicky Spencer! We've come across the Rutlands, then!"

"That's us. Soon be the late Rutlands, by the look of things. Well, it isn't a surprise to find you turnin' up anywhere, Villiers, old chap! You've had more sport than we poor regulars in this campaign. Sergeant, pass the word for more cartridges down this end, will you? That's your young brother, Villiers—eh?"

"That's me!" gasped Stephen, for the fall had winded him rather badly. "How are things going here?"

"Slack for the moment; but they'll brisk up again soon," said the subaltern, looking through his glasses at the enemy's position, as the firing gradually lessened. "It'll soon be as brisk as anyone could wish. I say, you chaps really are wonders, you know! Where have you come from on that 'bus-horse there, an' what have you been up to? I heard you'd gone down with the Blaine Castle."

"We bobbed up again," said Sam. "We're from Sheer-

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A Grand Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

ness Forts, an' that's a Uhlan's horse we annexed on the way."

"My aunt! I wouldn't have given much for you when I saw you ridin' across the open there! Still, it's here that we get the hottest fire, an' I'm afraid it's done for your beast."

The Uhlan's horse lay a few yards away, its eyes glazing in death; and Sam looked at it sorrowfully.

"Poor old camel! He'd a hard mouth, but he went his own way an' carried us through it! I wish he could have got through with a whole skin. There goes the machine-guns again, an' the Germans are startin' a cross-fire! They've shifted a lot of their men," added Sam, as the crackling of the rifles recommenced with increased fury, and the bullets screamed over the trenches, and knocked up flying spurts of mud.

"Whose troops are you, an' how on earth did you get here?" exclaimed Stephen. "We could hardly believe it when we saw you on Sheppey!"

"We're a couple of battalions of the Rutlands, a hundred Yeomanry without any horses, a company of sappers, an' six machine-guns," said Spencer coolly. "We're under Colonel Blake—and a very nice chap, too! But as to how we got here, there isn't time to tell you now, for we're gettin' blessed near the knuckle. It does seem a bit of a miracle to me how we find ourselves alive! However, I dare say you chaps would like to have a hand in it, wouldn't you? There are several rifles to let, unluckily, if you aren't too exhausted."

"We can shoot," said Sam eagerly, taking the rifle that lay beside a dead corporal in the trench, and a bag of cartridges. "Steve's the crack hand with a rifle, but I'll do my best, too."

"I'll stick to the little carbine," said Stephen, lying down in the trench, and putting the rear-sight up before he cocked his eye along the barrel. "It may have been made in Germany, but it fits me to a T. That was a near one!" he added, as a bullet flicked through his Service cap.

The duel of musketry began with tremendous severity, and two field-guns which the enemy had brought up began to throw in shells as fast as they could. The enemy was evidently expecting a great deal from these, but they did far less damage than might have been expected, owing to the situation of the British force, and most of the shells dropped just beyond.

"Our C.O.'s a chap who knows something, judgin' by the position he's chosen," said Sam, swiftly refilling the magazine of his rifle after the first shots. "I'd like to know by what sort of a conjurin' trick he brought this job off. But whether any of us'll live to hear is another matter. What d'you think, Spencer?"

"No sayin'," replied the subaltern, who was firing away with the best of them. "There's only about nine hundred of us, an' we've no decent guns."

"Then unless your colonel can do another miracle like flyin' over the Swale, we've no earthly. I can tell you. There are three thousand Germans at Sheerness, an' most of 'em were on the way here when we came through," said Stephen, picking off a mounted messenger eight hundred yards away on his front.

"You don't suppose we can hold out here for good!" said Sam. "My word, but it's gettin' thick!"

"No," returned Spencer, "our fire's slackenin', d'you see? Don't shoot too fast. They're in a hurry to wipe us up, an' when they think their guns have hushed us up they may try an' rush the position. That's what we're hopin' for, an' if they don't do it soon it'll be awkward for us."

The British fire was becoming fitful and uneven. Trench after trench slowly ceased, till only ragged shooting here and there was to be heard, while the German shells boomed and burst faster than ever. The British machine-guns were also slackening—four of them had ceased fire. It seemed no wonder, under the hail of lead and explosives that the Germans were pouring in.

And yet, as Sam was able to see, there were no great losses. The rifle-fire was not telling much on the Rutlands, and though the trenches were becoming silent, it was not because the men in them were shot down. They were, on the contrary, crouching low in the trenches, well out of sight, while a few of their comrades kept up a desultory fire.

"I see," said Sam. "It's very neatly done, but do you think the Germans'll fall into a trap like that? They're no fools at the war game!"

"No, they're not; but the ground here's so good that they can't tell what's happening. They want to mop us up as quick as it can be done—see?"

"Why in such a hurry?"

"Because Von Weisschhaus'll get in a tearing old row with the German commander-in-chief for lettin' us get on to

Sheppey at all, an' if he's got to wait an' bring all his garrison away from Sheerness—where it's wanted—to squash us, there'll be worse ructions still. He's got his reputation to think of."

"That's true. Never thought of that. Then if they charge now—"

"They'll get blazes. You don't need tellin' that—you can see the position. If they do come on, we shall drive 'em back with heavy losses, an' get a chance to scuttle on ahead."

"Where to?"

"Shorlands. That's where we intended to come all along. Once there, we can defy 'em for twenty-four hours at least, and in that time, let me hint to you, there are one or two surprises that may turn up for Von Weisschhaus and his men."

Sam looked back at Shorlands, where the famous old Manor House still stood, with the horse's-head weathercock on its spire, and he understood.

"That's so—it'll be a glorious position if we can reach it. I'm feeling more and more respect for your C.O., Spencer. I wonder what you think's goin' to happen in—Hallo, they mean comin' at last!"

There was a sudden change in the German position. The faint notes of a bugle rang out, and men—swarms of them—could be seen pouring out of cover in every direction, while the rifle-fire ceased, except from one quarter on the flank, where the enemy's troops still remained in their trenches.

"The beggars!" exclaimed Stephen. "It's drawn 'em! They've swallowed it whole!"

There was no hesitation about the enemy once the bugle was sounded. The dark green and grey masses of infantry, dotted with spiked helmets, came rolling across the level ground as hard as the men could run, and almost in silence.

"Fix bayonets," ran the order along the British lines, "under cover of the trenches! Keep down there!"

Swiftly and silently, down behind the breastworks, the bayonets were locked home. As the Germans came rushing on, the Rutlands kept up a spluttering fire—less than a dozen rifles speaking from each trench. The enemy, their sword-bayonets glittering in the winter sun, seemed to be charging in one solid mass.

The hearts of the boys beat fast. Sam took the dead corporal's three-cornered blade and fixed it to his rifle. Stephen could find no bayonet that could be attached to his Uhlan carbine, so he slung the latter across his back, and Spencer, seeing he was weaponless, passed him the revolver of the captain of the company, who had fallen early in the fight.

"Gosh!" muttered Stephen, stooping low as he watched the two full battalions of Prussian carabineers—for such they were—racing to reach the British position, with four companies of Hanovers close behind them. "They'll swamp us, won't they?"

Sam shook his head.

"You'll see a quick change in a minute. They're a heavy lot, though, an' if any of 'em do get to the trenches, you stand under me with that popper an' I'll reach over you with the bayonet."

Up came the Germans, in the face of the feeble fire that dropped a fair number of them here and there. There was but two hundred yards left for them to cover.

Suddenly from every trench in the British position came a deadly, withering blast of rifle-fire. The Rutlands, whom the Germans had thought to be decimated by the shell-fire, but who had been lying low behind the breastworks, rose up with their comrades, and eight hundred repeating-rifles poured forth their hail of lead.

The effect on the charging Germans was terrific. The whole of the foremost ranks seemed to go down bodily as they encountered that almost solid wall of bullets. At such short range every leaden messenger would drill three bodies in line ahead—and did.

The Maxims, at the same moment, loosed off with a deadly rattle and swept the advancing line from end to end. Every muddy ditch that had been so hastily dug out when the regiment went to ground became a spouting line of fire.

"Let 'em have it!" cried Spencer, shouting to make himself heard above the roar. "Low and fast, men!"

The Germans checked, amid an outburst of cries and desperate shouts from their officers urging them on; for no flesh and blood could stand against such a hail of death. But to go back was impossible, and so near were they that the Prussians on either flank charged on in desperation—their front broken, and their men falling like corn before the reaper's scythe.

If Stephen had wondered what the result would be, he was appalled when he saw it achieved. In the centre the German masses were fairly held back and ravaged by the withering fire. Twice they tried to come on—knowing that to turn and fly meant just as certain death—and twice they

failed. In less than thirty seconds a full half of their force lay dead or dying on the field, shot through and through.

It was only at the sides that a broken-up hundred or less managed to reach the trenches, and there they were, met by the bayonets of the Rutlands.

The breastwork behind which the boys were placed was suddenly rushed by a score of big, hefty Prussians, and a short, sharp, hand-to-hand struggle took place.

Stephen, standing below his brother, saw a huge, wild-eyed man in rifle-green spring on the breastwork and make a desperate lunge at Sam. The bayonet clashed on the young scout's rifle-barrel and the next moment Sam's three-edged blade was through the giant's body. Before he could recover it another Prussian whirled the butt of his rifle into the air to dash the boy down, but Stephen's revolver went off in the man's very face, and the two bodies toppled into the trench together. The wave of desperate Germans broke upon the breastworks as a sea-wave breaks on a beach, and though seven or eight of the defenders were bayoneted, not a Prussian came through alive. The charge was over.

Beyond the trenches the Prussians and Hanovers, or what was left of them, fairly broke and ran. They flung their rifles from them, and every man whose legs could carry him fled back across the open towards the starting-point, while the pitiless Maxims mowed them down. The plain in front was a red, helpless shambles, and in the near centre the dead lay three and four deep. It was an awful example of what modern musketry and guns, properly placed, can do against a frontal attack.

"Glory, what a knock-out!" said Sam. "Won't Von Weisshaus get it hot from his chief?"

"Leg it, you chaps!" said Spencer, springing out of the trench. "Now's our time or never! Bolt for Shorlands!"

Swiftly the order rang out along the line; the troops seemed to rise out of the earth, and in another minute they were all doubling as hard as they could go to gain the position on the next hill, for it was the key to the whole position.

The Prussians and Hanovers were routed completely, but already some freshly-arriving troops farther to the westward were making a desperate effort to get in and cut off the British force from the goal Colonel Blake hoped to reach. It became a race of life and death. The Rutlands could not hope to hold out for good in their present position, but at Shorlands it would be very different.

It was grand to see how smartly the compact little force carried out the move. Though just out of a hot encounter, every company was in good order. The wounded were brought away, and the guns, which up to the final moment greeted the departing Prussians, were the last to go. They had no horses, but each gun was dragged at a rapid run by several men. And as Sam and Stephen belonged to no company, they joined the gun-haulers and brought up the rear. It was the place of honour in such a case.

"Tail on here, young 'uns, if you're straining for a job," said the subaltern in charge of two of the guns. "Plenty of room on the ropes."

He joined the men himself and helped haul. The guns went rolling and bumping over the broken ground, and all the time the fresh German troops were racing at right angles to the course the British were taking.

"Shall we do it?" panted Stephen.

"No doubt about it," returned the subaltern; "we've got to!"

"We've got a long start of the foot-men," said Sam; "they'll never pull it off if their guns haven't arrived. But those cavalry—look at 'em!"

Away to the left, three troops of Saxon hussars were galloping down at full speed towards the British force. It was plain to everybody that if they swept in among the hurrying Rutlands there would be a terrible mess—nor could the latter afford the time to form squares and face them, for then they would certainly be cut off from Shorlands. The order came for the guns to stand.

Round came the pom-poms and the two Maxims, the gunners sprang to their posts, and as the cavalry swept round the slopes at full gallop, with sabres flashing, the blast from all four of the rear guns met them square.

The German cavalry had had to take the risk, and they took it. A minute or two sooner and they might have got through, but now it was impossible. They could not face the fire of the machine-guns. Thirty saddles were emptied in the twinkling of an eye, and the squadron split up and made a desperate attempt to come on in open order. One troop charged straight at the guns. Had they been field-guns, throwing large shells, they would have been ridden over, but the continuous hail of Maxim bullets and one-pounder projectiles was more than any cavalry could advance against. Less than a minute saw the Prussian hussars in full retreat, flying in all directions.

A rousing cheer rose from the men at the guns, which were instantly swung round again and raced away in the wake of the now distant Rutlands, who had made the most of their time. It was a severe strain for the last of the journey, for it was all rising ground up to the central position. But the main force were already swarming into the deserted enclosures, and the guns came swinging in while the baffled Germans were still toiling after them.

"Home at last!" shouted Stephen. "Now we can give 'em socks!"

Without a moment's delay, the Maxims and pom-poms were mounted in the best positions for defence, and the Rutlands lined the enclosure walls. Well in cover, they poured out a fire that made the Germans give up an attack that was now hopeless until many more men and guns arrived, and the enemy had to retreat hurriedly out of range.

Shorlands was no ordinary position for a defence, as Sam knew, and as Stephen was now able to see. It was not merely a house, but an enclosure covering some acres of ground, encircled by low, solid, old-fashioned walls, with buttresses to support them here and there, while the buildings—barns, stables, and outhouses—were in the middle. It made a fine natural stockade, and was so placed that it commanded the other positions around; nor was there any place from which the enemy's guns could properly command Shorlands.

Every man that could be spared from the actual defence was now at the work of increasing the defences. Three parts of the Rutlands were backing the walls by piling earth and turf and sacks of gravel against them, so as to quadruple their strength and make slopes behind them on which to mount the guns in proper emplacements.

There was a reconnaissance by the Germans very soon afterwards. They withdrew after some slight firing; but Colonel Blake's face grew grave as he saw how strong the enemy was, and how many were their guns. A few shells were pitched in as sighting shots by the German batteries, but these made no impression on the double-banked walls, and the few that came inside burst harmlessly in the open parts of the enclosures.

Once the place was fairly reached and made secure, however, the boys felt the strain of all they had gone through so severely that Stephen shut up like a claspknife, and was pulled, snoring, into an outhouse by a sergeant of the Rutlands out of harm's way. Sam, following, fell asleep beside him at once.

The dusk was falling fast when Sam was awakened—not by any alarm, but by sheer hunger; and very shortly afterwards he and Stephen finished off their emergency rations, preferring to take their chance rather than ask for any food from the besieged force, which was evidently short of it. In fact, it puzzled them to know how the Rutlands expected to exist at all with no supplies or communications; and just then Spencer walked into the shed and discovered the awakened pair.

"Well," said Sam, "here we are, perched up like eagles in a giddy eyrie, all the lot of us. It's a first-class position, no doubt; but what I'm wondering is, how you chaps arrived, and how you expect to stick here."

"The last is a bit of a puzzler, I admit," said Spencer; "but, seeing that Blake's got us so far, I fancy we sha'n't be here for nothing. As to how we arrived, it happened after we wiped the Germans up at Rochester."

"Did you?"

"Yes. They sent a detachment up from Sheerness, expecting to collar stores and things there. Blake, who was sent down from Gravesend, surprised the beggars and mopped 'em up! It had been arranged that he should lead a forlorn hope on to Sheppey, if there was any way of doin' it, and that Sir Francis's ships'd give him what help they could. You know what a huge pull it'd be for us to win back Sheerness."

"Rather! But it was a hundred to one against anybody passing the Swale, surely? It's a mile wide, an' all the Germans held this side."

"It takes a Blake to do a job like that," said Spencer. "He pushed on to Faversham, which is at the head of a creek opening on to the Swale on the mainland side, as you know. Well, of course, to take a force of a thousand men in boats across an estuary a mile wide was hopeless in the teeth of an enemy's fire. Too slow a job. But up at Faversham there were a lot of craft that had run in for shelter during the war, an', of course, daren't show their noses outside while the Germans held the Thames mouth."

"Most of 'em were barges and coasting schooners, but there were two good, powerful tugs. Blake grabbed those at once for his own purposes. There wasn't any coal for 'em, but wood was good enough to take 'em a short run, an' he could get plenty of that. He built up breastworks of stacked

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S WEEK-END."

planks as well, six feet deep round the fore-decks of the tugs, an' mounted two guns on each."

"Good man!" exclaimed Sam. "Now I begin to see his little game."

"He put his gunners and fifty picked shots on each tug, shoved all the rest of his men into four big barges, an' took the barges in tow of the tugs. At the top of high water, he set off down the creek, an', of course, was out of sight of the Germans on Sheppey till he reached the creek's mouth, an' came into the Swale itself. Away went both tugs as hard as they could lick, straight across the Swale, with the barges behind 'em, an' as the tide was right up they passed right over the flats, an' beached themselves at Harty Ferry within ten minutes."

"The Germans at Shellness, at the east end of the island, came streakin' up in a dooce of a stew to stop the landing, but there was only a cavalry troop an' some riflemen."

"We saw 'em," nodded Sam. "We wondered what had become of 'em."

"Blake turned his guns on 'em from the tugs, and mopped 'em up like anything, while the rest of us disembarked from the barges double-quick, an' took cover along the shore. We soon made short work of that Shellness lot, an' the garrison at Sheerness was miles away, an' had only just got wind of us."

"As soon as we'd cleared the way, we all legged it like anything for Shorland House, an' were able to get as far as the place where you found us, when we had to entrench ourselves in a hurry, an' meet the Prussians that were sent to stop us. We've reached Shorland, and here we make our stand."

"Great Scott! What a rippin' bit of work!" said Stephen enthusiastically. "Blake's the sort of chap I'd like to serve under—eh, Sam? But, I say, how are you goin' to hold out here without grub?"

"Every man has three days' emergency rations on him," said Spencer, "and we've brought a load or two with us as well. Beastly patent compressed grub—you know the stuff—but good enough to keep us goin'. We're makin' a big effort to win back Sheerness, which means the command of the Thames, an' London, too, an' it'll be the best day's work for Britain since—Hullo!"

There was a crackle of shots from the farther wall, and at the same time that a skirmishing party went out through the gates a couple of the dismounted yeomen, with one of the Rutlands, brought in a prisoner—a stout, tough-looking German.

It was the Uhlan captain who had captured them at the mine-station, and brought them before Von Weisshaus to be hanged.

"My eye!" said Stephen. "Look at that, Sam! It's our worthy pal of the mine-station, who brought us before that hangman they call their 'colonel'! Tables are turned now—eh—what?"

Lieutenant Spencer strode forward at once. The men in charge of the German saluted.

"Our scouting-party was lying in cover down the hill, sir," said the sergeant, "and the prisoner rode through us. He was makin' a reconnaissance, I think."

"Captain of Uhlans, is it not?" said Spencer civilly to the prisoner, in fairly good German.

"That's right," returned the German. "Herzog is my name. I suppose I must be taken before your commanding officer?"

"He's busy just now," said Spencer; "but he'll be delighted to receive you presently, Herr Captain. And in the meantime, if you'll give me your parole, I'll relieve you of your guard."

"My parole? Oh, certainly!" said Herzog. "Not much chance of escaping from this place of yours, or I wouldn't give it. But it's most courteous of you

to allow it me, sir—and you have it. May as well be comfortable while I'm here."

"You mean, you don't think it'll be long before your forces capture this place?" put in Stephen rather grimly. "Well, Herr Captain, you'll have the privilege of being wiped out with the rest of us if it does happen; for I believe there won't be any surrender."

Spencer laughed; and the Uhlan captain looked at the boy with a twinkle in his eye as they walked back to the outhouse together; for once an officer has given parole—his word of honour not to escape, even if he has the chance—no guard is set over him.

"We met under different circumstances last time, young gentlemen!" chuckled the Uhlan, as Spencer departed, asking the boys to keep the prisoner company while he was gone.

"Yes," said Sam. "You're rather luckier than we were, Herr Captain. I don't seem to remember your offering us parole."

"Ach, but consider!" said the German, his eye twinkling again. "I have not blown up a mine-station, or sunk a transport, or made myself as busy as you did. I wish I had."

"Well, we needn't complain, for we're well out of it," said Sam; "though Von Weisshaus is a bit disappointed, I dare say."

"You may not believe me, but I am glad you got away," said the Uhlan. "It is not for me to criticise my commanding officer, but I do not like those gallows methods of his. No; personally, I'd have stuck out for shooting you like gentlemen."

"Thanks!" said Stephen, laughing. "You'll admit it's rather galling to be called a spy when you can't answer back. By the way, your people don't always shoot prisoners, I suppose? Why should we be shot when we're caught?"

"Well, there seems to be a general opinion among our staff that a bullet will be the best cure for you when we get hold of you," chuckled the Uhlan. "You see, you've been more trouble to us than most, an' that Cadet Corps of yours, which we don't recognise as a British regiment, gives them a loophole. You really can't wonder at it, for you've been an unmitigated nuisance."

"That's good news, anyhow," grinned Stephen.

"I don't want to flatter you, but the Commander-in-Chief himself mentioned you the other day, I'm told—and not for the first time. He ordered that any of our men who got hold of you, and let you slip through their fingers afterwards, will be shot themselves! You've done damage enough, he says."

"I'd no idea we'd pulled Von Krantz's leg to that extent," chuckled Stephen. "Will he shoot Weisshaus, then?"

"That'd be going rather far," said Sam, grinning; "but, anyway, I reckon Von Weisshaus'll get it in the neck for to-day's work, an' I'm sure I hope so. A man who wants to string you up like a horse-thief, just because you've been playing the game for your own side, deserves the worst you can wish him. Well, captain, I'm afraid you won't get much to eat while you're up here. This is the 'Sooner Brigade'—sooner fight than feed, especially when they've nothing to feed on. But here's Spencer back!"

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"TOM MERRY'S WEEK-END"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther set out for a week-end vacation, and so do the rival Co.s, the Chums of Study 6 and Figgins & Co.

There's heaps of fun and some bewildering surprises. Gore, the cad of the Fourth, gets a very bad shock!

As for the rest—well, you will see next Thursday, and perhaps you will make sure of your GEM by telling your news agent to reserve you a copy now.

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