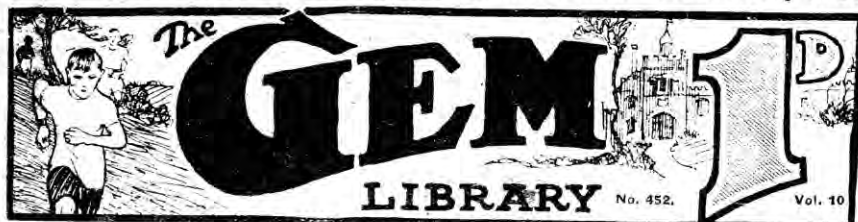


REDFERN TO THE RESCUE!

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



ARTHUR AUGUSTUS ARRIVES!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to

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OUR ··· THREE ··· COMPANION ··· PAPERS:

"THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.

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For Next Wednesday:

"BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!"

By Martin Clifford.

In the fine, long, complete story which appears next week, Talbot is again confronted with a shadow from the past which he has so finely redeemed. But the story is not chiefly concerned with this incident, or indeed with Talbot. It turns upon the efforts of Cousin Ethel's St. Jim's friends to do their best for a man down on his luck who has rescued her dog from drowning at considerable risk to himself. She tells them that this man is coming to Ryelcombe, and they prepare for his coming, meet him at the station, and treat him with the utmost hospitality—with results that cannot be told here, lest interest in the story should be lessened. Footer also comes into the yarn, a fact which will help to make it popular with our many sport-loving readers. There is a dog show, and there is a cat show; one is a School House affair, and the other a New House wheeze, organised in rivalry. Altogether, the story will be found to be crammed with interest, and it may be said that, although at one time nothing looked less likely, yet in the long run Tom Merry & Co. have no great reason to regret what they did.

"BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!"

AN APPRECIATION FROM A GROWN-UP READER.

A gentleman, whose name and address I am not at liberty to give—but I may say that he holds an appointment under a district council—writes me a letter, which I am very pleased indeed to publish.

"Dear Sir.—Just a line to express, very inadequately, our genuine appreciation of your most excellent paper, the 'Gem.' We are a large family, and we all derive equal joy from what I may describe as the close companionship of the characters in Mr. Martin Clifford's stories. You will realise how really keen our appreciation is when I tell you that, besides reading the current issue each week, we frequently dig up old numbers from our carefully-preserved stock, and read them over again. I may say that I am an old boy of the Talbot Baines Reed period. I think you will understand. Yours, with best wishes, PATERHAMMELIAS."

Yes, I quite understand. Talbot Baines Reed's stories were great. His is a name to conjure with among the 'old boys' who are a few years beyond the present military age limit. How he charmed and enthralled us in those days of old! I should feel sorry for the boys of to-day for not having a Talbot Baines Reed, but that I know that they have a Martin Clifford and a Frank Richards, authors upon whom the mantle of that giant of the past seems to have fallen in equal shares.

THE NEW SERIAL IN THE "MAGNET."

For some time past I have been getting many letters from readers of both the "Gem" and "Magnet" suggesting that school serials would be far more popular than the stories of adventure which we have been running. I am not sure what weight of opinion there is behind these suggestions; but the experiment of a school serial seems worth trying, and I am trying it in the "Magnet." Will those of my "Gem" readers who are not regular readers of the famous companion paper do me the favour of getting a copy of this week's issue? I think they will take to

"THE FOURTH FORM AT FRAMLINGHAM!"

It is a first-class yarn, with plenty of fun and some mystery in it, and the central figure, Johnny Goggs, ought to become a prime favourite. At first sight the reader may be inclined to take Goggs for a second Skimpole. But he is not, not by long chalks!

NOTICES.

Leagues, Correspondence, etc.

G. Francis, 23, Danbury Street, Islington, N., would like to correspond with a boy-reader of about 17 or 18 interested in cycling.

J. Ratcliff, 51, Alexandra Street, Southend-on-Sea, is forming a League for sending parcels of back numbers to men at the Front, and would be glad to hear from anyone interested. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Hurst Cogan, 8, Richmond Hill, Rathmines, Dublin, would like correspondence with other boy-readers.

Miss Mary Brown, 13, Stranton Place, Stranton, West Hartlepool, would like correspondence with girl-readers.

Albert Mannion, 113, Camden Street, Birkenshead, wants to correspond with boy-readers of about 14.

Henry Higgins, 230, Thistle Street, Glasgow, S.S., is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League (local), and would be glad to hear from anyone who would care to join. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

John Hodson, 10, Picton Terrace, Mount Pleasant, Swansea, would like to correspond with a reader interested in stamp-collecting.

Far Walcott, 17, Olveston Road, Horfield, Bristol, would like to correspond with boy-readers of about 14, and wishes to buy conjuring books.

James Adams, 17, High Baxter Street, Bury St. Edmunds, would be glad to hear from readers interested in the production of a small amateur journal. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

William Forbester, 116, Hyde Park Street, Gateshead-on-Tyne, wants to form a League for sending back numbers to the Front, and will be glad to hear from anyone interested.

Back Numbers, etc.

By Private G. A. Sinclair 5th. (res.) Seaforth Highlanders, B Coy., Hut 17, South Camp, Ripon: Back numbers of companion papers.

By Eric Wix, c/o Mrs. T. Warman, Patmore Heath, Albany, Ware: Back numbers of "Gem" and "Magnet" before 1915. Please state price.

By Willie Fraser, 515, Newcastle Street, West Perth, West Australia: "Through Thick and Thin," if any reader can spare him a copy.

By Rupert Macklin, 43, Melle Street, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa: Back numbers of "Gem" and "Magnet" for 1915. He missed a good many of these while serving in the German South-West campaign.

By Victor Allen, 22, Paget Street, Loughborough: "Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Figgins' Folly," "Tom Merry in the Rockies," and "The St. Jim's Airmen."

By C. Richards and D. Whiting, Homeland, 59, Holdenhurst Road, Bournemouth: "Gem" and "Magnet," Nos. 1-360. Half-price offered.

By C. Masters, 9, Hawthorn Road, Milton Regis, Kent: Any issue of the "B.F." 3d. Library containing a Jack, Sam, and Pete story except "Pete & Co.," "Pete's Prisoners," and "Pete's World-Wide Quest"; also numbers of "Gem" and "Magnet" earlier than 200.

By Private H. Birch, 20785, 15th Platoon, D Coy., 15th Hunts Regt., B.E.F., France: Back numbers of the "Gem." A. A. Butler, 20, Leopold Road, Bexhill-on-Sea; No. 399 of the "Gem." Doubtless price offered.

By R. Ostler, 7, Dellingsburn Street, Greenock: "Tom Merry & Co."

By R. Wells, 21, Holly Road, Hounslow: "Loyal to the Last," "The Schoolboy Explorers," "Tom Merry in the Rockies," and "Nobody's Study."

Your Editor

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AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING

GEM
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COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

REDFERN TO THE RESCUE!

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

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Mr. Lathom made Crooke sit down, and rang for a maid, and ordered hot water. The maid stared at Crooke, and giggled as she left the room. (See Chapter 9.)

CHAPTER 1.

No. 5 on the Warpath.

"**G**O it, Julian!"
"Sure we'll listen to yez intirely till we've finished the chestnuts!"
"Pile 'in, Moses minor!"

Dick Julian grinned.

He was mounted upon a chair in No. 5 Study, in the Fourth-Form passage in the School House at St. Jim's. There was a sparkle in his handsome dark eyes. Kerriush,

Reilly, and Harry Hammond were busy devouring baked chestnuts, so they were not able to give Dick Julian their undivided attention. But they gave him all they could spare from the chestnuts.

"Gentlemen, I have the honour of addressing this study."

"Sure ye have, and it's an honour intirely," said Reilly cordially. "But cut the cackle, and come to the horses! We're only giving you till we've finished the chestnuts, unless you like to stand another lot. We don't mind."

"Funds are short," said Julian. "That's the lot."

Next Wednesday:

"BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!" AND "CORNSTALK BOB!"

No. 452. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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"Then, faith, y'd better buck up wid yere speech!"

"Gentlemen, it is time this study came into the limelight. Honourable members are aware that the chief end and object of existence in the School House at St. Jim's is to give Figgins & Co. of the New House the kybosh."

"Hear, hear!"

"Tom Merry & Co. generally take that matter in hand. Study No. 6 think they are great guns in that line. But my idea is that it is time No. 5 took a hand, and showed Tom Merry and Blake and everybody in general that when it comes to real business No. 5 is the real goods."

"Bravo!"

"Therefore—in Latin, ergo—we are going on the war-path."

"Pass the chestnuts, Hammond, you baste!"

"It happens that Figgins & Co. of the New House are away for a week, having got leave to go down to Wales with Wynn's uncle, who's home from the Front," went on Julian.

"More power to his elbow!"

"But Redfern & Co. are as cheeky as ever, and they're ready to be kyboshed. Now, my idea is to give Redfern & Co. the kybosh at present, and Figgins & Co. the kybosh when they come back."

"Good egg!"

"That will show Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther that they're not the only pebbles on the beach. It will show Blake and Herries and Dig and D'Arcy that they are not head cooks and bottle-washers in the Fourth Form."

"Bar, ear!" said Hammond heartily, with more heartiness than his, in fact. The Cockney schoolboy still had trouble with his aspirates.

"In fact, we're going to make this study top study in the Fourth, and No. 6 will have to hide its diminished head!" said Julian.

Loud cheers.

There was a tap at the door, and an eyeglass gleamed into the study. Behind the eyeglass the eye of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth gleamed at the four chums of No. 5 Study.

"Sowwy to intewwupt, deah boys—" began D'Arcy.

"Buzz off! This is a meeting."

"I could not help hearin' your last remark, as you made it in such an extremely wained voice," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I have stopped in, Julian, to point out to you that you are a feckal ass!"

"Bow-wow!"

"And unless you cheeky young boundahs withdrow on the spot your ridiculous remarks," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, pushing back his spotless cuffs, "I shall immediately proceed to mop up the whole studay!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall begin with you, Julian. I wash like you personally, but I cannot allow you to get your yabs up. Put up your hands!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The howl of laughter in No. 5 Study had an exasperating effect upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He rushed at Julian.

Gussy was on the best of terms with Julian, as a rule; but when it was a question of the prestige of Study No. 6 personal feelings could not be considered. It was evidently necessary to mop up No. 5 Study, and Gussy never counted odds.

"Unfortunately, the odds were there, whether he counted them or not."

Four juniors laid hold of the warlike swell of St. Jim's at the same moment. In an instant Arthur Augustus was swept off his feet, and his arms and legs were flying wildly in the air.

"Yawwoh!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Weflease me, you wottahs! Weflease me at once, and I will thwash you all wound!"

"Not good enough," grinned Julian.

Julian & Co. rushed Arthur Augustus out of the study. Three Shell fellows were coming along the passage, unfortunately, at the same moment. There was a terrific collision, and Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther went staggering.

"Yow!" roared Tom Merry. "Wharrer you up to?"

"Ha, ha!"

"Sorry!" gasped Julian. "Only taking Gussy home."

"You silly asses!" yelled Lowther.

"Ha, ha! Sorry! Come on!"

"Weflease me! Yawwooh!"

"Kim on!"

Arthur Augustus, struggling wildly, was rushed, bodily along to No. 6. Julian kicked open the door.

Blake and Herries and Digby were at tea. They stared in astonishment at the sight of their aristocratic chum whirling in the air in the grasp of Study No. 5.

"What the merry dickens!" exclaimed Blake.

Crash!

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"Why, your dangerous lunatics—" roared Herries.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy landed bodily in the middle of the tea-table. There was a crash of crockery, a wild yell from Arthur Augustus, and a roar of wrath from his study-mates.

With a yell of laughter, Julian & Co. beat a rapid, strategic retreat. Arthur Augustus sat up among the broken crockery and flowing tea, and gasped.

"Greatest Scott! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Julian & Co. sauntered away cheerily. No. 5 Study were on the warpath, and Study No. 6 had become only too well aware of the fact!

CHAPTER 2.

Dodging Ratty.

"POTTY!" exclaimed Owen.

"Quite off his giddy rocker!" gasped Lawrence.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence of the New House at St. Jim's were sauntering along a footpath close by Rylcombe. All of a sudden Redfern had seized his two comrades by their arms, and dragged them bodily into a clump of willows, close by the garden wall of the Green Man.

Redfern's action was sudden and inexplicable, and neither Owen nor Lawrence had time to resist. In a twinkling they were sprawling in the cover of the thick clump of willows by the garden wall.

"You silly ass!" roared Owen.

"You potty duffer!" gasped Lawrence.

"Hold on," said Redfern. "Don't play the goat now. Do you think I did it for fun, asses?"

"Well, what did you do it for?"

"Old Ratty is stalking us. I spotted him coming round the corner."

The Co. became serious at once. Mr. Ratcliff was master of the New House at St. Jim's. Mr. Ratcliff was not popular in his House. He was fussy and severe. Offences which Mr. Ratcliff, of the School House, would pass over lightly, were heavily visited by Mr. Ratcliff upon his boys.

Owen gave an expressive whistle.

"The Ratcliff beast! Are you sure?"

"Ass! Do you think I don't know his owl's face? And I believe he has spotted us. If he has, look out for assalls!"

And Redfern, cautiously putting his head through the opening of a hedge, warily scanned the lane they had so abruptly left. A tall, thin gentleman was coming from the direction of the village, and the expression of his sour face showed that he had seen the trio before they disappeared through the hedge, in spite of Redfern's promptness in performing the vanishing trick.

"Is he looking for us, Reddy?" asked Owen, as Redfern turned back again.

"Yes."

"My hat! Then we're in for it!"

"Perhaps not. He could only have caught a glimpse of us, and we may dodge him yet. Look here, if we cut across the field, we can get into the garden behind the Green Man, and cut through that into the village. Come on. No time for talk! Keep your noses down, and sprint for it."

There was nothing else to be done. The hedge was high, and if they could get across the field before the Housemaster reached the gap, they were saved. Keeping their heads low, the three juniors sprinted across the field, towards the row of leafless trees which marked the boundary of the long inn garden. A wide ditch, filled with water when the Ryll stream was high, had to be crossed on the further side. It was full up now, and the water lapped over the plank which crossed it by way of a bridge.

"Look out! This will be slippery!" exclaimed Owen.

He was right. The plank was indeed slippery; but the three juniors, treading with care, crossed it in safety, and scrambled over the garden-gate. Redfern lingered behind for a moment, but he quickly rejoined his comrades. From the safe side of the gate, keeping well out of sight, they looked back across the field. A tall, thin figure stood in the gap of the hedge.

"The Ratcliff bird, as large as life," said Owen. "See! He's looking this way. He suspects where we are. Reddy, you asses, you've made matters worse by this move!"

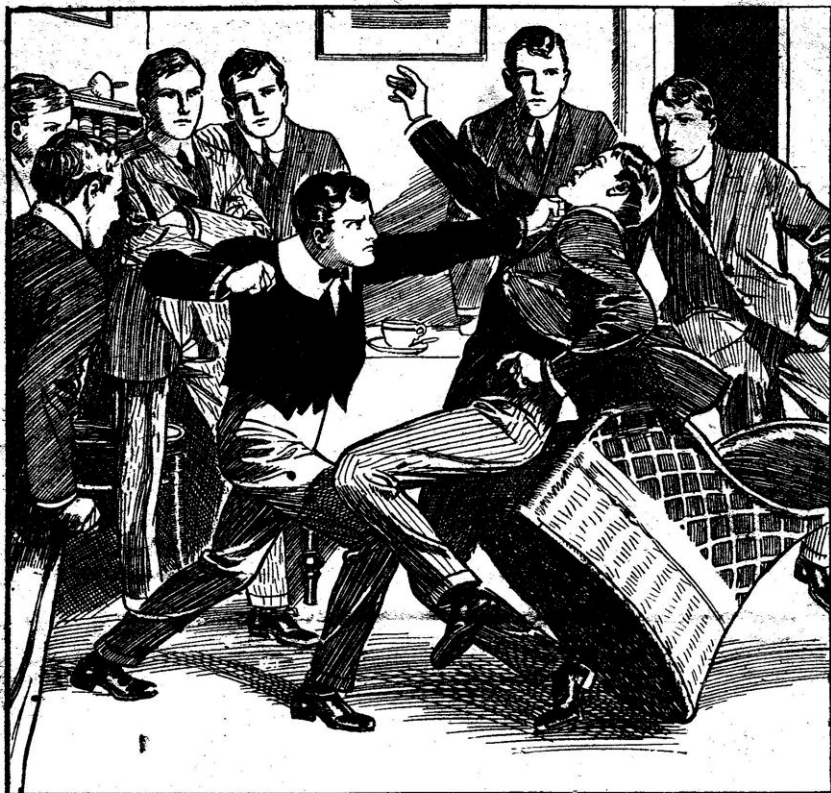
"Don't you worry your poor little brain, my son," said Redfern. "He won't catch us. He could only have caught a glimpse of us in the lane. And he won't spot us here."

"He's coming across the field!" exclaimed Owen.

"Let him come. He isn't across the plank yet. I noticed it was loose as I crossed it, and I stopped for a tick to—"

"To make it safe?"

"To make it looser," said Reddy serenely. "Keep down



Julian dashed right at Hake, and his fist crashed right into the senior's face. "You—you little hound!" gasped the enraged Hake. (See Chapter 5.)

here in the shrubbery. We want to see him negotiate that plank. It ought to be worth seeing."

The Co. chuckled joyously. Keeping in cover, they watched the thin figure of the Housemaster. Mr. Ratcliff was coming directly towards the gate, but his expression was dubious now. He had certainly caught sight in the lane of three figures he had taken for those of Redfern & Co., and, full of righteous wrath, he had set out to track them down. But he was doubtful now, so suddenly and completely had the trio vanished. But he was not a man to do things by halves, and he meant to investigate a little further.

He reached the flowing ditch, and looked doubtfully at the plank. Treading very gingerly, he commenced to cross it to the gate. He had taken three steps from the bank when the further end of the plank slid downwards, and the Housemaster plunged forward. He made a desperate effort to recover his balance, slipped from the plank, and splashed up to his knees into the water.

"Oh!"

The sudden shock made him gasp and flounder, and in a moment he was in the deepest part of the ditch, with the water flowing round his waist. He gasped, and spluttered, and struggled back to the bank he had left, and clutched at the reeds and weeds. He was a dragged object as he dragged himself out.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Ugh! Oh, ah, ugh!" His trousers were soaked, his sleeves wet, his tall hat sailing merrily towards the river.

The juniors, hidden on the other side of the gate, remained still as mice.

"Oh, ah, ugh! I shall catch cold, I am sure I shall. Oh, ah, ugh!"

"The silly ass!" whispered Redfern. "He'll catch cold if he stands there grumbling. Why don't he make a run for it?"

Apparently the same thought came into Mr. Ratcliff's mind. Nothing but sharp exercise could save his nether extremities from freezing. He turned away, and started across the field at a good pace. His hunting of Redfern & Co. was over; if he had wished to continue it there was now no means of crossing the ditch. But he did not wish anything of the kind.

"This," said Redfern, "is what comes of trailing down innocent youths like a giddy blighound. Let us hope it will prove a warning to our misguided master. Come along." Reddy led the way through the inn garden. "The sooner we get out of this place the better."

The juniors had excellent reasons for not wanting to be seen in the garden of the Green Man.

Joliffe, the landlord, and the Green Man altogether were strictly taboo.

There was a path beside the inn, leading out into the main street of Rylocombe, and it was by this that Reddy hoped to escape. But the luck of Redfern & Co. seemed to be out that day. Reddy suddenly whispered, "Cave!" and dragged his companions into the shelter of an outhouse. Coming

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!"

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down the path beside the inn was a well-known figure—that of a senior of the New House at St. Jim's.

"It's Hake," whispered Reddy, peeping out cautiously. "I say, this is rotten! Fancy his coming on us like this!"

"Think he's after us?" asked Owen. "Acting in collusion with the Ratcliff bird?"

"No," Reddy shook his head. "I believe he's here on a visit to Joliffe. I've thought a lot of times he was one of the chaps that had dealings with that rotter. He's just the sort. But he'd be down on us if he found us here, all the same."

"If he goes into the house we can slip past," said Owen anxiously.

"He's not going in. Hallo! He's talking to somebody at the side door. Hark!"

Hake's voice could be distinctly heard. He was not a dozen paces from the juniors.

"I must see Mr. Joliffe. Tell him it's most important. It's about the money."

"He can't see you now, sir," said a rougher voice. "He says you can give me what you have brought him."

"I haven't brought him anything. I want to explain—"

"Then, I'm afraid there'll be a row, sir. It's no good; he won't see you."

"But I will see him! Let me pass!"

Redfern, looking cautiously round the corner of the shed, saw Hake, with a white, angry face, push his way in, in spite of the man's real or pretended resistance. They were still speaking, but their voices died away indistinguishably inside the house.

"Come on!" whispered Redfern.

The three juniors darted away, and in a minute or less were in the High Street of Rykcombe. There they breathed more freely.

"Now for a sprint to St. Jim's!" exclaimed Redfern. "If we buck up, we may still get there ahead of Ratty, and be nicely and patiently at work in our study when he arrives."

"Right-ho!" said Owen. "But, I say, Reddy, what price Hake? It's as plain as anything that he's in the habit of visiting that cad Joliffe, isn't it?"

"Looks like it; and looks as if he owed the cad money, or something like that," answered Redfern. "Still, it's no business of ours. We can't interfere. Buck up!"

And Redfern & Co. set out upon a run to the school. They covered the ground very quickly. They were still some distance from the school when they sighted the figure of the Housemaster ahead. Mr. Ratcliff was not accustomed to violent exercise, and he had soon dropped into a walk.

"We shall have to go round him," said Redfern. "At the rate he's going we shall do it easily enough."

And they did. They lost a quarter of a mile making a detour to escape the lynx eye of Mr. Ratcliff, but when they reached the gates of St. Jim's the Housemaster was not yet in sight. The three scamps hurried to the New House, and were speedily at work in their study.

Ten minutes later the door of that apartment opened, and Mr. Ratcliff looked sourly in. He saw three juniors hard at work, with ink fingers and set, serious faces, and they all looked up respectfully as they saw him. He gave them one long, searching glance, which they met with faces of the most perfect innocence, and turned away without saying a word.

And as soon as the door had closed Redfern & Co. chortled joyfully.

CHAPTER 3.

A Raid on the Enemy.

DICK JULIAN sat on the table in No. 5 Study with knitted brows.

"What's the matter with the image?" exclaimed Kerruish. "You haven't touched your prep yet, Julian."

Dick Julian broke silence at last.

"Blow prep!"

"What about Latham in the morning?"

"Blow Latham!"

"Pathead! You'll get lines!" said Hammond.

"Blow lines!"

"What's the matter wid ye?" roared Reilly.

"I've got a wheeze."

"Howly mother av Moses! Is that all?"

"I suppose you haven't forgotten that this study is on the warpath," said Julian severely. "We're going to give the New House the kybosh, and show Tom Merry & Co. that we can do it."

"While Figgins is away!" grinned Hammond.

"We'll deal with Figgins & Co. when they come back," said Julian.

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said Julian. "Figgins & Co. ain't above our weight. At present Reddy is our game. Reddy's a good chap, and I respect him no end, but he's got to be made to sit up and take notice."

"Hear, hear!"

"And that cad Hake," said Julian. "After we've settled Reddy's hash we're going to make things warm for Hake of the Sixth."

Reilly whistled.

"Better let the Sixth alone," he said. "You had a row with Monteith the other day, and you got a kicking from Kildare over it."

"I only called him a New House bounder."

"Sure, ye musn't call a prefect a bounder. New House or not!" chuckled Reilly. "The greater the truth the greater the libel, you know. But what has that baste Hake been doing?"

"He was kicking young Wally this afternoon."

"I dare say D'Arcy minor asked for it," said Hammond.

"There never was a kid who could do with so many lickings."

"A New House rotter isn't going to wallop School House fags, though—not while this study is on the scene!" said Julian. "And I don't like Hake, anyway. I think it was a mistake to make him treasurer of the senior cricket club, and to put him in the First Eleven, too. School House chap ought to have had the job—say Darrel or Rushden."

"Kildare didn't ask yer advice, Julian. It was an oversight."

"Well, never mind Hake now," said Julian. "The rotter had the cheek to pull my ear—a School House ear, you know—yesterday. I butted him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He doesn't like me," said Julian cheerfully. "People have queer likes and dislikes. But blow Hake for the present; we'll deal with him later. I've got an idea for japing Redfern & Co.—in their own quarters, too!"

"Well, phwat's the wheeze intirely?" asked Reilly. "I'm game for any old thing. You'd better have a go at these chestnuts or they'll be gone."

"Oh, blow the chestnuts! Talk about Nero fiddling while Rome was burning," said Julian severely. "Now, lend me your pen."

"Fire away!"

"The cat, the lion, and the unicorn which remained of the chestnuts—while Dick Julian expounded his wheeze."

"The New House have been bucking up a good bit lately, and it's time we wired in and put them in their place! Now, this is the accepted time! We've got an opportunity we never had before!" he said.

"How's that?"

"Why, the Housemaster over the way, the estimable Ratcliff, has managed to catch a cold, or a cold has managed to catch him, and he's keeping to his room for a bit. I had it from a New House kid. There's nothing the matter with him, you know; but he never goes in for exercise or any sports, and so the least little bit of a cold turns him into a giddy invalid! And by the same token, Monteith, their prefect, is away."

Reilly and Hammond and Kerruish looked interested.

"I saw him go out on his machine with Webb, of the New House," went on Julian. "Now, do you grasp the situation? Do you fully realise the thushness of it? The Housemaster is nursing himself in his room. The head prefect is off for some hours. The coast is clear. Once aboard the lugger, and the girl is ours—I mean, now is the time to make Redfern & Co. sit up!"

"I see!" grinned Hammond. "All right! I'm game, if you are. Have you thought out what we're going to do?"

"Of course I have! Two of us will be enough to do the trick. I'm going, of course. I want one volunteer."

"Here you are!" said Reilly promptly.

"Here you are!"

"Rats! If you all want to come, toss up for it. That's the quickest way."

This was agreed to. And Hammond produced a shilling, and chance decided in favour of Reilly. Hammond and Kerruish growled, and submitted.

The evening was deep in the early-winter dusk as Julian and his companion cautiously crossed it towards the New House. Three figures in running flannels glimmered for a moment in the gloom and vanished. Julian grinned. He recognised Redfern & Co. doing their usual evening sprint round the quad.

Luck and the winter dusk favoured them. They reached the corridor of the Fourth Form undisturbed, and Julian tried Redfern's door. It opened to his hand, and the School House juniors entered, and Julian closed it. It took but a moment to light the gas.

Dick looked round the room, and saw the various belongings of Redfern & Co. scattered about it in a state of delightful disorder. He shook his head solemnly.

"This is shocking untidiness!" he said. "Don't you think so, Reilly?"

"Not more untidy than our study in the School House, is it?" grinned Reilly.

"That's got nothing to do with it! It's shocking untidy, and I'm going to set it to rights before our dear schoolfellows return. Now, if I pour this bottle of ink into Reddy's football boots it will be an improvement, and it's bound to please him when he finds it there!"

"Eh, ha, ha!"

"Then there's their grub. Shocking little gluttons, ain't they?" said Julian, opening the door of the cupboard where Redfern & Co. kept their provisions. "These jam-tarts look all right, but a little red ink will improve their colour! They look better now, don't they?"

"Ha, ha! Reddy won't think so!"

"There's no pleasing some people! Now, here's a bottle of syrup. If I pour that over the pigeon-pie it will give it flavour! Now I'll empty the tea-canister on top of it! Ah, and here's some coffee! That may as well go on the heap! Now, that will do for the cupboard. Oh, won't Reddy be pleased?"

Reilly grinned, and joined in to help with the improvements in the quarters of Redfern & Co.

The amount of havoc the two juniors wrought in a very short space of time was really remarkable. They sorted things, and they mixed things, and in ten minutes the room looked as if it had been subjected to a dozen spring-cleanings all rolled into one.

Julian surveyed the ruins with a pleased smile of satisfaction.

"Do you think Reddy will be pleased?" he demanded.

"He is sure to be, entirely. But if they come in and find us here, and the study in this state, I don't think we shall be pleased!" remarked Reilly.

"Perhaps you're right. A benefactor must always be prepared to meet with ingratitude. This is where we bunk!"

And Julian turned out the gas, and they left the room.

"Oh, I say, I forgot!" muttered Julian. "We ought to leave something to let 'em know who's been, though I dare say they'll guess. Cut along, sonny! I'll join you."

Reilly hurried on, while Julian turned back into the room he had just quitted. He lighted the gas, and, dipping his finger in the ink, scrawled in huge letters upon a sheet of exercise-paper:

"With the compliments of Study No. 5."

This friendly message he pinned up in a prominent position over the mantelpiece, where it could not fail to catch the eyes of Redfern & Co. when they returned.

Then he quitted the study and followed Reilly. The latter had already left the New House, and was streaking across the quad for home. Julian hurried down the stairs, and passed quickly along the second corridor towards the lower flight. Fortune was against him, for he was only half-way through the corridor, when he heard someone ascending the lower stairs. He halted in dismay.

It was too late to return, and to advance was to show himself to the enemy. If it was only a junior it did not matter, but it might be a prefect. Julian's thoughts moved quickly. He turned to the nearest study door. The fact that there was no light showing beneath it proved that it was unoccupied, and that was what he wanted. In a moment he was within the room, and had closed the door. There he waited, with beating heart, for the footsteps to pass. They came on, nearer and nearer, and, to his dismay, halted at the door.

A hand was on the handle; the door opened before he had time to think. He stepped back into the study, and someone came in in the darkness and struck a match. In the flickering light Julian caught sight of the face of Hubert Hake.

The New House senior was deadly pale, and his eyes had a haggard look, as if from constant worry and want of sleep.

Julian looked at him in amazement, forgetting for the moment his own position in wondering what was the matter with Hake.

The senior caught sight of him at the same moment, and uttered a startled cry.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing!" said Julian.

He stood watching Hake warily as he lighted the gas. He knew that he had at least a licking to expect, and he did not mean to take it quietly if there was a chance to bolt.

There was no love lost between Hake and Dick Julian.

All things considered, Julian had taken about the worst possible step for himself in taking refuge in Hake's study, and now he was looking out for trouble.

But, contrary to his expectations, the New House senior did not reach out at once for a cane and commence operations. In the light of the gas Hake stood looking at Julian oddly, his face still ghastly white and strained.

"What were you doing here?" he repeated, in a strangely calm voice.

"Nothing! I dodged in because I heard you coming. I've been paying a visit to Redfern's study," replied Julian cheerfully.

"Do you mean to say that you have only just entered my room?"

"Yes."

"I did not see you in the corridor."

"I dodged in when I heard your footsteps upon the stairs." Julian was rather puzzled by this cross-examination. Hake was not taking at all the line he had expected him to take. Was it possible that he was to get off the licking, after all? And what was the matter with Hake? What made him so horribly white?

Hake was still looking at him in the same quiet, strange way.

"don't believe you," he said coldly. "You are the worst boy in the School House, Julian, and I believe you came here to play some trick upon me, you young Sheezy!"

"Well, I didn't; and only a cad would doubt a fellow's word!"

Hake flushed with anger.

"Very well. Whatever you came for, you're going to have a licking!"

Julian watched him warily.

Hake reached out to grasp him by the collar. In a flash Julian ducked under his arm, and bolted for the door. But it was not to be. Hake swung round, and seized him before he could escape, and boxed his ears right and left.

"Oh, you beast!" gasped Julian.

And he hit out, too, with all his strength; and Hake received one or two that made him gasp. He dragged Julian to the door, and sent him spinning out into the corridor. Two or three study doors opened, and fellows looked out to see what the disturbance was about.

Julian picked himself up.

He was not a bit daunted, but he had his wits about him. In a twinkling he had bolted down the corridor, and was descending the stairs three or four at a time.

Fortunately, he had met no one in his wild career, or there would certainly have been a catastrophe. He ran down the steps of the New House, and in a few minutes was safe in Study No. 5 in his own House.

"Allo! You've been in the wars!" exclaimed Hammond, as Julian burst into the study, his face flushed, his hair tousled, his collar hanging loose.

Julian sank back into a chair.

"Did Redfern & Co. get you?" asked Kerruish.

"No," gasped Julian; "it was that beast Hake! I dodged into his study because I heard someone coming upstairs, and it was Hake himself, and he spotted me there. It was lucky for Reilly he got clear. He was only just in time!"

"Never mind," said Hammond consolingly. "It's all in the day's work. And now tell us how you've fixed up Reddy's quarters. From Reilly's account, you have mixed things up a little!"

"I left 'em our compliments," said Julian. "That's what I went back for. My hat, that tussle has made me warm!"

He took out his handkerchief to mop his manly brow, as Reilly put it. From the handkerchief a coin rolled, and fell clinking on the floor.

"Hah!" exclaimed Hammond. "Why, you image, you said you were sorry this morning, and here you go chucking half-sovereigns about!"

Julian stared at him.

"Half-sovereign! You're dreaming!"

"Look at it, then."

Reilly picked up the coin. A half-sovereign it was, sure enough, and Julian looked at it in amazement.

"I didn't know I had it," he declared; "and I'm blessed if I know where it's come from now! I never put money in that pocket. Besides, I don't have gold—generally currency notes, hardly ever a quid. But I suppose I must have overlooked it somehow. I don't quite understand it, though. But as we're in funds, kiddies, we'll go down to the tuck-shop and lay in a feed. We can't expend our wealth in a nobler cause!"

And the half-sovereign was forthwith "blued" in a royal feast. Meanwhile, Redfern & Co. had returned to their study.

Redfern's feelings when he looked round the room and

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discovered its state were too deep for words. He had no doubt as to whose kind attentions he was indebted. The notice over the mantelpiece stared him in the face:

"WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF STUDY No. 5."

Redfern & Co. looked at one another. They did not speak. Their feelings could not have been expressed in any known language. They set to work to clear up the litter, to disentangle their various properties, to put things right again as well as they could; but it was not within the bounds of possibility to separate jam from liquid blacking, red ink from tar, or treacle from pigeon pie.

Redfern & Co. laboured not patiently, and as they laboured they breathed deep vows of vengeance upon the School House and all that dwell therein. But neither the raiders nor the raided had any ideas of what was to follow Dick Julian's incursion into the rival House.

CHAPTER 4.

A Clean Sweep.

HUBERT HAKE looked out of his study as Monteith and Baker of the Sixth came up the passage. He seemed strangely disturbed.

"I say, stop a minute, will you?" he said.

"Hallo! What's the matter?"

"Come in here, both of you!" said Hake. Monteith and Baker entered wondering. They could not help noticing how disturbed Hake of the Sixth was looking.

"What the dickens is the row?" asked Baker. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost!"

"It's rather more serious than that," said Hake.

"What the dickens—"

The two New House seniors stared at Hake in amazement.

"Anything happened?" asked Baker.

"Yes."

"Well, what?"

"Somebody's taken twelve pounds from my desk!"

The two Sixth Formers jumped simultaneously.

"Money! From your desk!" ejaculated Monteith.

"Great Scott!" said Baker.

"Dash it all, you're mistaken!" said Monteith uneasily. "You must be mistaken! I know jolly well there isn't a thief in the New House!"

"You've mislaid the money somewhere!" said Baker.

Hake shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Do you think I should be likely to mislay twelve pounds?" he exclaimed.

"Well, no; but—"

"I tell you it was in my desk," said Hake. "I always keep it in the same place. Now it's gone!"

"How rotten!" growled Baker. "This will make a pretty yarn to get over the school, I must say! You ought to be more careful with money, Hake, if you're rolling in it to that extent!"

Monteith gave Hake a somewhat sharp look.

"I didn't know you were so dashed wealthy, Hake!" he said.

Hake made an irritated gesture.

"It wasn't my own money, of course. It was the total amount of the footer club subscriptions I had in hand!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I had got in most of the subscriptions, and it came to about twelve pounds, the sum I had in my desk. It was mostly in currency notes, pound and ten-shilling notes, but there were three or four half-sovereigns, so near as I can remember!"

"Got the numbers of the notes?" asked Baker.

"Who ever takes the numbers of pound or ten shilling notes?" growled Hake. "Of course, I never thought of such a thing!"

"Well, you ought—"

"Do you take the numbers of currency notes yourself?"

"Well, no; but I'm not treasurer of the senior footer club!" said Baker tartly. "It's up to a treasurer of a club to be careful!"

"Look here—"

Monteith broke in. The head prefect of the New House was looking decidedly worried and troubled.

"No good javing!" he said. "It would have been better if Hake had taken the numbers; but nobody ever does bother about currency notes like banknotes, and I dare say we should have done the same in his place!"

"Of course you would!" growled Hake.

"Well, I don't say we shouldn't," said Baker. "Anyhow,

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it's not much good arguing about it. The question is, are you absolutely sure that the money's gone, Hake?"

"Of course I'm sure! Every note and every coin has vanished! Whoever took it made a clean sweep of it," said Hake, between his teeth.

There was a grim smile in the study for a few moments. Monteith and Baker looked worried and exasperated. They were thinking more of the disgrace to their House than of the loss of the money, though that was serious enough. Hake seemed still more anxious. His eyebrows puckered and his face wrinkled, his face looking strangely old.

"We'd better go into this," said Monteith at last.

Baker nodded.

"Where did you keep the money exactly?" asked Monteith.

Hake pointed to his desk.

"I had the money in an envelope in a drawer in my desk. When I came in I found the envelope lying on the desk, and was amazed, of course. I looked in the drawer, and the money was gone."

"There's a possibility of a mistake, I suppose," said Monteith. "This is a frightful thing for the New House. The School House will make capital out of it if it gets out."

"It must get out!" exclaimed Baker decidedly. "We can't lose twelve pounds, I suppose? And, besides, more than half the money was subscribed by School House chaps. The thing's bound to get out, of course."

"I haven't told you all," said Hake. "I don't think the School House will do much crowding over the business."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that when I came in I found a School House boy in my room!"

Monteith whistled.

"Who was it?"

"Dick Julian, the Jew kid."

"Julian? You found him here? What was he doing?"

"He couldn't explain. I thought he had come to play some trick, and chucked him out. He seemed so innocent at being found here, but I didn't attach importance to that at the time. But when I saw the envelope lying on the table and the money gone—well, I wasn't long in putting two and two together."

"It certainly looks more than suspicious."

"Let's have it out plain," said Baker. "It's well known, Hake, that there's no love lost between you and young Julian of the Fourth. Can you prove that you found him in your study? He might deny it."

Hake smiled in a sour way.

"There won't be much difficulty about that, I think. A good many fellows must have heard me chuck him out."

"It's a bad business! You say you've hunted through your study for the money?"

"Every corner, for the sake of making sure."

"You ought never to have left a drawer unlocked with money in it."

"It's easy to preach after a thing's happened. There's no thief in the New House, and how was I to guess that Julian would come here?"

"How was he to know you had money here, if you come to that?" said Baker. "A School House kid can't know much about your arrangements here."

"Well, I suppose he knew that the treasurer of the club would be certain to have the football subscriptions in his room somewhere," said Hake. "I don't know how long he had been here rummaging when I found him."

"Well, we'll have a look about the room, and make assurance doubly sure before we accuse Julian or anybody else," said Baker.

"That's what I want you to do."

And the three seniors searched the study, turning out every corner in which there was the barest possibility of the money having been carelessly bestowed.

The hunt was fruitless. They were finishing the search when Webb of the Sixth put his head in at the open door.

"Hallo! What are you grovelling about? Lost something?"

"Yes."

"Is this it?"

And Webb held up a half-sovereign.

"Where did you find it?" asked Hake.

"Just picked it up in the corridor outside your door. It isn't mine, and I thought it might be yours."

"Julian must have dropped it when he bolted," said Hake.

Webb stared at him.

"Hallo! What are you talking about? What's that about Julian?"



Mr. Joliffe, the landlord of the Green Man, was seated in an easy-chair before the fire. Hake had just come into the room, and Reddy saw him clearly. (See Chapter 10.)

The state of affairs was explained to him. Webb drew a long breath.

"It looks fishy!" he exclaimed. "I say, the sooner something's done the better. If that kid has taken the money we may be able to get it back before he has had time to hide it anywhere. Let's go over to the School House and interview Kildare, and have the kid up for examination."

"That's a good idea," said Monteith. "We'd better all go, and say nothing to anybody until we've had it out over in the School House."

This was agreed to, and the four New House seniors started at once. They entered the School House, and proceeded direct to Kildare's study. Eric Kildare was head of the School House and captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare was at home, a couple of School House seniors with him, having tea in his cosy study. His cheery voice bade the visitors enter, and the School House fellows looked in amazement at Monteith and his companions as they came in.

Kildare, Darrel, and Rushden rose to their feet.

"Hallo, you chaps!" exclaimed Kildare. "This is an unexpected pleasure. You are just in time for the brew."

"We've come on business!" said Monteith shortly.

"Do you mean the footer? I suppose that can be settled at the next committee meeting. I don't see what can have turned up all of a sudden," said Kildare, looking puzzled.

"It isn't the footer. Something's happened that means

disgrace for St. Jim's—or, at least, for the School House—if it isn't cleared up."

"I don't understand you."

The School House seniors remained standing. Webb, Baker, and Hake looked extremely uncomfortable as they faced them.

"I'll explain," said Monteith. "Hake came into his study suddenly a while ago, and found one of your juniors there. He couldn't explain his presence, and Hake kicked him out. When he had gone Hake discovered that the footer subscriptions, amounting to twelve pounds, had been taken out of his drawer."

Kildare changed colour.

"You are accusing a School House boy of going to the New House to steal?"

"Yes."

"It's a thundering lie!" exclaimed Rushden hotly.

But the captain made him a sign to be silent. Monteith's look told him that the New House prefect had a strong case.

"Who is the junior in question?"

"Dick Julian," said Hake.

"It's a question of proofs," said Monteith, looking at Kildare. "Hake will bear out what I have just told you. Personally, I know nothing of the matter, only that the money is gone. But Webb here picked up half-a-sovereign in the corridor, where Julian was when Hake kicked him out. The inference is that Julian dropped it there."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY: "BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!"

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"We want to settle the matter as quietly as possible, and prevent a scandal!"

Kildare nodded.

"I will send for Julian at once, and question him before you."

Kildare went to his door and called to his fag, who was sent at once in quest of Dick Julian. In grim silence the group in the study awaited the arrival of the accused junior.

CHAPTER 5. Accused!

"H AVE another, Kerruish?"

"No, thanks!"

"Some more ginger-pop, Hammond?"

"Full up, old chap!"

"Reilly, old son, one more cream-puff?"

Reilly grinned, and shook his head.

The chums of Study No. 5 were lounging in the school tuckshop. They had spent the half-sovereign right royally, and had enjoyed their feast. But satiety had come at last.

"This," said Julian, "is what I call happiness. I wonder where that half-sov. came from? I wish some more would come from the same place!"

"Julian—Dick Julian!"

"Hallo! What are you squeaking out my name for, young D'Arcy?"

"Kildare wants you."

"Oh dear! What is it now? I suppose the Hake beast has been complaining," said Julian. "I can't possibly stand a licking after that feed. I sha'n't go."

"Better," said Hammond. "Explain 'ow it is to Kildare, and get 'im to go a bit easy."

"I suppose I shall have to go. It's rotten! Here, young Wally, come and have some tarts. I'm on funds to-day. I've had a windfall, and there's still some left. Was there anybody in Kildare's study with him?"

"Yes; some seniors from the New House."

"Was the Hake pig one of them?"

"Yes; and Monteith."

"I'm in for it!" sighed Julian. "Why can't they let an innocent kid, who only wants to be happy, alone? Well, here goes!"

And he betook himself to the study of St. Jim's skipper.

"Come in, Julian!" said Kildare, quietly and seriously.

Julian looked in astonishment at the grave faces of the seniors.

"Well, here he is," said Monteith. "You had better question him, Kildare."

"Yes, here I am," said Julian cheerfully.

"This is a grave matter, Julian," said Kildare quietly.

"Hake has made a very serious accusation against you."

"All right!" said Julian. "I know it means a licking; but, as Hake pitched into me, I don't see what he came complaining to you for. Still, here I am, ready to be made a giddy martyr of. Which hand, and how many?"

"You don't understand. Hake discovered you in his study."

"Yes; I was there as large as life. There's no getting out of that," agreed Julian. "If I had known the bouncer was just coming in, you bet I wouldn't have gone into his old study! But we have to pay for these little errors in tactics, so I'm quite ready to take my gruel. Only lay it on lightly, because I've just been filling myself up to the chin in the tuckshop, and I don't feel so fit as usual for a whacking."

The seniors looked at one another doubtfully. It was evident that Julian had not the slightest suspicion of the real object of the New House seniors' visit, or else he was the most accomplished actor they had ever seen.

"We have come about the money you stole from my study," said Hake.

Julian started back. For a moment he looked at the New House senior in incredulous amazement.

"The money?" he repeated vaguely, dazedly. "What money?"

His startled glance went from face to face.

"You know well enough!" said Hake.

"You mean to say I took money from your study?" panted Julian, amazement giving way to indignation and anger.

"Yes."

"You liar! You beast! You cad!" The words came out in a torrent. "You rotten cad!"

Julian's eyes were blazing with rage. His usual coolness was gone, and for the moment his passionate indignation mastered him. Right at Hake he dashed, his fists flying out wildly, and the senior staggered back from the sudden and unexpected attack.

"You—your little hound!"

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Julian's fists crashed into his face.

Hake, recovering himself, grasped him savagely, and drew back his clenched hand for a heavy blow. Kildare gripped him and slung him away, leaving Julian loose.

"Kildare, let me go!"

"Stand back, Hake!" said the captain of St. Jim's savagely.

"Stand back, or you'll have to reckon with me!"

"He has struck me! He—"

"Stand back!"

Kildare's eyes were blazing now.

Hake thought it better to obey. He let his hands drop to his sides, giving Julian a glance of poisonous hatred.

The boy's passion had passed now. He stood, white and shaken, with the tears struggling to his eyes, but keeping them back with a tremendous effort.

"Then you deny, Julian, knowing anything at all about the money that is missing from Hake's study?" asked Kildare.

"I didn't know any was missing till now."

Webb picked up a half-sovereign outside Hake's door, where you were turned out. Did you drop it there?"

"No. I hadn't a half-sovereign on me."

"You'll never get the truth out of him!" said Hake. "The question is, where is the money? If he is searched, and his belongings, it's pretty certain to come to light. And it ought to be done before he has time to hide it."

"Have you any objection to being searched, Julian?"

"Not if you think I ought to be, Kildare," replied the junior promptly.

"That means that he hasn't the money on him now," said Hake. "He's got it hidden away safely enough somewhere."

Julian's eyes flashed, but he controlled himself now. He understood that it was no time for violence. The matter had to be threshed out.

"I don't see what's to be done," said Kildare, looking extremely worried. "Nobody can say he saw Julian take the money. His explanation of being in Hake's study is perfectly reasonable. His presence in the New House is fully accounted for."

"Which means that you do not believe him guilty?"

"No; I cannot."

"Then you refuse to take the matter up?"

"How am I to take it up? If you choose to search Julian and his belongings, you are at liberty to do so. He has given his consent."

"Thank you! I am not a policeman! If you refuse to take the matter up, I shall take it to the Head. You can make your choice."

Very well. The matter will certainly have to go before the Head, anyway, so the sooner you do so the better."

"Come on!" said Hake. "It's no good staying here. It's turned out as I might have expected. Kildare stands by a chap of his own House, even if he's a proved thief. Let's go to the Head."

And the New House seniors quitted the study. The School House fellows looked at each other in grim dismay.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" exclaimed Darrel. "The New House will make a song over this, and no mistake!"

Kildare dropped his hand on Julian's shoulder.

"Julian, do you give me your word of honour that you are innocent, and know nothing about this matter?" he said earnestly.

"Yes," said Julian, looking him fearlessly in the eyes.

"I believe you," said Kildare, with a deep breath. "I don't understand it all, but there's something more than a mistake somewhere."

"Julian had better remain here," suggested Darrel. "There will be a search, and we mustn't put it in Hake's power to say he had time to make away with the money."

Kildare nodded.

"Yes. Stay here, Julian. One of you fellows had better stay, too. I must go and see the Head. It's a beastly business."

And with a darkly-clouded brow, the captain of St. Jim's followed in the footsteps of Hake to the study of the Head.

CHAPTER 6. Before the Head.

ST. Jim's was amazed. The news spread over the school like lightning.

The boys gathered in groups and talked of nothing else. There was a thief in the school, and Julian was accused! Dick Julian accused of theft!

His chums received the news first with incredulity, and then with indignation. The juniors of the School House mostly shared their feelings. There were a few exceptions, like Mellich and Croke and others.

They took care, however, not to express their opinions within hitting distance of the chums of Study No. 5.

The New House juniors received the news with more mingled feelings. They were incredulous at first, but the fact that the accusation came from the New House disposed them to put faith in it. After all, Julian's tale was weak, and the money was certainly missing. Upon that point, at all events, there was no doubt.

Twelve pounds had vanished from Hake's study, and as it could not have taken unto itself wings and flown, someone must have taken it.

The New House juniors had the choice of believing Julian guilty, or of attributing the crime to one of their own House.

That they were not likely to do. And so ere long there were few boys in the New House who did not believe that Julian had taken the footer money from Hake's desk. But there were three important exceptions to the general rule. Redfern & Co. scouted the idea that Julian was a thief in the most scornful manner.

"It's all rot!" said Redfern. "Julian's no more a thief than I am."

And the Co. loyally chimed in.

"He's innocent!" said Owen emphatically.

"Of course he is!" said Lawrence. "It's simply rot!"

"That's all very well," said Pratt; "but if he didn't take the money, who did?"

This was a poser, and Redfern & Co. could not answer it. "Perhaps you'll say that one of our House took it?" said Pratt, pursuing his advantage. "Yah, cads! Can't you stand up for your own House?"

Whereupon Redfern promptly "biffed" him, and Pratt retired to wash a red-flowing nose under the bath-room tap. He, although silenced, he was not convinced, and his followers remained of his opinion. Redfern & Co. were alone in the New House in upholding the innocence of Julian. And even Reddy was a little staggered by the subsequent developments of the case. It was all very well to assert that Julian was innocent, but it could not be denied that matters looked very black against the unfortunate junior.

After Hake had laid his complaint before the Head, Julian was sent for. He came into the Head's study very pale, but with his head erect. The Head gave him a searching look, but was compelled to acknowledge that he could discover no signs of guilt in the boy's face.

"You know what you are accused of, Julian?" he said quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"You adhere to the statements you have made to Kildare?"

"Yes, sir; because they are true."

"The matter must be thoroughly sifted," said the Head. "I need not say that if I am satisfied of your guilt, you will be expelled from the school."

"I should deserve it if I was a thief, sir!"

"Very good! If you are innocent you have nothing to fear, for I shall certainly thresh out the truth. Kildare, bring the juniors who share Julian's study here."

Hammond, Kerruish, and Reilly were soon brought in. They gave Julian encouraging looks, and the tears started to the boy's eyes as he read their unwavering faith and loyalty in their faces.

"Hammond, you have shared Study No. 5 with Julian. Have you ever had any reason to doubt his honour?"

"No, sir. 'E's all right, and a real good chum."

"Do you others say the same?"

"Rather—I mean yes, sir," said Kerruish. "Of course, sir."

"And you, Reilly?"

"I believe him to be an honourable chap," said Reilly. "Sure, it's a broth av a boy he is entirely!"

"The Head drew a breath of relief.

"You will all understand," he said, "that this is a point in favour of Julian."

"But the money is gone, sir," said Monteith.

"Certainly; and circumstantial evidence is against Julian. I merely wished to elicit such points as were in his favour. I have another question to put to you, Hammond. I believe you would be likely to know if Julian had a sudden accession of pocket-money, if he spent more than usual at any time?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Since Julian's visit to the New House, have you noticed him to be in possession of more money than usual?"

Hammond was about to say "No," when he suddenly stopped. With his mouth half open, and his face flushing red, he looked the picture of mental discomfort. His embarrassment, of course, did not escape a single eye in the room.

"Come, speak on!" said the Head sharply.

Hammond gave Julian a helpless glance. Julian bit his

lip. He knew what Hammond was thinking of—that unlucky half-sovereign which had just been expended in the school tuckshop.

"It was nothing, sir," stammered Hammond. "There was a half-sovereign."

"Please be more explicit."

"I mean Julian had a half-sovereign, but it was his own, and—"

"Was it, to your knowledge, in his possession before he went to the New House?"

"Nun-no, sir."

"Or to your knowledge, or yours, Reilly, Kerruish?"

"Nun-nun-no-no, sir!"

"Where did you get that half-sovereign, Julian?"

"I found it in my pocket, sir."

Dick Julian made the answer bravely, but even as he spoke he could not help realising how absurd such an answer must sound, and he flushed uncomfortably. Hake openly sneered, and Kildare looked uneasy.

The Head's brows set in a frown of portentous severity.

"You found it in your pocket?" he repeated, as if hardly able to believe his ears.

"Yes, sir!" said Julian desperately. "I didn't know it was there. I pulled out my handkerchief, and it rolled upon the floor. Hammond saw it."

"Yes, I did!" exclaimed Hammond, glad to be able to bear witness to something. "I saw it, sir. 'E flicked it out with 'is handkerchief, and it rolled on the floor. I picked it up, and saw that it was a half-sov—I mean, a half-sovereign."

Poor Hammond did not see yet that he was making the case worse instead of better. The Head's face was beginning to set like iron.

"So Julian flicked the coin out by accident, Hammond?"

"Yes, sir; quite by accident!" said Hammond eagerly.

"And then he explained that he found it in his pocket?"

"He said he didn't know where it had come from. Didn't you, Julian? He didn't know he had a half-sov left. We were all surprised to see it, sir."

"No doubt," said the Head drily. "And now, Julian, do you still maintain that you don't know how that coin came to be in your pocket?"

"Yes, sir. I must have shoved it in there absent-mindedly some time when I was in funds, I suppose, and forgotten all about it. You see, I never keep money in that pocket, and that accounts for my not finding it."

"You keep your handkerchief in that pocket? Yes? And you have put it in and taken it out a good many times. I presume since the last time you were in funds, yet you never chanced to flick the half-sovereign out till just after your visit to the New House, when a certain sum of money was missing?"

Dick Julian was silent.

"Please tell me, Hake, the exact coins missing from your desk," said the Head.

"Currency notes and two half-sovereigns, sir," replied Hake.

"And you still deny knowing anything of the missing money, Julian?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you have no better account to give of the half-sovereign?"

"I have told the truth, sir."

"I am afraid you have stated a physical impossibility," said the Head drily. "How long is it since you were in funds, as you put it?"

"A week, sir."

"Then you wish us to believe that the coin was in your pocket for a week without coming to light, although you must have taken out and replaced your handkerchief scores of times?" exclaimed Dr. Holmes.

For one dizzy moment Julian wondered whether he was guilty—whether, in some inexplicable lapse of consciousness, he had indeed taken the money from Hake's study.

There was a painful silence in the room.

Julian raised his eyes. He looked round him almost wildly. Kildare avoided his glance. Upon Monteith's face was something like a look of pity. Pity from the head prefect of the New House. The vague thought of a plot against him crumbled away in Julian's mind as he caught the prefect's expression. Monteith could feel a gleam of pity for him—because he believed him guilty, and knew that he would be expelled from St. Jim's.

But there was comfort in one direction. There were three faces that still told of faith and firm belief—three staunch chums who would stick to him through thick and thin. Kerruish, Hammond, and Reilly, impervious to logic, caring only for the evidence of their own true, warm hearts, wavered not for a moment in their loyalty.

The Head's voice broke the silence, which had become oppressive.

"The facts, then, are these, as I have gathered them. You will correct me if I am wrong, Julian. You went to the New House with Reilly. You let him leave alone, while you went back with an excuse, which may or may not have been true. Hake found you in his study. Immediately after you were gone he missed the money. A half-sovereign was picked up where you had been ejected from the study. Later you are found with another half-sovereign in your possession. It is revealed by accident, and the explanation you give is absolutely inadmissible. Have you anything more to say?"

Julian shook his head.

"What's the good of my saying anything?" he said brokenly. "You believe me guilty. I can only repeat that I'm innocent, and you won't believe me. I've only got my word to give you."

"Can you expect your word to be taken against an overwhelming mass of evidence?"

"I don't know, I'd take a fellow's word. But I know him to be a liar. I can't understand it all. Unless I am innocent."

"I wish I could believe you," said the Head wistfully. "You have hitherto borne an excellent character in the House, Julian. I wish I could believe you. But it is impossible."

There was a terrible pause.

"If you choose to confess, Julian, and to restore the money. I will deal with you as gently as I can," said the Head. "You must, of course, leave St. Jim's. But in view of the good record you have borne up till now, I will allow you to leave quietly, without a public expulsion, if you make what amends are in your power."

"If you mean returning the money, sir, I cannot, because I did not take it. I suppose you will expel me if you think I am guilty, but I am not. I know I can't explain all the circumstances, but I am innocent."

"He's innocent!" burst out Hammond. "Oh, sir—"

"Silence, Hammond!"

"I can't be silent, sir! He's innocent, and I know it. So does Reilly—don't you, Reilly?"

"I do," said Reilly. "He's as innocent as I am. It's rot! As if he'd take the dirty money!"

"It's a shame entirely," said Kerruish, with a catch in his voice. "He never took the money, sir. I am certain that he never did."

"Your faith in this wretched boy does you credit, my lads," said the Head, much moved. "I only wish I could believe that he deserved it."

Kildare made a step forward. The Head looked at him inquiringly.

"Have you anything to say in Julian's favour, Kildare?" asked the Head.

"Only this, sir, that he's one of the last boys in the school I should have suspected of being a thief. I know things look black against him. But there's a chance—a slight chance, and—and would it be too much, sir, to ask you to suspend judgment for a few days, and let Julian remain until—until the matter is cleared up a bit? The money may be found—it ought to be found—and I can't help thinking that there may be a horrible mistake somewhere."

Kildare spoke with deep earnestness, and the Head was evidently impressed. He glanced at the captain and then at Julian, and hesitated.

"But do you not see, Kildare, that it will be a very painful position for Julian himself?" he asked. "It is useless to attempt to hush the matter up. Julian will be pointed at as a thief by the boys."

"Let him decide for himself, sir."

"Very well. Julian, what do you say?"

"Oh, let me stay, sir!" exclaimed Julian eagerly. "I'm certain that something will turn up to prove my innocence, sir. If the money was really stolen, we may be able to find out who took it, and—"

The Head coughed.

"That will do. For the present, then, your sentence is suspended, while every effort will be made to discover the missing money. I presume you have the numbers of the missing notes, Hake?"

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"Unfortunately, no, sir. I never foresaw anything of this kind, of course."

"It cannot be helped. The money must be found. You may go now. Kildare and Monteith will come with me, and Taggles will search Julian's belongings in our presence. Then, if the money is not found, I must consider the next step. You may go."

The New House seniors returned to their quarters. They carried away a firm conviction of Julian's guilt. Julian, looking white and utterly depressed, was taken away by his chums. And then the search commenced for the missing money.

When Julian came out with Hammond, Reilly, and Kerruish, every eye was bent upon him at once. His pale, harassed looks were at once commented upon. There was a touch of eager questioners, but Julian took no notice of them. He walked straight on, and his chums followed away the inquirers.

From a distance many inquisitive juniors watched the search that was immediately made. Taggles, the school porter, made it, accompanied by the Head, by Kildare, and by the head prefect of the New House.

Study No. 5 was first examined, but in that apartment no trace of the missing money was found. For the sake of making assurance double sure, even the property of all the chums was searched, but with no result.

From Study No. 5 the searchers proceeded to the Fourth Form dormitory, without result. All Julian's belongings were subjected to a keen search—Taggles missed nothing—but no trace of the missing money could be found.

"He's shoved it in an awfully safe place," said Percy Mellish to his cronies. "What we want is a detective, you know, to shadow him and all that, and discover where he has hidden it. That's what we want."

"Then you think he's guilty, and they're trying to screen him?"

"I know he's guilty. I—"

Percy Mellish broke off with a yell.

A grip of iron was placed upon his collar, and a set of bony knuckles were ground into the back of his head.

He swung round furiously, half throttled, and to his amazement saw that it was Redfern of the New House who had seized him.

Redfern was looking wrathful.

"So you think he's guilty, do you, you little beast!" said Redfern.

"Yes; no—I— What are you doing here, you New House cad? You've no right in our House. Kick 'em out, you chaps!"

The Co., who were, of course, with their leader, clenched their fists to stand by Reddy. But it was not necessary. The School House boys showed no disposition to rally to the call of the injured Percy.

"Kick him out yourself," said Gore. "We'll see fair play."

But that did not suit Mellish. He would as soon have tackled a wild bull as Redfern, who could have wiped up the ground with him in next to no time.

"What do you want here, anyway?" he snarled.

"We've come to see Julian," replied Redfern. "As for you, Mellish, if you were worth licking, I'd waste five minutes on you, but you ain't! Come on, you fellows!" And Redfern & Co. marched off to Study No. 5, leaving the School House boys considerably astonished, and wondering what the object of their visit might be.

Julian and his chums were in the study.

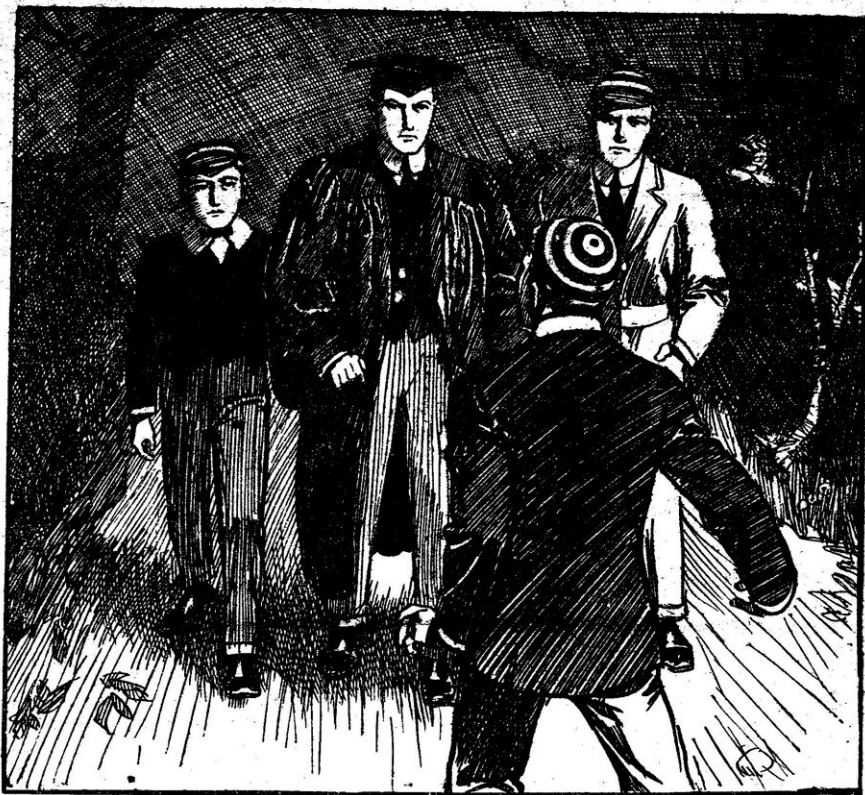
They were about the most miserable group that had ever gathered together within the ancient walls of St. Jim's.

Julian started from a painful reverie as a timid knock came at the door.

"Sheer off, whoever you are!" growled Hammond, thinking it was some inquisitive questioner returning to the attack. "We don't want any visitors!"

But, in spite of this discourteous response, the door opened, and Redfern & Co. came hesitatingly into the study. Hammond and

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Hake halted with a gasp of dismay and terror, for three figures had suddenly detached themselves from the gloom direct in his path. "Hake, where are you going?" It was Mr. Raiton's voice. (See Chapter 12.)

Reilly sprang to their feet, their fists clenching convulsively. A thought, unjust but not unnatural, had sprung into their minds at once.

"You've come to—to—"

Redfern shook his head hastily.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "We ain't on the warpath. And if you think we'd crow over a thing like this, even if we believed it—"

"Sorry!" said Hammond, sitting down again.

"And we don't believe it!" said Redfern earnestly. "That's what we've come over for—to tell you so, Julian. Most of our House have made up their silly minds that you are guilty; but some of your own fellows are saying the same, too. But we know you didn't take the money. We know it, don't we, chaps?"

"We do!" said Owen and Lawrence in a breath.

There were tears in Julian's eyes now, though he was far from being one of the crying kind. His own chums had proved staunch in the hour of trial, but he had never expected this faith and loyalty from his rivals of the New House.

"You're jolly good about it, Reddy!" he said, in a low voice. "I can't say much, but you'll understand how I feel what you've said. Of course I am innocent! It's a horrible mistake somewhere, though I can't make it out."

"There's more than a mistake," said Redfern. "Somebody has been telling lies. Somebody has taken the money, and managed to fix it on you!"

"But I say," remarked Reilly; "you know what that amounts to, Reddy? If you admit that Julian's innocent, it's as good as accusing one of your own House."

Redfern nodded.

"I know that, Reilly; but I believe that Julian is innocent, all the same. Whether it was one of our own House or not, we're going to discover the thief!"

"You are?"

"Yes. We've talked it over between ourselves, and we're going to set to work. You lot do the same. If the real thief's in the New House, we'll find him. If he's in the School House, you'll spot the cad. I know it's most likely that he's on our side. I know it will be a come-down for us to admit that we have a thief in the New House; but we're going to get at the truth, and clear Julian."

"You're a Briton, Reddy, and no mistake!" exclaimed Julian, deeply touched.

"We've already got a clue. I won't tell you what it is, because it concerns one of our fellows, and it may be nothing, after all. But we're going to follow it up like a giddy Sherlock Holmes. But look here, Julian, just you tell us all you can about the matter, so that we shall be posted."

Willingly enough Julian told all he knew. Redfern & Co. listened attentively, and were soon in possession of all the facts. Reddy's face was a study as he listened to the story of the unfortunate half-sovereign.

"Now, look here, Julian," he said. "After what has happened, do you still think the half-sov. was one of your own, which you had put in your pocket and forgotten?"

"I thought so at first," said Julian. "I couldn't think anything else when I found it there, could I? But now—well, if it was possible for anybody to have put the coin in my pocket, I should think someone had done it."

"And only the thief could have had any motive for doing it!"

"Yes; to throw suspicion upon me. But then, only a School House chap could have got at my jacket when I wasn't wearing it, and—"

"But what about when you were wearing it?"

"Well, I don't see how anybody could put a half-sovereign in my pocket without my knowing it," said Julian, looking at Reddy in surprise.

"Suppose he had hold of you at the time—slinging you out of his study, for instance?" said Redfern slowly.

The chums of Study No. 5 gave a simultaneous jump, and looked at each other and at Redfern.

"Do you mean to say—" began Hammond.

"I don't mean to say anything!" said Reddy obstinately.

"I simply asked a question. Would it be possible for a chap, under the circumstances, to slip the coin into your breast-pocket, Julian?"

"Why, of course, it would be easy enough if he wanted to!"

"Right-ho, then! That's all I want to know. We'll be off now. Mind, not a word to anybody about what I've said."

"Of course not! We'll be as mum as oysters!"

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus has an Idea.

TOM MERRY & CO. had gathered in a gloomy group in the Common-room.

They kept away from No. 5 Study. They felt that Dick Julian and his comrades wanted to be left alone just then.

They discussed the matter in low tones; but, staggering as the evidence was against the unfortunate junior, there was no wavering in their faith in him.

"It's imposs., you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, almost with tears in his eyes. "Utahly impos., dear boy! Julian is a weal bwick, and he could nevah do anythin' of the sort!"

"I don't believe it for a minute!" said Jack Blake decidedly.

"Same here!" said Herries.

And Digby nodded assent.

There was evidently only one opinion among the chums of Study No. 6, in spite of the fact that Julian & Co. had been so recently on the war-path against their lofty prestige.

The Terrible Three fully agreed.

"It's all rot!" said Tom Merry. "There's a thief, I suppose, but he's in the New House itself."

"That's the place for 'em!" growled Manners, rather reasonably.

Monty Lowther looked very grim.

He had not forgotten the time when Dick Julian drew him from the mill-stream at the risk of his life. Monty Lowther was never likely to believe anything against the brave lad who had plunged in to his rescue so gallantly, whatever might be the evidence against him. Only Julian's own confession could have convinced Monty Lowther of his guilt—perhaps not even that!

"Oh, it's rotten!" said Lowther. "Of course, Julian never did it! Kerruish and Reilly and Hammond are sticking to him like bricks. They know he never did it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you think, Talbot?"

Talbot shook his head.

"Utter rot!" he said. "Julian can't have done it! But it's a blessed mystery who did. Somebody had the money."

"Yaas, that's the fearful difficulty in the case," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "There is a howwid thief somewhere!"

"I wish Piggins & Co. weren't away!" growled Monty Lowther. "If Kerr were here, he'd think it out for us. What we want now is old Kerr's blessed Scotch brain on the subject!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's rotten!" said Tom Merry. "There doesn't seem to be anything we can do. I do wish Kerr were here!"

"Yaas, but pewwars there is anothah fellah yewy neahly as elevah as Kerr heah," said Arthur Augustus. "A fellah well known for tact and judgment—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Blake, I wufuse to weply to an unintelligible weemark! I have an ideah."

"Go and boil it!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"And then bury it!" grunted Monty Lowther.

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort, Lowthah! I have a weally wippin' ideah. Poor old Julian is mopin' in his study now, and feelin' wotten. My ideah is to send him a deputation—"

"A which?"

"A deputation," repeated Arthur Augustus firmly. "A wepewesentative deputation to assuah him of the twust of the whole House in his honah."

"He knows we believe in him," said Talbot.

"He does not know it until we tell him, dear boy. Pway follow my lead, as a wepewesentative deputation."

"Well, it may buck Julian up a bit," said Tom Merry.

"He'd like to know that we all stand by him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus led the way to the Fourth-Form passage, and the crowd of juniors followed him. Several other fellows joined them en route—Kangaroo and Dane—and Glyn and Gore, of the Shell, and Lumley-Lumley, and several more of the Fourth. Even Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, relinquished the entrancing volume of Professor Balmyscrump to join in the deputations, as soon as he had seen what was towards.

And Wally D'Arcy of the Third came along, with Joe Frayne and Curly Gibson, and brought up the rear.

It was quite an imposing deputation by the time it reached No. 5 Study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped at the door.

Julian and Kerruish, Reilly and Hammond started up as the doorway filled with a thick crowd of School House juniors.

Reilly's eyes blazed. For a moment he thought it was a hostile demonstration.

"Ye spalpeens—" he began.

Arthur Augustus held up an elegant hand.

"Weally, Weally—" said D'Arcy minor cheerfully.

"Keep your wool on!" said D'Arcy minor cheerfully.

"We've come," began Tom Merry.

"Pway don't take the words out of my mouth, Tom Mewwy! Julian, dear boy, this is a wepewesentative deputation from the School House," said Arthur Augustus, in a very dignified way.

Julian smiled faintly.

"We wish to assuah you of our twust in your honah, and our firm belief that the twuth will come out, and that—that—that, in short, everythin' in the garden will be lovely, dear boy!"

"Hear, hear!" said the deputations.

"Thank you!" said Julian, with a catch in his voice. "I—I'm glad you came, you fellows. I—I suppose I needn't tell you that I am innocent!"

"We know it," said Tom Merry. "Hake's made a rotten—"

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mistake, I suppose, or else there is a thief in the New House."

"We're all standing by you, Julian," said Monty Lowther. "Now we'll get off, now we've told you."

"Thank you," said Dick. "It's splendid of you! I—I hope it'll come out before I'm kicked out."

"Wely on it, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus impressively. "There is already hope."

Julian started.

"How do you mean?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"I am goin' to look into the mattah," explained D'Arcy.

"Oh!"

The deputation marched its leader away, and Talbot closed the study door. Dick Julian looked at his chums. His eyes were wet with tears.

"It's splendid of the chaps to stand by me like this!" he said, in a low voice. "I—I hardly expected it—I mean, I didn't expect it at all. And Reddy, too! It's ripping!"

And though the clouds were still dark over him, Dick Julian's heart was lighter. That idea of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's had been a good one, after all.

CHAPTER 8.

Redfern Knows What to Do.

REDFERN, Owen, and Lawrence crossed the quadrangle with thoughtful brows, and entered the New House.

Hake of the Sixth was standing in the doorway, and the three juniors glanced at him curiously.

The Sixth-Former did not look precisely happy.

Perhaps the loss of the footer club funds weighed on his mind. Certainly he was pale and harassed, and seemed ill at ease. Monteith was speaking to him, and Monteith seemed troubled, too. The head prefect of the New House was worried by the whole affair.

Redfern & Co. went up to their study. Redfern's brow was deeply corrugated with thought.

The study showed very visible signs of the late raid by Dick Julian and Reilly—the raid that had led to such tragic consequences for Julian of the Fourth. The efforts of the Co. to put matters straight had not been wholly successful. But Redfern & Co. did not think of that now. House rows and House rivalry were quite off the carpet, so to speak, for the present.

Redfern sat himself on the table, swinging his legs and wrinking his brow.

"It's up to us!" he said decidedly.

Owen and Lawrence nodded.

"If Figgins was here he'd think just the same. I'm sure of that," continued Redfern. "So would Kerr and Fatty Wynn—just the same. And, look here, my sons, if we can work it out, it's a feather in the cap of this study! It will show Figgys when he comes back that this study is a cut above his, and that we're top dogs in the Fourth, just as we've always told him, though he never believed it."

Owen and Lawrence grinned.

"Quite so," agreed Lawrence. "But never mind Figgins & Co. now. I'm blessed if I quite see what we're going to do!"

"You leave it to your Uncle Reddy!" said Redfern, with the smile of superior wisdom. "I've been thinking the matter out already, and using all my wonderful powers as a second-hand Sherlock Holmes."

"Go it, then!"

"You see, we jolly well know it wasn't Julian! He ain't that sort," said Redfern. "That's something to go upon, to begin with."

"That isn't the way Sherlock Holmes does it," grinned Owen.

"Blow Sherlock Holmes! That's the way I do it!" said Redfern.

"Well, pile in, old chap!"

There was a long silence, Lawrence and Owen waiting for their study-leader to speak.

"I never thought," said Reddy at last, "that we should ever start in business as giddy detectives for the purpose of proving one of our own House-fellows a thief! But you never know your luck. We've got to do it. We know Julian's innocent, and we couldn't let an innocent chap be expelled."

"Right-ho!" assented Owen.

"Julian's got to be cleared," went on Reddy, and it can only be done by hunting out the real rascal. He's in our House."

"It's rotten, but I'm afraid it's true."

"Let's look at the facts. Hake loses twelve pounds. If it was Baker, or Webb, or even Monteith, we could take his word for it. But do we trust Hake?"

"Rather not!"

"We saw him yesterday," went on Reddy, "at the Green Man. We know that he went there to see Joliffe, the landlord. The man he was speaking to asked him if he had brought something, which could only have meant money."

The Co. nodded in agreement.

"Now," said Redfern, "it's pretty plain that Hake has been playing the giddy goat at the Green Man, and has lost money there—don't you think so?—and that Joliffe has been pestering him for it, and perhaps frightening him."

"Looks like it," said Owen.

"And in that case, suppose he used the footer funds to pay Joliffe, and couldn't make the money up again?"

The Co. looked at each other.

"You see," went on Reddy, "with an acumen worthy of a legal luminary, 'the whole case against Julian rests upon what Hake says. Nobody saw the money taken. Hake found that it was gone. Why, he might have had it in his pocket all the time. Julian was in his study, and Hake found him there. That was his opportunity. If he took the money and couldn't replace it, of course he would have to pretend that it was stolen by somebody. Poor old Julian, by going into his study, gave him a chance of fixing it upon him."

"My hat, Reddy, you are really working it out well! But suppose Julian hadn't gone into his study at all?"

"Then, if my theory"—Reddy lingered a little at this word with relish—"if my theory is correct, Hake would have found somebody else to have fixed it upon. He would have had to fix it on one of our House. He would have selected his lag, probably."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Yes, he would," persisted Reddy. "And some of the money would have been found in a locker, or in a football boot, or tied up in the tail of a shirt, and somebody would have been expelled."

"He's—he's a dangerous beast if you're right, Reddy!" Owen muttered. "He ought to be in a convict prison!"

"Well, that's how I figure it out," said Redfern. "If I'm wrong, I'm wrong; but if I'm right, we haven't very far to look for the thief. Hake slung Julian out of his room. Of course, they struggled a bit. What could be easier than for Hake to shove the half-sovereign into Julian's outside breast-pocket? Of course, Julian wasn't looking for anything of the kind, and wouldn't notice it. As for the half-sov that was picked up in the corridor, of course Hake shoved it there to be picked up."

"The whole thing rests with Hake," remarked Lawrence. "You've worked it out well. But if we hadn't happened to know that Hake was in debt to that cad Joliffe—"

"But we did happen to know it," replied Redfern. "That's where we've got a pull over the others, and can figure things out. If the Head knew it he would jolly soon alter his mind. Of course, we can't tell him; we've got no proof. Before we say anything we have got to find proof."

The Co. looked extremely doubtful.

"I don't see how that's to be done, Reddy," said Lawrence, shaking his head.

"That's because you haven't the brains, my son," replied his leader serenely. "Thank your lucky stars that you have an uncle who can think for you, and save your poor little brain fagging itself! Now, the first thing a real detective does is to fix on a person to be suspected. We've done that, haven't we?"

"Yes; we suspect Hake."

"Exactly. And now all we've got to do is to bring it home to him. We know Joliffe was worrying him for money, don't we—at least, we think so, and that's sufficient. Now, if we can find out that he's paid Joliffe, we shall want to know where he found the money, and we shall be able to find it out."

"How?"

"By shadowing him. We must find out for certain if he's paid Joliffe. That's the first step. That's the programme, my sons!"

"We'll do it!" exclaimed Owen. "If he's really the kind of brute you think, Reddy, the sooner we get him kicked out of the school the better!"

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!"

CHAPTER 9.

Unpleasant for Crooke.

THE Head had said that Julian would find it very unpleasant to remain at St. Jim's while the proofs against him were so strong. The Head was right.

The New House, with the honourable exception of Bellamy & Co., believed him guilty. They were not slow in letting him know it. In his own House he could depend only on his own immediate friends to stand by him.

The evidence was strong enough to convince the majority. Kidare had firmly believed in Julian at first, but even he had been staggered by the apparent proofs of guilt, and did not know what to believe.

Naturally enough, the New House juniors did not let the matter rest.

No wonder they felt righteously indignant, and the School House did not know what to say, and could only save their faces by disclaiming their member.

"What we want," said Crooke to a mass meeting in the junior Common-room, "is the sack for Julian."

"He was always too cocky," said Levison.

"And now he's proved to be a thief, none of us, of course, can speak to him again. I shan't, for one."

"Wonder if he'll survive it?" said Levison.

"Oh, you're up!" said Crooke. "We shall have to send him to Coventry, or the New House rotters will say we're all tarred with the same brush."

"That's a jolly good idea!" said Trimble. "Right-ho!" said Crooke, looking round. Now, it's been proved that Julian is a thief—

Dick Julian entered the Common-room at that moment.

"What's that, Crooke?" he said quietly.

Crooke retreated hurriedly. Julian was looking dangerous. "Look here, buzz off!" he exclaimed. "This has nothing to do with you!"

"You said something about me, though," said Julian politely. "May I ask you to repeat it, if you're not afraid to?"

"I said you were a thief," said Crooke, very pale, but feeling that he could not surrender utterly. "So you are! All the school know it!"

"Very good," said Julian quietly. "Now, I want to assume all the fellow who says I am not a thief, and that I know nothing whatever about the money that was missing from Hake's study. That said, the matter's ended. You can believe what you like, of course, but anybody who expresses such a belief in my presence will have a fight on his hands. That's a plain warning."

"I suppose you won't lick us all, will you?" said Trimble sarcastically.

"Come on, you fellows!" said Crooke. "We don't want to stay near a thief— Oh, lemme go, you beast!"

Reilly had interrupted him by a sudden grip. Crooke was no match for the indignant junior. In a moment he was floored, and Reilly was pinning him down with a knee on his chest.

The crowd made a movement, but Julian, Kerruish, and Tom Merry at once closed up, and they thought better of it.

"You had your warning, Crooke," said Reilly, "and still you have put your foot in it! What was the term you applied to my pal, you spalpeen?"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"No, that wasn't it. Try again!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Kerruish, you'll find a bottle of red ink in my desk. Bring it here. Take the cork out!"

Kerruish promptly obeyed.

"Now, Crooke, are you going to take back the expression you used, and apologise handsomely?"

"No, I ain't!"

"Pour it over his dial, Kerruish!"

Crooke struggled frantically. A thin, steady stream of red ink descended upon his nose from the bottle held by the grinning Kerruish, and spread in streamlets all over his face. Some of it went into his mouth, and some over his collar and tie, some into his hair. He gurgled and struggled fiercely, but Reilly kept him pinned down on the floor.

"Let him get up!" exclaimed Mellish.

Julian promptly collared the objector, and ran him out of the room.

"Going to apologise?" asked Reilly sweetly, taking no notice of the commotion round him.

"No—ugh—yes!"

"Go ahead, then! Stop a minute, Kerruish!"

"You beasts!" gasped Crooke. "You rotters. 'Lemme get up!"

"You haven't apologised yet. Are you sorry?"

"No—yes!"

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"That sounds rather contradictory. Give him a little more, Kerruish!"

Kerruish emptied the bottle. Crooke gurgled and yelled.

"Now, are you sorry, Crooke, or shall we start on a fresh bottle?"

"I'm sorry."

"Very good! I thought I should be able to bring you to a state of proper repentance. You had better keep off the grass in the future. The way of the transgressor is ink. Now cut while you've got the chance, bedad!"

He allowed Crooke to rise. The unfortunate Shell fellow was a shocking sight. His face was a beautiful crimson, and his collar was streaked with red, and his hair was matted with the streams of ink.

He caught sight of his face in a glass, and gave a howl as he rushed from the Common-room, and his followers greeted him with a roar of laughter which was far from being grateful or comforting.

"I say, you do look stunning, Crooke!" grinned Levison.

"Here, look out where you're running to! There's Latham!"

The warning came too late. Crooke, whose only idea was to get the horrible mess off his face and hair, was dashing along the corridor to the stairs to get to a bath-room. Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, met him face to face.

He caught sight of Crooke, and started back in horror.

"Boy, what has happened? How came you in that dreadful state?"

"I—I—I—"

Crooke stammered. He could not "sneak" without incurring the wrath of every junior in the House, and he could not explain.

"Dear me, how terribly you must be injured! Come with me at once, my poor lad! Lean on my arm! How did it happen? Don't speak if you do not feel strong enough!"

"I—I—I—"

"Dear me, he must be suffering intensely when he can only express himself in inarticulate monosyllables!" murmured Mr. Latham. "What a quantity of blood! He is simply drenched with it! The wound must be a terrible one! Come, come, my dear lad!"

"I—I—I—"

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Latham soothingly. "Come along!"

And he hurried Crooke to his room, willy-nilly, and made him sit down, and rang for a maid, and ordered hot water. The maid stared at Crooke, and giggled as she left the room.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Latham. "What a handsome girl! Are you suffering very great pain, my poor boy? As soon as I have washed the wound—"

"It's red ink!" blurted out Crooke desperately.

"Red ink!" repeated Mr. Latham faintly. "You dare to tell me that it is red ink—that you have deliberately deceived me, and played a foolish trick upon me?"

"I didn't. I—"

"Why did you not explain at once?"

"You didn't give me a chance."

"This is mere subterfuge! If there is anything I specially detest in a boy it is subterfuge! Now, you have played a most absurd trick, and caused me much needless anxiety."

"I—"

"Not a word! You cannot escape your just punishment by further prevarication!" said Mr. Latham severely. He took down a cane from the wall. "Hold out your hand, sir!"

"But—"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Latham.

Crooke reluctantly obeyed. The incensed Form-master gave him three cuts on each hand, and Crooke, who never could bear pain, was almost doubled up with anguish.

"Now go, and let that be a lesson to you never to play a ridiculous trick again!" said Mr. Latham sternly.

And Crooke went, with feelings that were worse than Hunnish.

CHAPTER 10.

Redfern Takes a Hand.

ELEVEN strokes had sounded from the clock-tower at St. Jim's.

The vast pile of the school buildings was hushed in silence.

In the School House seniors and juniors alike were sleeping the sleep of the just; but in the New House there were wakeful eyes.

Just as the stroke of eleven died away there was a faint sound in the rear of the New House as a window was softly opened, and a dim form dropped lightly to the ground outside.

The form stood for a moment still, the head-bent to listen, and then hurried away into the gloom. The sash of the window was left raised about an inch.

A couple of minutes later the sash was cautiously raised from within.

A head was thrust out, and a keen pair of eyes peered into the gloomy night.

"It's all right," said the voice of Redfern. "He's gone!"

The head of Lawrence appeared beside his at the window.

"It was Hake," murmured Lawrence.

"Yes, it's Hake, and he's gone to see the crew at the Green Man."

"Now," said Reddy, "the question is, where do we come in? We could fasten the window, and keep him out all night, and so show him up. But though that would prove that he was a riddler, and get him into an awful row, it wouldn't prove enough for us. I'm going after him!"

"All right! Then you'd better buzz off before he disappears."

"Well, I know pretty well where he's going to, in case I miss him; but I shall spot him in the lane all right."

And Redfern crawled out on the sill, hung there by his hands, and dropped lightly to the ground.

Lawrence closed the window, so that it appeared as Hake had left it. Reddy started off in the gloom, and quickly vanished from his chum's sight. He heard a scraping sound ahead of him, and knew what it meant. He came in sight of Hake as the latter crossed the top of a wall and disappeared on the other side.

Redfern waited for a minute or two to give him time to get clear, and then climbed the wall.

He dropped on the other side of Rykcombe Lane, and caught a glimpse of the senior passing in the circle of light cast by a roadside lamp.

Hake was hurrying towards Rykcombe.

Taking great care to keep his pursuit concealed from his quarry, Reddy hung on the track of the senior, keeping always in sight or hearing.

A light gleamed ahead; it was from a window of the Green Man. Hake turned into the lane beside the inn and strode on through the dark like one who well knew the way. Reddy drew a deep breath and followed him. The shadowy street as he heard the sound of his footsteps ahead.

"Come in, sir!" Mr. Joliffe's in the back room; he's waiting for you!"

Hake muttered something in reply, and a door closed. Redfern went quietly forward. From a back window the light streamed out into the inn garden. There was no blind to the window, only common muslin curtains, and Reddy, standing in the dark outside, could easily see through them into the room. His eyes gleamed as he looked in:

Mr. Joliffe, the landlord of the Green Man, was seated in an easy-chair before the fire. Hake had just come into the room, and Reddy saw him clearly. The New House senior was looking very white and worried.

Redfern had a struggle with his conscience. His cheeks burned at the thought of listening. But, on the other hand, this was probably his only chance of discovering the truth. He might now learn something of the true story of the missing money, and the chance would never recur. Upon his action now probably depended the proof of Julian's innocence!

Well, it was unpleasant, but it had to be done. Reddy listened.

"Yes, the 'orse will win," were the first words he heard. Mr. Joliffe was speaking. "I'm quite willing to put anything on 'im for you, Mr. Hake. Only I shall want to see the colour of your money. And afore there's any more transactions between us, there's the rest of that old matter to be wiped out."

"Yes, you said so in your note."

"I said so, and I meant it!"

"But if Blue Cloud is certain to win, I shall get in enough over that to wipe out the old debt, and have something in hand!" said Hake eagerly.

Joliffe grinned.

"Yes, if you've got the spondulics to put up."

"I haven't anything at present; but you know you can trust me—"

Joliffe interrupted him with a rude laugh.

"Trust you! Yes, that's likely! I've had enough o' that. Why didn't you stub up afore I threatened to go to your Head about it? You know you didn't."

"Of course—of course; only I shan't have any more tin till next term. I daren't ask my father for any more, and— and I can't raise it. If you'll put something on Blue Cloud for me, I shall win, and pay you off, and—"

"No word!" Pay up's the word! "You give me ten pounds or twenty-five. What's the good of that to me? I've been hard hit myself lately, owing to this 'ere war. I want the money!"

"If Blue Cloud—"

"Bother Blue Cloud! Have you got the money?"

"No."

"You won't pay me?"

"I can't!"

"So you said afore, but you managed to raise ten quids," said Mr. Joliffe significantly. "I dare say you can raise some more rather than 'ave me go up to the school."

Hake was deadly white.

"You wouldn't do that, Joliffe, after what you promised! You said that if I managed ten pounds, you would give me time, and—"

"I reckon a judge would give you time, if I opened my mouth wide," said Mr. Joliffe, with a grin. "You're in pretty deep this time, young gentleman. You swear and vow that you can't raise a sovereign even, and then you stub up ten quids."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you'll get into trouble if you don't let me 'ave the other fifteen pretty sharp!" replied Mr. Joliffe, with a leer. "Where did you get that money from?"

"I—I borrowed it."

"Then borrow some more."

"I can't. It's impossible!" Oh," panted Hake, "what a fool—what an utter fool I was ever to have any dealings with you!"

"I'm all right, if you treat me like a gentleman. When I lose I pay up, don't I? When you lose, why don't you do the same?"

"I shall have some more money next term. I'd pay you every penny if I could. I will pay you next term. Don't be so hard on me, Joliffe! After all, you haven't done so badly out of me, have you?"

Mr. Joliffe looked sulky, and replaced his pipe in his mouth.

"You'll give me till next term, Joliffe?"

"I'll give you," said Mr. Joliffe deliberately; "till next Saturday!"

"Joliffe, I—I—"

"And I may as well mention as I've kept the currency notes. I've got 'em still. I ain't parted with 'em. I ain't gone to in a hurry. 'Allo! Wet's the matter with you?"

Hake staggered and caught at the table for support.

His eyes were fixed upon the landlord with a wild stare.

"Why, how can you be so mean?" he muttered bitterly.

"I thought they might be useful," grinned Joliffe; "and it appears I was right. Am I to 'ave my money on Saturday?"

"It's impossible! There's no way I can get it!"

"Get it where you got the last."

"I can't! You don't understand!"

"Oh, yes, I do! I understand. You can get it if you like. Anyway, if you don't bring me at least ten on Saturday, look out! I'm in earnest, I am. You'll look pretty queer when I go up to the school and ask the Head if he knows the number of these currency-notes."

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't do that?"

"Wouldn't I? Just you wait and see, my young gentleman. I'll teach you!"

Hake, with a face like chalk, turned hopelessly to the door.

"I'll do my best," he said wretchedly.

Redfern had remained at the cracked window as if fascinated. Very little of the conversation had escaped him.

With a feeling of guilt, yet of satisfaction at the discovery he had made, he stepped away from the window.

He hurried into the street, and when Hake came out a minute or two later, Redfern was already well on the road to St. Jim's. As fast as he could go he sprinted towards the school, and he reached it a long way ahead of the senior.

Lawrence was still wakeful and watching. He opened the window immediately Reddy appeared, and the junior scrambled in.

"What success?" whispered Lawrence eagerly.

"A lot," replied Reddy. "Let's get to the dormitory now. We'll talk it over to-morrow."

And the two hurried to their sleeping-quarters. The rest of the dormitory were in slumber. The absence of the chums had not been discovered. Quickly enough Redfern and Lawrence were in bed. But it was a long time before Reddy slept.

CHAPTER 11.

Redfern's Little Game.

"HALLO, Reddy!"

"Dick Julian was in the gym when Reddy came up, with an eager expression on his face."

Julian was looking quiet and grim. "The old sub's expression had quite left his handsome face."

Reilly and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were in the gym with Julian. Arthur Augustus was very chummy with Julian now.

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for the especial purpose of showing all St. Jim's that he did not doubt him for one moment.

Julian had confided to his nearest chums the hope Redfern & Co. entertained of making discoveries in the New House—under a promise of strict secrecy, of course. It was necessary for Redfern to work in the dark, if he was to effect anything at all. Tom Merry & Co. hoped that something would come of it. They had faith in Redfern's sagacity, though they agreed that everything would have been better if Kerr of the Fourth had not been absent.

Dick Julian looked quickly at Redfern, as the New House junior came into the gym. Redfern's expression made his face brighten a little.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weddy looks as if he was on the twack, you know."

"Bodad he does!" murmured Reilly.

"I trust he is not on the w'ong twack, however. I weally fail to see how Weddy can have found anything out," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "You see, I have been twyin' to think it out, and weally I cannot think of anythin', and I wathah pwide myself on my tact and judgment."

Julian smiled faintly.

"This way, Reddy!"

Redfern hurried up to the School House juniors.

"I want to speak to you chaps," he said. "It's rather important, too!"

"Found anything out, intirely?" exclaimed Reilly.

Redfern nodded.

"You've made a discovery?" exclaimed Julian breathlessly.

"Yes," said Reddy.

"Good old Reddy," said Julian gratefully. "What have you found?"

"I don't want you to say anything at present," said Reddy. "I haven't any proof yet, you understand; but I think I have the whole story clear enough."

"Just one question. Do you know who the real thief is?"

"Yes."

"For certain?"

"Yes."

"My hat! And it's only a question of obtaining proof?"

"That's all."

"And you think you can do it?"

"I hope so."

Julian thumped him on the back.

"But I want help," said Redfern. "I can't explain exactly now, but I want you to trust me, and I think it will come out all right. Now, young D'Arcy is always rolling in money. Have you got a ten-pound note, Gustavus?"

"I have two fivahs," said Arthur Augustus.

"Will you lend them to me—not to spend, you know, but for a certain purpose? You shall have them back safe and sound. There's a slight risk of losing them, though."

"I don't mind," said D'Arcy. "If it would clear Julian, I'd gladly give a pony!"

"That's all right, then. First, though, I want you to take down the number of the notes. You chaps will witness that he has it."

"That's easy enough," said Julian. "But I'm blessed if I can see what you're driving at, Reddy."

"Never mind that," said Redfern mysteriously. "You'll see soon enough, if the wheezo works, and I think it will. Let's have the notes."

It did not take Arthur Augustus long to produce them, and Reddy went back to the New House with the two fivers in his possession, leaving the chums of the School House in a state of considerable astonishment.

"It's all serene," said Reddy, when he rejoined the Co. Gussy stumped up like a little man. Here are the notes, and the numbers are down all right. This little game is going to be a howling success!"

"You think you'll be able to manage Kildare all right?"

"That-ho! He'd jump at a chance of clearing Julian."

"I suppose so. Reddy, old son, you're a genius!" said Owen admiringly. "They can talk about Sherlock Holmes. Why, he ain't in the same street with you, Reddy!"

"Well," said Reddy modestly, "I don't want to blow my own trumpet, but I really think I have worked this thing out pretty well. Mind, you've got to back me up, and don't you give the game away."

"No fear!"

It was Saturday evening. Hake was sitting alone in his study. He had avoided his friends a good deal of late, and Monteith had noticed how worried he looked, and asked him about it. Hake had given short replies.

Hake was thinking as he sat there, of the hour when he had to face Joliffe, and tell him that he could give him nothing. He looked up savagely as his bag came into the room.

"I say, Hake——" began Lawrence.

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"Get out!"

"But——"

"I don't want you. I sha'n't want you any more to-night. Clear!"

"But I want to ask you"—Hake rose threateningly to his feet—"if you can change ten pounds in notes, Hake," went on Lawrence.

Hake stared at him.

"What do you mean? Have you ten pounds?"

"Reddy has. It was his birthday yesterday, you know."

This statement was strictly true, though the inference Hake drew from it was not quite correct.

"Redfern has ten pounds?" said Hake, with a strange gleam in his eyes.

"Yes. Can you change the notes?"

"No. Do you think I keep a bank in my study?"

"Well, you're treasurer of the clubs, and——"

"Julian has collared all the tin, as you know," replied Hake. "There will be a subscription to make it up, but it hasn't been done yet. The fellows still think the money may turn up."

"All right. I suppose Redfern had better go to the Head."

"Wait a minute," said Hake. "He can't go to the Head to-night. It's too late. I could, I dare say, get the notes changed for him in the morning."

"All right; that will do for Reddy. The tuckshop's closed now."

"Mind you tell him to put the notes in a safe place," said Hake. "You know that money has a way of vanishing. Does Julian know anything about it?"

"Oh, yes, he knows!"

"Well, if Reddy doesn't take care, then, his ten pounds will follow the other money," said Hake. "You'd better warn him."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Lawrence. "He's taking care of the money. It isn't in his desk, you know. When we go to bed we're going to shove it under the loose board in the corner of the study."

"Yes; I dare say it will be safe there."

"I'll tell Reddy he can bring the notes to you in the morning, then," said Lawrence. "Don't you want me to toast your cheese, Hake?"

"No, no! Good-night!"

"Good-night, Hake!"

And Lawrence quitted the senior's study. Lawrence was a member of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, and he greatly fancied himself as an actor, but he was really surprised at the way in which he had carried out Reddy's instructions.

Hake remained alone. He did not sit down, but began to pace the room restlessly, his face very pale, and his eyes burning. Disturbing thoughts were working in his brain—thoughts which seemed to bring him a strange mingling of relief and terror. For a long time he paced the room, and he was still restlessly moving when the clock struck from the tower, and he started.

It was time for him to see the Fourth to their dormitory, that duty being his for the week. He left his study, trying to compose his face. The juniors trooped up to bed, Redfern & Co. with the rest. Hake saw that they were all in, and turned out the light. The door closed, the usual chatter died away, and the boys one by one dropped asleep. But there was one who did not allow slumber to creep upon him. It was Redfern.

As soon as he was sure that the others slept, Reddy rose, quietly dressed himself, and slipped out of the dormitory. The Upper Form boys were not yet gone to bed, but they were in their studies or the common-room, and the corridors were deserted. Redfern easily left the house unobserved, and hurried through the darkness of the quadrangle to the School House. Straight to Kildare's room he went. He had noted the light in the window, and knew that the captain of St. Jim's was there. Kildare stared at him in amazement.

"Redfern! What does this mean? What are you doing out of your House at this hour?"

Redfern closed the door.

"Hush!" he said mysteriously. "Hush!"

Kildare looked still more astounded.

"Are you mad, Redfern?"

"No. I'm on the track!"

"On the—the what?"

"The track of the giddy criminal!"

Kildare reached out for a cane.

"I give you two seconds to explain yourself, Redfern!"

he snapped.

"Don't be hasty! Don't you want Julian to be cleared?"

Kildare dropped the cane.

"What! Do you mean that you have discovered something?"

"Yes."
"Then why haven't you gone to your own prefect?" asked Kildare sharply.

"Because I'm not at all sure he'd take the matter up properly." You see, Monteith is a chum of the chap who boned the tin."

"Redfern!"
"Look here, Kildare, I've come to you as captain of the school."

He listened with amazement as Reddy unfolded his tale.

"Can all this be true?" he exclaimed, looking dumb-foundedly at Redfern.

"Every word!"

"But it is useless to tell it to me. Even if it is true, the way you learned it throws too much discredit upon it. I don't say I exactly blame you, under the circumstances, but you cannot expect the evidence of a secret listener to be accepted."

Redfern flushed painfully.

"I don't!" he said shortly. "I shouldn't have told you a word if I hadn't got proof to back it up, Kildare. I've got more to tell you. I've laid a trap, and caught the giddy criminal in it. That's why I'm here."

"I don't understand. What have you done?"

"Hake had to get ten pounds for that shark-to-night or be shown up. If you find him making for the Green Man with ten pounds in his pocket, which can be proved to be stolen, will that convince you?"

"It would convince anybody. But—"

"Then come with me, I tell you that Hake knows there's ten pounds under the loose board in my study, and he's certain to take it. He'll get up to some trick to throw the blame on somebody else, if we give him time. But we're not going to. Come with me, and if we see a light come in my study window, it will prove to you I'm right. Then we shall only have to wait and nab him."

Kildare rose and put on his coat and cap.

"I will come, Redfern. I think you are in earnest, and for Julian's sake I can leave no chance untried of discovering the truth."

"Come on, then!"

Kildare turned out his light, and quitted the School House with Redfern. As they passed under the eaves a light gleamed from a previously dark window in the New House. Redfern checked Kildare's arm, and pointed excitedly.

"My window," he muttered—"my study window! What do you think now?"

Kildare looked steadily at the light. It glimmered there for about a minute, and then disappeared. Reddy's grip tightened upon his arm.

"What do you think now, Kildare?"

"I think," replied the captain quietly, "that you are right, Redfern. I shall call Mr. Railton. It will be better to have the evidence of a master when the matter comes out. Wait here for me."

CHAPTER 12.

Light at Last.

ELEVEN strokes had boomed out from the tower. From the dark wall abutting upon Rylcombe Lane a dim figure dropped lightly, and turned towards Rylcombe. It was Hubert Hake. He set out at a rapid stride along the lane, but before he had taken half a dozen steps he halted with a gasp of dismay and terror.

Three figures had suddenly detached themselves from the gloom directly in his path. And, in spite of the darkness, he recognised them. Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, Kildare, and Redfern! What did it mean?

"Hake, where are you going?"

The thought of flight had crossed the wretched youth's mind, but it passed away as he heard the Housemaster speak his name, and knew that he was recognised.

"I—I—" he stammered.

"You were going to the Green Man?"

"I—no—I—certainly not!"

"Where were you going?"

"Only for a—a walk. I have a headache, and—"

"That will do. If that explanation proves to be correct, you have nothing to fear. Come!"

"Where?"

"To the Head."

"The Head?" gasped Hake. "Why? If you think I have broken bounds for a wrong purpose—which I deny—you can report me to my own Housemaster."

"This is a matter too serious to be dealt with by a

Housemaster, and concerns one of the School House boys, too. In short, Hake, I have reason to believe that you were going to see that ruffian Joliffe, to take money to him."

Hake seemed turned to stone.
"Money not your own!" went on Mr. Railton. "Can you deny it?"

"Yes—yes; I deny it! It is false!"

"You are willing to be searched?"

"Searched? No! I will never submit to such an insult!"
"You will either be searched in my room, or in the Head's!"

"I will not submit! I—"

"Why should you not submit if you are innocent?"

"It is an insult, and—"

"If you are unjustly suspected, apologies will not be wanting," said Mr. Railton. "But, as a matter of fact, your manner makes it impossible to doubt your guilt. Come!"

Hake, whose only idea now was to get rid of the incriminating notes in his breast-pocket, turned to fly.

But Kildare was on the look-out for such a move, and so was Redfern, and in a moment he was struggling in their grasp.

His resistance was brief.

With his arms held by the two, he was marched along behind Mr. Railton, who opened a wicket with his key and entered the walls of St. Jim's.

Right across the quad the culprit was marched, a grip on either arm, so that he could neither attempt to escape nor to destroy the notes.

The last doubt Mr. Railton or Kildare might have entertained as to the accuracy of Reddy's information had, of course, vanished now.

Hake was trembling violently, and white as death. He cast hunted looks to right and left like a captured wild animal.

As they entered the House he broke down utterly.

"Let me go!" he whispered, in a dry, husky voice. "For mercy's sake, don't take me to the Head! I—I own up!"

The Housemaster looked at his white, anguished face almost compassionately.

"I am sorry for you, Hake. But the truth must come out publicly. You forget that an innocent boy bears the suspicion of having committed the crime of which you are guilty. You must go to the Head!"

Hake groaned, and made no further demur. He knew that all was up now, and he ceased to struggle with his fate.

The Head was in his study, busy with the preparation of examination-papers. His deep voice bade them enter.

The Head of St. Jim's was not given to expressing surprise easily, but he certainly looked astonished now as he stared at his unexpected visitors.

"Mr. Railton! Kildare! What can this possibly mean?"

"It means, Dr. Holmes," said the Housemaster gravely, "that Julian's innocence is proved, and that the real thief stands before you."

"Hake!" The Head laid down his pen, and stared at the white and trembling culprit. "Hake! Is it possible?"

"Unfortunately, it is only too true. Owing to certain information supplied by Redfern concerning Hake's dealings with Joliffe at the Green Man, Kildare and I stopped this wretched boy to-night on the way to the inn. I had reason to suspect him of having upon his person two banknotes stolen from Redfern's study. He admits his guilt."

"You have the banknotes in question, Hake?" asked the Head sternly.

Hake made a sign of assent. He could not speak.

"Give them to me."

With a trembling hand Hake took a pocket-book from his breast and opened it. He passed two crisp, rustling five-pound notes to the Head.

"Are these your notes, Redfern?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you obtain such a sum?"

"I borrowed it from D'Arcy, sir, to lay a trap for that rotter! I knew he was the thief, and I wanted to clear Julian."

"How did you know he was the thief?"

"Because he paid Joliffe ten pounds at the time of the robbery, when he had no money of his own. Joliffe suspected that he had stolen it, and kept the notes so as to hold it over Hake's head as a threat."

Hake stared at Reddy in amazement.

He had not the faintest idea whence the junior derived his information.

"Is that correct, Hake?"

"Yes!" groaned the wretched Hake. "I—I was driven to it. He won the money from me, he fleeced me, and then he threatened to come to you and get me expelled if I didn't."

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!"

pay him. I—I used the football money to keep him quiet, and—then—"

"And then," said the Head severely, "you saved yourself by throwing the blame upon a wholly innocent lad; an action infinitely more wicked than the theft!"

"The idea came into my head when I found him in my study," muttered Hake. "If he hadn't been there I shouldn't have thought of it."

"No!" exclaimed Redfern indignantly. "Then you'd have fixed it on some kid of our own House! You could have shoved a half-sovereign into his pocket, as you did into Julian's."

"Silence, Redfern! Hake, I do not know how to express my detestation of the enormity of which you have been guilty. Theft itself is one of the basest of all petty crimes, but to blast the character of an innocent lad—But I will say no more. You will leave this school to-morrow morning. You are expelled from St. Jim's, sir, and I shall take care that your father is acquainted with this full particulars of the matter. You are a disgrace to the school. Go!"

And Hake walked unsteadily out of the study.

CHAPTER 13. Good Old Reddy!

ST. JIM'S received a shock when it awoke the next morning.

For on the notice-board, in each House, was a paper in the Head's handwriting, round which eager crowds gathered.

The information it imparted was thrilling. But for the well-known writing of the Head, there would have been a suspicion that it was a practical joke.

But there was no doubting Dr. Holmes' own hand. The notice was brief, but very significant.

It ran as follows:—

"The truth concerning the theft from the New House of St. Jim's has now fortunately been discovered.

"The money was not taken by the junior hitherto unjustly suspected, but by Hubert Hake, the treasurer of the college clubs, himself.

"Hake has confessed, and is expelled from the school."

And the signature of the Head followed.

The news buzzed from one end of St. Jim's to the other. Julian, when he came down, observed the crowd in the hall, but did not join it. He was getting into a habit now of keeping to himself.

He was astonished when, as soon as he was perceived, a number of juniors made a rush for him, and surrounded him in wild excitement.

"It's all right, Julian," yelled Monty Lowther.

"What's all right?"

"You're not a thief," shouted Kersuish.

"What?"

"I mean they know you're not. The truth's out."

Julian's heart gave a bound.

"What are you jabbering about?" he asked.

"Hake's the thief! He took the money; he's confessed."

"Hake!"

"Yes. Here it is on the board, in the Head's fist! Look!"

"Head it yourself," chorused Tom Merry and Co.

Julian was dragged to the notice-board.

There, sure enough, was the Head's statement of his innocence in black and white.

His chums had already heard the news, and they were soon in the crowd. They slapped him on the back till he gasped for breath.

"Hurrah!" cried Reilly, and the crowd echoed his shout, waking echoes in the School House very unusual on a Sunday morning. "Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Kildare came out of his room.

He came towards Julian with his hand outstretched, and gave him a hearty grip.

"I felt all along that you were innocent, though I admit I was staggered at one time," he said. "I'm glad the truth is out, Julian. The whole House owes you an apology, and make mine now. I'm sorry I ever doubted your honour for a moment."

"Thank you, Kildare."

And Study No. 5 sallied forth from the School House arm-in-arm across the quadrangle to the New House.

Redfern and Co. were expecting a visit.

There was a blush of conscious merit upon the classic features of Redfern, and the Co. looked as if they fancied themselves a good deal that morning.

"How did you do it, Reddy?" asked Julian, gripping hard the hand of his old enemy and his best friend. "How on earth did you do it?"

And Reddy modestly related his adventures as an amateur detective.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "You ought to have a medal, Reddy."

"Reddy, old son, you're a giddy marvel," said Julian. "I don't know how to thank you, so I won't try. You'll understand."

"I understand, old son," said Redfern. "No need to pile it on; I've only done as much for you as you'd have done for me. I owed you one for mucking up my study the other day, you know."

Dick Julian laughed—he could laugh now.

"Good old Reddy!" he said. "You're a brick! That's all I say. And you can call the New House cock house of St. Jim's, so far as I'm concerned."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yaas, wathah, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Vow many wats! But I will agree that Reddy deserves well of his country, and has shown great tact and judgment—wreatly remarkable tact and judgment for a New House chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have a suggestion to make, deah boys—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, you know, it is wathah a wippin' ideah. As my banknotes have come back, I ppropose to expend a fivah in standin' treat at the school shop—"

"Hear, hear!"

"In celebration of this most happy occasion, deah boys."

And the celebration was forthwith celebrated, and the happiest face among many happy faces was that of Dick Julian.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"BY COUSIN ETHEL'S WISH!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

NOTICES To Readers of THE "GEM" LIBRARY.

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By F. E. Freewin, 182, Fulham Road, Fulham, S.W.—Back numbers between 439.

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CORNSTALK BOB



The Previous Instalments Told How

Old TOM HILDER, a cattle-farmer of Katarit, Australia, is faced with ruin for the want of £1,000. He goes to a friend in Sydney, HENRY NORMAN, from whom he obtains the money, but is afterwards robbed, and, in recovering the notes, becomes mixed up, in the eyes of the police, with a gang of scoundrels.

His son BOB receives the money from his father, and takes it to SUMMERS, the bank manager, who is in league with BOARDMAN, a scoundrel who has plotted to ruin old Hilder.

Bob is afterwards arrested, and charged with passing false notes at the bank, but is liberated from his prison cell by CAPTAIN DASHWOOD, a notorious outlaw.

Bob learns from him that his father was robbed by a man named SUTHERLAND, the leader of another gang of outlaws, and he sets out in pursuit of him. He traces the villain to an hotel, where he also sees his father. A fight ensues, and the place is burnt down. Bob narrowly escapes with his life, believing his father to be dead.

Later, old Hilder appears upon the scene, pursued by troopers, just as Dashwood and Bob are returning stolen property to the house of a squatter; Dashwood having recovered it from Sutherland. They all succeed in getting away, and after the recovery of Dashwood—who had been wounded—Bob and his father set out in search of GELL, an accomplice of Sutherland's.

On the way they are caught by Sutherland and Boardman, but are again delivered by Dashwood. They all follow Sutherland to a town where he has planned a robbery, and Bob succeeds in capturing him, when BOGONG, Dashwood's black servant, brings news that his master has been caught by the troopers.

(Now read on.)

A Daring Scheme.

Dashwood was in the clutches of the police. And Sutherland, whose capture meant security and prosperity for Bob and his father, was lying a prisoner at the lad's feet. Bogong kept wringing his hands and pleading earnestly, and yet to leave Sutherland would be to relinquish all hope. For a couple of seconds Bob stood undecided.

"You can save massa," Bogong urged again. "And you say that, if need be, you would die for him."

He started. Yes, he had said this, and he meant it from the bottom of his heart.

"Where is Dashwood, and what has happened?" he panted, drawing his breath hard, after his desperate race and struggle with Sutherland.

"They caught him out on the road," Bogong explained. "He would go there to make sure the gang did not escape."

"And how can I save him?"

"I crept up and heard all," the black tracker continued. "Two troopers are to take him to Katayear, and wait there. Before they can get help—"

"I see. It's a desperate job, but we'll take it on," Bob

cut in. "But this cur is not going to escape for all that, if we can help it. Give me a hand to truss him up."

Sutherland, much shaken, was trying to rise, but they flung themselves upon him. Despite his struggles, they managed to gag him, and his arms were already bound when old Tom Hilder hurried up. Briefly Bob told him what had happened. They carried Sutherland into a thicket fifty yards away, and left him there. Then they hurried back to the camp where their horses were tethered. Mounting, they galloped away.

So far there had been no time to decide on any plan. But now, as they rode hard, they tried to form one. Bogong knew the direction in which Katayear lay, and was leading them there in the hope that they might arrive first. He told them that the police were in the habit of meeting at a hut in the bush. Katayear was half-way between Tamsay and the nearest police-station.

"Then they'll off-saddle and take Dashwood into the hut," old Tom remarked. "That's where our chance may come. But there's no use shirking facts, Bob. You know what this means for you and me."

Bob nodded. His young face was very grave. "We're rescuing an outlaw; we're going dead against the law, and the penalty is penal servitude if we are caught," he replied. "It's the last thing we would think of doing in the ordinary way, father, but can we stand out to save ourselves? We should be guilty of base ingratitude if we hesitated."

"That's how I feel, too," old Tom agreed. "Dashwood has stuck to us through thick and thin. He would be well on his way across Queensland, and to safety, if he hadn't chucked everything on our account. And he has been caught to-night in trying to do us a good turn. Besides, we know him as the police don't. He doesn't want to make mischief; he is anxious for another start, and to leave the old life behind. All we're trying to do is to give him the chance."

"And let us hope we'll succeed," Bob added.

"And that the rest of the police won't come along too fast," his father said. "The town behind us is swarming with them."

"Yes, that's what astonished me," Bob commented. "It couldn't have been a coincidence that they were there just now."

"There's something behind it all, and I don't think they were after us."

"Then what was the idea?"

"They got a hint that Naylor's house was to be attacked—that's my notion. And that would go to prove that they were after Sutherland and his gang. Of course, they are delighted at catching Dashwood; they feel more than repaid by that. Do you remember how quiet everything was in Naylor's house after the gang broke in? And Naylor always had two men on the premises."

"What is your explanation, then?"

"That Naylor and his lot had cleared out on the advice of the police."

"But we saw a light in the room upstairs," urged Bob.

"And it was extinguished almost on the instant when the scoundrels broke in," his father replied. "I'm sure that a

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trooper was keeping watch, and he put out the light to notify his comrades that they were to advance. And then, on the way, they ran up against Dashwood.

"Most likely that's what happened, and it's hard luck for us," Bob replied, "and hardest of all for Dashwood. And now, what are we going to do when we get to Katayear?"

"Ay, we must fix on something, and it's not easy," said Tom Hilder. "Bogong, anyhow, seems certain that he's taking us on all right, and I reckon the troopers are not riding as fast as we are. We ought to have time for a look round before they come up. Perhaps, then, we may see our way clear."

They galloped on, the black tracker fifty yards ahead, never hesitating. Up hills and down into gulleys and across creeks he went, into the scrub and out across open plains, and the two following him noticed that he was working round in a half-circle. For over an hour they galloped, and the horses were beginning to feel the strain, when, at last, Bogong looked back, pointed to a wood away to the left, and rode down towards it.

On the edge of the wood he dismounted and waited. "The hut is in here," he said. "The troopers and my massa will come in on the far side. We go on foot now."

The others jumped down and led their horses into the wood. Tying the reins to the branches of a tree, they went on. This side of the wood was very dense, but when they came to the clearing in the centre where the hut stood, they saw that a path had been made to it, and down this path the troopers would ride.

Old Tom first examined the hut. It had been well built, and there were provisions and cooking utensils in it, and also provender for horses. Bogong explained that the police often used it, and that sometimes as many as a dozen met there.

"It's a good rendezvous, and they do themselves uncommon well," old Tom remarked, as he looked around. "And there are a couple of carbines there, too. They may come in handy."

"But, father—" Bob protested, his face growing white.

Old Tom chuckled.

"I guess what's in your mind," he interjected. "No, my lad, we ain't going to shoot the troopers, if that's what you're thinking. Nothing would justify that and I'm mistaken in

Dashwood if he wouldn't agree. But this is a case of strategy, and to give 'em a big start. Ha, ha, ha! It's a game worth thinking on, anyhow. Now let us get down that path. There's nothing like knowing the lie of the land."

They went down the path. There were high trees on either side till the path opened out into the plain. The old man looked disappointed.

"It was hoping this was different," he remarked. "We can't scare 'em here, so as I can see. Let us look. We'll have to take 'em on from the side of the hut."

"You have some idea," Bob said.

"Yes, I have; but it needs working out still," his father answered. "We'll get three carbines, and let us hope they won't miss 'em. Here's the game, as far as I've thought it out."

They were back in the hut, and he looked around again.

"There's them sacks of oats," he continued. "Bogong can get behind 'em; trust a black chap to squeeze in anywhere. I'll give him my clasp-knife, and when we play up outside, he can cut Dashwood's thongs, and they must both scot as best they can. And it's a good job that the troopers have had a fire here, and that those ashes are handy. Scoop 'em up into your hat, Bob, and we'll take the carbines and clear out. We'll have to blacken our faces, for if ever we're identified with this job, not all the influence in Australia would save us, no, not even if we cleared our names from all the false charges hanging over us at present."

The audacity of his plan, and the coolness with which the old man expounded it, set Bob laughing heartily. Certainly the possibility of success was in it, and without any harm to the men whose duty it was to keep their prisoner at all risks. But there was no time for delay; even whilst old Tom had been talking, he had also been working strenuously.

He pulled out a stick of fat, and Bogong, grinning, as if entering into a joke instead of facing great personal risk, took the clasp-knife and slipped, like an ace, behind the sacks. The others pushed them back until the black tracker was tightly wedged against the wall, and then, taking the carbines, they left the hut, closed the door, and listened intently.

No sound of horse hoofs came to them as yet. Whilst the rescuers had galloped at full speed, the troopers had joggled along slowly with their prisoner. Old Tom Hilder, after a few moments' thought, pointed to the trees forty yards to the right of the hut.

"That's the best spot for our job," he said. "We'll get across and blacken our faces at once."

They hurried across, lay down, and rubbed the ashes vigorously over their faces. Before long they heard the troopers approaching, talking and laughing as they came slowly up the path. Suddenly the party appeared in single file, Dashwood in the middle, bound to his horse.

A thrill went through Bob as he recognized the outlaw. Only a few hours before he had been leading them against Sutherland. What must his thoughts be now? His liberty was gone. Nothing lay ahead but the gallows. Yet he sat his horse in proud disdain, his shoulders squared, his chin raised high.

"Grit to the last!" old Tom murmured. "Little he knows that we are here, poor chap. Now, be ready when I give the word!"

The troopers jumped down. They unbound Dashwood's legs and hauled him to the ground. His arms were tied behind his back. One stood close to him, his carbine in his hand, whilst the other led the horses to the rear of the hut. On his return this trooper went into the hut, and was there so long that the rescuers trembled lest Bogong might be discovered. But, no! The trooper came out carrying some food, and they all sat down. They freed Dashwood so that he could use his hands, and he ate ravenously. Bob and his father watched, their hearts thumping with suspense.

The minutes passed very slowly for them, and their anxiety grew greater every moment. For time was against them. No doubt the other police had left Tamey long since; they might arrive at any moment. After the meal the troopers lit their pipes, and allowed Dashwood to smoke, too. Were they going to sit outside until their comrades came? In that case old Tom's plan must fail. Beads of perspiration began to break out on Bob's forehead in his excitement.

At last! The two men arose, one on either side of their captive. They stood talking. Then they bade him stand up. They strapped his hands together again. They led him into the hut.

"Now for it!" old Tom said. "And run like the wind!"

Dashwood Freed.

They sprang to their feet and dashed out into the open, old Tom Hilder making straight for the hut. When near it, he handed his weapon to Bob.

(Continued on page 111 of cover.)

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CORNSTALK BOB!

(Continued from page 20.)

"I'm going to take the cartridges out of their carbines," he whispered, "and put in dummy ones. Lie flat here. I'll join you in a few moments."

Very stealthily now he advanced. Bob saw him get close to the door where the carbines were resting. The lad thought he would never extract the cartridges, though, in point of fact, the task only took him a few seconds. Swiftly he crossed back, and handed one to Bob.

"Load up and make ready to fire!" he whispered. "That will draw them out. Bogong will then set to work."

As he spoke he dropped to the ground.

"I'm ready, father," Bob whispered, his voice shaking in excitement.

"Then fire!" old Tom said. "I'll keep my shot for later on."

The sharp report rang forth. They heard a shout, and, as they had expected, the troopers rushed out. Old Tom jumped up. Seeing him, they caught up their carbines and pulled the triggers. There was a loud report, and old Tom pretended to be hit. He reeled, but did not fall. Turning, he staggered away, and Bob, jumping up, ran with him.

Believing that he was seriously wounded, the troopers broke into a run, and Bob and his father, having gone fifty yards, dropped to the ground again. The old man fired; and the troopers, believing he meant to hit them if he could, lay down flat. Their backs were to the door. If only they could be kept thus for a couple of minutes, Bogong would have the time he needed to free Dashwood.

For a while, during which Bob gazed anxiously at the doorway, the troopers lay still. Then one raised his head and shoulders, and old Tom fired again. The man again lay prone. Hardly had he done so, when two figures glided through the doorway and crept round to the back of the hut.

"They've got away!" Bob whispered. "Now, father, do you make a start, and I'll keep these fellows at bay."

Old Tom jumped up and began to run. The troopers also arose, and were about to start in pursuit, when Bob fired by the doorway, and they dropped down again. Twice he fired at old Tom, but, of course, they could not hit him. When he entered the wood, Bob decided to follow.

Jumping up, he ran at full speed, the troopers in hot pursuit. He got into the wood, and headed for the spot where they had left their horses. His father had already mounted, and the lad sprang into the saddle. Together they galloped off.

The scheme had succeeded. Dashwood was free. Bob's eyes were sparkling, and a grim smile was around his father's lips; but, though they both felt triumphant, yet neither spoke for the first couple of miles. At last, on the top of a hill, old Tom drew on the rein.

"Well, lad, that's as good a bit of work as ever I heard on, though it's a lot as says it," he chuckled. "We fooled 'em fair, and I guess they're still puzzling how they failed to bring us down. And already they've discovered that Dashwood has cleared out. How that was managed will baffle them altogether."

"He and Bogong have taken their horses, I expect," Bob replied, laughing heartily. "They can't even try to follow him or us."

"That's so, but it won't be long before their comrades join 'em, and then there'll be a chase, and a stern one," old Tom replied. "After this, the police will never give in until they run him down, for, if the story gets out, they'll be laughing-stock from one end of the continent to the other. And there's more than that, too, though I didn't tell you so at the time."

"Do you mean—?"

"I mean that there'll be no rest for us either," old Tom interjected. "They won't be able to prove as we had a hand in this, so far as I can see, anyway, but for all that, they'll get certain it was we who played the trick on them. They'll give us no rest, night nor day, from this on, for they have arguments on against us both, and until we clear ourselves and these wags grants cancelled, the police will be our most deadly enemies."

"I didn't think about that; but, even so, it wouldn't have stopped me," Bob said.

"Nor me, either," his father agreed. "But we're up against a bigger trouble than ever, and that's aying a good deal. How we are to get out of it is the sole question. We must lose no time. Every minute now is precious. The first thing is to push on to Tamsay, and get hold of Sutherland."

"We'll have to drag him along with us wherever we go," Bob said.

"Mebbe we'll find some place where we'll be able to keep him a prisoner," old Tom remarked. "And he needn't be a

prisoner for long." He sighed and shrugged his shoulders. "It's this way, lad," he went on. "The game is up, as far as we are concerned, unless we can do all we want in a few weeks, at the outside. That's the limit of our freedom now."

"Then, perhaps we had better chuck up everything and try to clear out of Australia altogether," Bob said, a note of sadness and desperation in his voice. "I'm thinking of you, father, and I can't bear that you should be hung into gaol, and perhaps for years, you who have always been honoured by everyone who—who—"

His voice seemed to choke. His father turned in the saddle and laid a hand on his arm.

"Don't you worry about me, lad," he said gently. "I'm an old fellow who has had his day, and the next few years don't matter. You have your life before you, and it's snatched unjustly at the start. That's what fairly gets me back up. But we ain't going to look on the black side more nor is prudent. But we'll pull out of this some way yet, though we must be quick about it, that's all. Now, we've rested the nags, and we'll push on again. Though Sutherland don't love us yet, he won't be sorry to see us, I guess. We must be fairly tired of lying cramped up out there, alone."

They shook up the reins, and settled down again in the saddle. They were half-way to Tamsay by this time, and they rode another four miles in silence. As they rode towards a hill, they were startled by seeing two horsemen coming across the scrub at right angles, and they pulled up under a tree. The go back would have been as dangerous as to ride on; in either case they could have been seen.

"Troopers!" old Tom ejaculated.

But Bob's young eyesight was keener.

"They're not troopers; they haven't got the military set in the saddle," he explained. "I could see that almost from the moment we got a glimpse of them. And now that they're coming nearer they look to me as if—"

He touched Brave Bess, and almost shouted.

"They're Dashwood and Bogong!" he cried. "Come on, father! Don't let 'em get across us and away!"

He galloped out from under the tree, waving his sombrero. Bogong and the outlaw were riding hard. Still, Dashwood saw him, and swung his horse round in his direction, almost bringing the animal on its haunches as he pulled up.

"Hallo! Jolly glad to see you!" he began, speaking in a evident hurry. "Bogong told me you were certain to get back to Tamsay to round up that cur Sutherland, but I didn't think you'd drop across you. There's no time for talk now, but—"

"And where are you going?" Bob asked.

"Back to the old lair, to the maze where we have all been before. It's the only safe spot, and you and your father will have to come along there sharp. Bring Sutherland along with you. There's a lot I have to tell you that's important."

"Is it good news?" old Tom asked, riding up.

"It's first-class news for you chaps. I heard a lot from the troopers as they were taking me along. If you can get into the maze, we ought to be able to do a lot. Now, I must get on, and do you fellows ride hard, too, for the troopers are not a mile behind me." So long for the present. We ought to meet again before daybreak."

He set spurs to his horse and flashed away, Bogong galloping after him. Bob and his father did not need any incentive to clear away from the track the police would take. In five minutes they had left the scene behind, and, by tacit agreement they rode hard, the same thought in both their minds—to get to the lair as soon as possible.

And to both a great change had come by this meeting with Dashwood. Their despondency had evaporated; his words had kindled a new hope in their hearts. He had good news for them. What could that news possibly be?

As they approached Tamsay they had to ride very warily, for possibly some of the police might be there yet. They worked round behind Naylor's house, and, dismounting, they approached the spot where they had left Sutherland, gagged and bound. Would Sutherland still be there, or would some of his gang have released him? Was luck to be against them again at the moment when it seemed to have changed in their favour? If only they could get him to the lair, they might hope for much with good reason. But if not—

Both saw him at the same instant. He was lying as the had left him, unable to speak, unable to move, but with eyes gleaming with fury. Bob pulled the gag from his mouth, and laid his hand on his throat.

"Dare to shout, and we won't spare you!" he said sternly. "But come along quietly, and we'll treat you better than you deserve. Now get up!"

They hauled him to his feet, untied his legs, and then strapped him to Brave Bess. Bob jumped up behind his father, and held the mare's reins.

"It's all right now, father. Brave Bess would follow me anywhere," he said. "Off we go! We've still a long ride before us!"

(Another grand instalment next week.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

EGGS-ACTLY!

A London wholesale provision house, which prides itself on filling all orders correctly, received a letter from a provincial customer complaining bitterly of the very poor quality of the last two lots of eggs supplied.

The reputation of the house for never making an error seemed to be at stake, but the bright inspiration of a junior partner found a way out. He wrote:

"Gentlemen,—We are sorry to hear that our consignment did not suit you. There was, however, no mistake on our part. We have looked up your original order, and find that it reads as follows: 'Rush fifty boxes eggs. We want them bad.'—Sent in by W. E. Urban, Clapton.

BEATEN.

Young Giles, eager to join the Metropolitan Police Force, journeyed to London to pass the necessary medical examination. This he survived satisfactorily, and the next day the proud young recruit was interviewed by a high official.

"Well, my man," said the latter, "you look a promising lot of fellow. What kind of an education have you had?"

"Oh, sir," said the recruit, "I was educated at a country school."

"Ah, and you have a good general knowledge, I hope?"

"Oo, yes, sir."

"I wonder, can you tell me, for example, how many miles it is from London to Edinburgh?"

The recruit became nervously agitated, but at length blurted out:

"Look here, sir. If you're going to put me on that beat, I'm done with the Force!"—Sent in by H. Seymour, Langley.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

Mother: "Willie, run across and see how old Mrs. Brown is this morning."

Willie (a little later): "Mrs. Brown says its none of your business how old she is."—Sent in by C. C. Jones, Oxford.

A GOOD BITE.

"The worst winter, I remember was when we were besieged," said the old soldier. "We only had one bite a day for two weeks, and that was horseflesh."

"I remember," said his tramp companion, "living for a month on one bite, and that was out of my own leg."

"You old cannibal! Do you expect me to believe that?" roared the old soldier.

"It's true, believe it or not," said the tramp calmly.

"A dog took a bite out of my leg, and the compensation kept me like a lord for four weeks."—Sent in by H. McGubbin, Glasgow.

VERY CUTTING.

The old gentleman in the barber's chair was rather facetious, and was in a constant state of restlessness for fear his man should cut his face during the shaving operations.

After several false alarms, the customer cried out:

"Here, didn't you lop a piece off my ear then?"

"Yes, sir," said the barber, in a breezy tone: "a small piece, but not enough to affect the hearing, sir."—Sent in by E. Church, Watford.

A STRIKING ILLUSTRATION.

Guide (fat moustache): Here, you see the waistcoat worn by Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar. The bullet that ended his life went through this hole here."

Nurse (to charges): "Do you remember, children, how I warned you against carelessness? If the hole had been mended at the proper time, the bullet could not have gone through it, and he might have lived years longer."—Sent in by J. H. Cole, Lowestoft.

COIRECT.

Uncle (angrily, to small nephew): "I never knew a— Jimmy, with such an awful memory! Everything I tell you goes in at one ear and comes out at the other!"

Jimmy (wonderingly): "Is that why I've got two ears, uncle?"—Sent in by H. R. Cribb, Wakefield.

TRUNK CALLS.

A fidgety old gentleman at a railway station was terribly afraid that he might lose his trunk, and during the time that he was waiting for his train, continually worried the busy porter, much to the latter's annoyance.

"Porter, be sure that my trunk is safe," said the old gent.

"All right, sir," replied the porter sharply.

A few moments later the worrying passenger again approached.

"Porter, don't forget my trunk!"

"All right, sir," replied the man, still more viciously.

Yet a third time, within about ten minutes:

"Porter, now be quite sure my trunk is safe!"

"Bejabbers," roared the thoroughly exasperated porter, "it's a pity you wasn't born an elephant instead of an ass, then you would always have your trunk under your nose!"—Sent in by H. T. J. Furner, Walthamstow.

SEE THE POINT?

A football match was in progress between an Irish and a Scotch team, and the scoring was running pretty level. A loyal Irishman among the spectators, obviously very anxious to see his team gain on the opposing side, kept on shouting out:

"Sit on 'em, Ireland!"

It so happened that the man who was sitting next to him was a Scotsman, and hearing Port shout "Sit on em, Ireland!" for about the twentieth time, he turned to his neighbour and said:

"Ye can sit on a leek, mon, and perhaps on a rose, but ye canna sit on a thistle!"—Sent in by F. E. Pell, Shottley.

VERY ILLUMINATING.

As he was setting off for business one morning, a young father was stopped by a neighbour, who asked:

"How's the baby?"

"Doing fine!" replied the father, in a tired voice.

"Don't you find," inquired the neighbour, "that a baby brightens up the house wonderfully?"

"I do," said the young parent. "We have the electric light on most of the night now."

"—Sent in by D. Walker, Huddersfield."

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

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