

THE SCHEMER OF THE SHELL!

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



TALBOT IN TROUBLE!

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A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY
OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

THE SCHEMER OF THE SHELL!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Talbot Intervenes.

"TAKE that!"

"Ow! Yow! Leggo!"

"And that!"

"Oh! Lemme go! Yow-ow-

ow-ow!"

Racke of the Shell was in a spiteful mood.

Racke's temper was never of the sweetest, but at the present moment was beyond all control.

The cad of St. Jim's stood in the Fourth Form passage, gripping tightly the wrist of Jameson of the Third.

Jameson was one of the fighting men of the fag tribe, but he was no match for the bullying Shell junior.

Racke gave the fag's wrist another vicious twist.

Jameson screamed with pain.

"Oh, let me go, you beast!" he cried. "Don't twist—Ow! You beastly bully! Yow!"

Racke's eyes gleamed spitefully, as he glared at the Third-Former.

"Say you're sorry for putting soot in my shoes!" he exclaimed angrily.

"I didn't do it!" moaned Jameson.

"I didn't, really, Racke!"

"Don't lie! I say you did!"

"But—"

"If you didn't do it, you jolly well know who did!" said Racke. "Now then, own up at once, or—"

Jameson looked up almost pitifully at the revengeful Shell fellow.

"I don't know, honest Injun!" he muttered haltingly. "And if I did, it's not fair for you to make me tell tales of another fellow."

"Oh, isn't it?" snapped Racke. "We'll see about that!" He twisted the fag's wrist harder than ever. "Now, will you do what you're told?"

"Ow-w-w-w! You beast! Lemme go!"

"Own up, then!"

"Oh, dear! I—I—I don't know who did it! I—Ow-wowow!"

"Buck up!"

"Ow! You rotter! You'll wrench my arm out of its socket!"

"And a jolly good job, too!" growled Racke. "You fags have been coming it a bit too strong just lately, and I'm going to put a stop to it!"

"You rotten Prussian! I'll kick you, you brute!"

"Oh, will you?" said Racke, giving the fag's wrist another twist.

"Ow! Yow! Oh-h-h-h-h!"

Racke laughed cynically.

"I thought you'd think better of it," he said. "Now, I'll forgive you for what you've done, if you say you're sorry."

"I'll be hanged if—"

"Eh?"

"I'm not going to say I'm sorry to a brute like you!" declared Jameson valiantly.

"A brute, am I?" exclaimed Racke fiercely. "Don't you know I'm a very decent chap?"

"No, I—Yow!"

Racke had twisted the fag's arm again.

"Sure I'm not a decent chap?" he asked.

"No. I—Yow! Ow-ow! Oh, yes—yes!"

"Good!" said Racke. "We're getting on! Now say, 'I'm sorry, Racke, for—'"

"I won't! Yow—Ow! Help! Oh, help!"

The plucky fag had tried to fight his own battle with the bullying junior, but Racke was more than two years older than he, and naturally stronger.

In a stand-up fight, Jameson might have put up something of a show. But Racke had no intention of fighting the youngster. He had taken a tight grip on the fag's wrist, and twisted it continually and savagely.

Jameson had stood a good deal, but he could stand no more.

His scream for help echoed down the passage.

"Shut up, you young rotter!" exclaimed Racke. "I'll break your blessed arm if—"

"Help! Help!"

Jameson was at the end of his tether now.

Had the junior studies been occupied, someone would have come to the fag's assistance before.

But the juniors were on the football field, and not a single door opened in response to the fag's cry.

Racke gloated.

He had purposely chosen this hour. He knew that he would be able to carry out his bullying tactics uninterrupted.

"What do you yell like that for?" he cried. "Anybody would think I was putting you to torture."

"So you are, you low-down Prussian!"

"Do you want me to give you another twist?" asked Racke spitefully.

"N-n-n-no! Please don't, Racke! I can't stand any more, really I can't!"

"Well, then, say—"

Racke broke off suddenly.

The sound of footsteps thudding along the passage had suddenly become audible to his ears, and he turned and looked in the direction from which it came.

A figure was running towards the bully and his victim—running hard.

Racke released his hold on the fag. Jameson sank helplessly to the floor.

The Shell junior stood in a crouching attitude, staring down the passage to see who the new-comer was.

Darkness was falling fast, and the corridor was unlighted. Racke could not see very far ahead.

Next moment he stepped back a pace as the new-comer became revealed to him.

It was Talbot of the Shell.

Talbot had just entered the School House, when Jameson's call for help had fallen upon his ears. He had pelted hard for the Fourth Form passage.

There was a look of cool determination upon Talbot's face as he faced the bully of the Shell.

Then, as he caught sight of the fag's

helpless form, his face flushed with uncontrollable anger.

"You rotten cad!" he exclaimed hotly.

"What do you mean?" said Racke, endeavouring to be calm and collected.

"You've been bullying that youngster!"

"I've been minding my own business," said Racke suavely. "I don't know that I asked you to interfere in mine!"

Talbot bent over the Third-Former. He caught sight of the marks on Jameson's wrist, where Racke had gripped it so viciously.

He rose to his feet quickly, his eyes gleaming.

"Put 'em up!" he exclaimed.

Racke shifted uneasily.

"What do you mean?" he inquired.

"Mean!" ejaculated Talbot. "I'm going to give you the biggest hiding of your life! You've been torturing that youngster, you rotten Hun!"

"I—I—I—"

"Put 'em up at once!"

"But—"

"Put 'em up, I tell you!"

"I—"

Smack!

Talbot could restrain himself no longer. His left fist swung out, and crashed between Racke's eyes.

Racke staggered backwards.

Talbot followed up quickly, and sent his right to the bully's head.

Racke put up his hands in a vain effort to ward off Talbot's onslaught, but Talbot was in a determined mood. He hated bullying, and the sight of Jameson's wrist had filled him with determination to make Racke suffer for his savagery.

He swept Racke's hands aside, and dealt out two hard punches on his nose.

"Ow! Yow! Stop it, can't you?" growled Racke.

"You don't like it, then!" exclaimed Talbot. "But you're going to have a lot more yet. There's one on the nose, another on the head, and—you might as well have that one between the eyes!"

Talbot had no mercy on the bullying junior. He hit him continuously on face and body.

He had beaten Racke almost to the end of the passage when the Terrible Three and the four chums of Study No. 6 came up the stairs. They had just returned from the footer-field.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise. "What's happening here?"

"Nearly finished," said Talbot, with a smile. "I'm just giving Racke a dose of his own medicine!"

"Oh, good!"

Smack!

Like a piston-rod, Talbot's fist swung out from his shoulder, and, crashing into Racke's face, sent him hurtling to the floor, where he lay perfectly still.

"Well done, Talbot, old son!" said Jack Blake.

"Jollay good, Talbot, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Now you've knocked Wacke out, pewwaps you

wouldn't mind telling us what the wow is all about?"

"Come along with me," said Talbot.

He led the way down the passage, to where Jameson was propping himself up against the wall, rubbing his injured wrist.

"Look at that kid's wrist," said Talbot. "It's Racke's doing!"

"The rotter!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly.

"Did Wacke weally do this?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! I weally think I ought to give Wacke a thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Talbot. "I reckon Racke's had about all he can do with for a little while."

"He'll have a black eye for a week, at any rate," said Jack Blake.

"Serve him right!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, I weally think it does serve him right!" said Arthur Augustus.

And that opinion was shared generally by the juniors.

Racke had been punished severely for his treatment of the Third-Former, but he had not received more than he deserved. As the footballers moved down the passage he rose to his feet, and glared at Talbot.

The look on Racke's face was evil to see. Bitter hatred for Talbot was in the bully's heart. Already vague plans for seeking revenge upon his enemy were in his mind.

CHAPTER 2.

At Dead of Night.

BOOM!

The clock in the old tower at St. Jim's commenced to chime solemnly.

It was midnight!

In the Shell dormitory all was quiet and peaceful, save for the soft breathing of the juniors, sound asleep in their beds.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the faint rays of the full moon shone through the windows of the dormitory across the juniors' beds.

Suddenly a figure started up in bed, and glanced round him. The moon's rays lighted upon his face—a face that was bruised and cut—the face of Racke!

The juniors had been in bed for fully two hours, but Racke had not slept. Talbot had given him the worst hiding he had had in his life, and his face had smarted and pained him all the evening.

But it was not solely his aches and pains which had kept him wakeful.

He had a desperate scheme in mind—a scheme for getting his revenge on Talbot for the thrashing he had received that afternoon.

Racke had always hated Talbot, but that hatred was tenfold greater now.

Racke sat bolt upright.

"You fellows awake?" he muttered, in a low tone.

There was no reply, save for the slow, regular breathings of the sleeping juniors.

"Anybody awake?" asked Racke once again.

Still no reply.

Satisfied now that he was the only fellow who was not asleep, Racke slipped noiselessly out of bed.

He picked up his coat, slipped his hand into the inside-pocket, and drew forth his pocket-book.

Then he walked quietly towards Tom Merry's bed, and, picking up the waistcoat belonging to the captain of the Shell, brought to view the latter's gold watch.

He drew away from Tom Merry's bed, and made his way in turn to the beds

belonging to Manners and Lowther and Gore.

He made a careful search of the clothes belonging to the three juniors, and replaced them only after he had purloined at least one article from each.

As he drew forth a gold watch-chain from Gore's waistcoat-pocket he little realised that the eyes of the latter, although apparently closed in sleep, were carefully watching his every movement.

George Gore was awake!

He had heard Racke ask whether anybody was awake, and had suspected that the latter had some motive for putting the question, so he had remained silent—and waited.

Now he was thankful that he had done so.

He had watched Racke's stealthy marauding, and had wondered what purpose he had in view.

He was soon to learn.

Had it been a moonless night, Racke's movements would have been invisible, of course. The rays of the moon, however, made a glimmer of light in the dormitory, and Racke's figure was plainly discernible as he made his way towards Talbot's bed.

Gore watched him with eyes that gleamed through the gloom—watched him pick up a sports-coat of Talbot's, and slip the purloined articles into the pockets.

The fellow who owed so big a debt to Talbot simply longed to leap out of bed and punish the cad of the Shell there and then; but he saw the folly of such a move, and he remained quiet—watching!

At last Racke finished his treacherous task.

Gore saw his purpose plainly enough. Racke, smarting under the hiding he had received at Talbot's hands, had adopted this means of getting his own back.

There would be a great outcry amongst the juniors when they found their things missing. Racke counted upon Talbot being accused of theft, and getting into disgrace with the Form.

But Racke had reckoned without George Gore!

Gore remained awake for at least another half-hour. Then he decided it was time for him to play his part.

"You chaps awake?" he called out.

No reply.

"Racke! You awake?"

Still no reply.

"Racke, old man! Are you awake?" Silence!

Racke had been quiet in his movements, but he was certainly no quieter than was Gore.

Gore crawled out of bed, and in a few seconds he was holding in his hands the sports-coat belonging to Talbot, in which Racke had placed the purloined articles.

He took them all out of the pockets.

Then he moved slowly towards Racke's bed, and, without making the slightest sound, put them, one after another, into the pockets of a coat belonging to the cad of the Shell!

Racke's cunning scheme was recoiling on his own head.

Gore smiled to himself as he thought of the way in which he had turned the tables on the cad.

Then he went back to his own bed, and was soon between the sheets, and fast asleep.

The Shell juniors slept on until the rising-bell clanged out the next morning. Clang! Clang!

Tom Merry sat up in bed, and looked around him sleepily.

Dawn was only just breaking, and the dormitory was still dusky.

"Time to get up, you fellows!" he said. "Come on, Manners, old son, get a move on!"

Manners did not move.

Tom Merry shook him by the shoulder.

"Wharrermarrer?" mumbled Manners.

"Time to get up! Rising-bell's gone!"

"Oh, rats!" muttered Manners sleepily. "You've been dreaming. Go to sleep again!"

"I tell you the rising-bell's gone!"

"Bosh! What's the time?"

"Time to get up!"

"Fathead! I mean what's the time by the clock?"

"Soon tell you."

Tom Merry picked up his waistcoat, and felt for his watch.

"By Jove!"

The captain of the Shell gave a startled ejaculation, but still Manners did not move.

Tom Merry shook him furiously by the shoulder.

"Here, Manners, old scout, wake up!"

"Whaffor?"

"My watch has been stolen!"

"Eh?"

"It's a fact. I can't find it anywhere. Burglars have been here in the night!"

"I wonder whether anything of mine has gone," said Manners, in natural concern.

He felt in the pockets of his coat.

"Great Scott! My penknife's gone, and I paid half-a-guinea for it only two terms ago!"

The alarm was spreading. In another moment most of the juniors were out of bed, making a careful search of their clothes.

"Have you lost anything, Monty?" asked Tom Merry.

"I don't know," replied Monty Lowther, feeling in all his pockets in turn. "I—Here, who's boned a quid note of mine?"

"No doubt it was the same chap who bagged my watch," said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"Anybody else lost anything?" sang out Tom Merry.

The juniors were still searching.

"Nothing of mine gone," said Crooke.

"What about you, Gore?"

"Oh, it's all right," said Gore, with a grin. "I've only lost a gold watch-chain!"

"Only!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"That's all. It doesn't matter much."

"Don't matter! You've gone potty, old chap! You seem chirpy about the burglar's boning your chain."

"It'll soon come back," said Gore coolly.

"It hasn't got legs, has it, fathead?" asked Monty Lowther humorously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No," replied Gore. "But it'll come back as quickly as if it had."

"What do you mean?"

"You'd better get my pocket-book back for me, then," said Racke nastily. "There were ten blessed quid notes there, and every one of them's gone!"

"Hallo! You've lost something, too, Racke?"

"I should jolly well think I have!" replied Racke.

Gore laughed.

"Nothing to laugh about!" snapped Racke. "It's no joke to lose ten quid like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Monty Lowther. "Fancy a millionaire like Racke kicking up a fuss at the loss of a few paltry quidlets."

"Look here, Lowther—" began Racke.

"Don't want to, thanks," replied the humorist of the Shell. "Your face is unpleasant enough at the best of times, but now it's ten times worse. I'd sooner look at Tom Merry, thanks! He's sad, but he ain't loathsome."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't it time we got dressed?" asked Talbot, slipping on his trousers. "We shall have Kildare up here soon."

"Yes, it is," replied Tom Merry. "But it's jolly queer about all these things being missing. I can't make out how any burglar could get in here without waking one of us."

"Supposing it wasn't a burglar?" remarked Racke casually.

"What do you mean?" snapped Tom Merry. "If you're suggesting that there's a thief in the dormitory—"

"I'm suggesting nothing," replied Racke indifferently. "But—"

"But you think it's quite possible," concluded Gore.

"Well, you never know."

"Quite so," said Gore. "I quite agree with Racke. I reckon that before we make any complaint to the Head we ought to make a careful search of everybody's pockets!"

"Good idea!" said Croke.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed. He did not like the idea of anybody in the Shell dormitory being suspected of theft.

"You'd better turn your pockets out first, then, Croke," he said.

"Oh, certainly," said Croke. And he proceeded to feel in all his pockets.

But there was no sign of the missing articles in Croke's clothes.

"Now you, Merry," said Gore.

The captain of the Shell looked decidedly huffy.

"Look here, Gore, if you think—"

"Not at all," said George Gore, in an unusually earnest tone. "I'm not suspecting you, old son. All the same, we must make a thorough search."

Tom Merry turned out his pockets, without any result.

"You next, Racke!"

Racke was busy washing.

"Leave me till last," he said. "My hands are too wet for me to feel in my pockets."

"Oh, I'll do it for you," said Gore. He picked up Racke's waistcoat and searched the pockets.

"Nothing here," he said.

"Didn't expect to find anything, did you?" growled Racke.

"No, but—Hallo! What's this little lot?"

The juniors gathered round closer as Gore picked up Racke's coat.

"Jolly heavy coat of yours, Racke," said Gore mildly.

"I—I—"

Racke's face had gone as white as a sheet.

Gore proceeded with his search. He dug his hand deep into the outside pocket of Racke's coat, and when he brought it to view it gripped tightly a Russian leather pocket-book.

"This yours, Racke?"

"I—I—I—" faltered Racke, in surprise. "Y-y-yes, that's mine!"

"Thought you said it had been stolen?"

"So I—"

"Perhaps the burglar had a fellow-feeling towards you and put it back when you weren't looking," remarked Lowther.

"Why, he's put some more things back, too!" exclaimed Gore.

He had plunged his hand into another pocket of Racke's coat.

Next instant he brought it out full, and the juniors gasped with amazement as they saw what it contained.

"My watch!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement.

"My quid note!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"And my penknife!" cried Manners.

"Who on earth put them there?" asked Talbot.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 512.

"That burglar must have been rather a humorous sort of Johnny," remarked Lowther. "Fancy boning a lot of things like that, and putting them in Racke's pockets! Coals to Newcastle—gilding refined gold—painting the lily!"

Monty Lowther was suspicious, and so were one or two more.

"Why, here are the rest of the missing things," said Gore, as he completed his search of Racke's coat.

Racke stood stock-still, his face as white as chalk.

"What's Racke got to say about it?" asked Manners.

"Been starting in the burglary line, Racke?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I—I—I—" stammered Racke.

"Perhaps Racke couldn't sleep, and he did it for a bit of fun," remarked Gore.

"Well, he looks as though he'd had a bad night," said Monty Lowther.

"There's some trickery here!" said Racke angrily. "Somebody's—"

"You'd better not try and put the blame on somebody else," said Gore.

"Supposing the things had been found in Talbot's pockets, you'd have been the first to condemn him!"

"I—I—"

Racke boggled and stammered. The mention of Talbot's name had struck him almost dumbfounded.

He saw at once the meaning of Gore's remark. Gore was playing with him, as a cat plays with a mouse.

Gore knew all, Racke felt sure of that, and he shuddered as he thought of the punishment that the juniors would mete out to him when they learned of his cunning scheme.

"Hallo! Here comes Kildare!"

The door of the dormitory opened, and in walked the captain of St. Jim's.

"What! Not dressed?" he exclaimed.

"Shan't be a minute, Kildare!" sang out Monty Lowther. "We've just been discussing the weather. Think we're going to have a fine day?"

"I think you're going the right way to get a whacking," said Kildare. "if you don't hurry up and get dressed!"

"All serene, old scout; be down in five minutes!"

"Mind you are!"

Kildare left the dormitory, and the juniors dressed at lightning speed.

Racke said nothing more. He thought a good deal, however. His cunning scheme for bringing about Talbot's disgrace had been frustrated by someone.

Was it Gore?

And when he saw Gore talking quietly to Tom Merry & Co., he knew that the game was up.

There were sorry times in store for the cad of the Shell!

CHAPTER 3.

A Ragging for Racke!

"WHERE'S Racke?"

"Anybody seen Racke?"

"Where's that rotter got to?"

The Terrible Three, and Jack Blake & Co., with Gore and Talbot, were crossing the quad, at St. Jim's.

Lessons were over for the morning, and the juniors were hot on the scent of Racke of the Shell.

Racke was nowhere to be seen. Realising that the enemy would be on his track he had slipped quickly out of the class-room, and made himself scarce.

But Racke was not to escape as easily as he had thought.

He had made arrangements to meet Croke outside the school gates, and at the moment the juniors were crossing the quad he was hiding on the outside of the school wall.

"The rotter's vanished!" said Manners.

"Let's go and ask Taggles if he's gone out," said Tom Merry.

Taggles was sitting in the parlour of his lodge when Tom Merry & Co. burst in excitedly.

"What I ses is this 'ere," he said. "Nice manners you young rips 'ave got to come interruptin' an old porter like this."

"Sorry!" said Monty Lowther. "We quite forgot to send in our cards. Look here! Have you seen that bounder Racke?"

"Which I 'ave seen Master Racke," answered the old porter grumpily.

"Well, where is he?"

"'Ow do I know?"

"Has he gone out?"

"Yes, he went out about five minutes ago," explained Taggles, "running as 'ard as he could."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry, turning away. "Come on, you fellows!"

They trooped after their leader.

Tom Merry rushed out of the gates into the lane. He gazed up and down the road, but there was no sign of the missing junior.

Jack Blake strolled back to the gate, and looked across the quad. Next moment he returned to his chums.

"Croke's just coming out," he said. "I bet he's going to meet Racke somewhere. Suppose we hide, and—"

"Good idea!" said Tom Merry quickly.

"Come on, you fellows, get behind the hedge, and keep your eyes on Croke!"

In another moment the juniors were hidden behind the hedge, watching intently for Croke to emerge into the lane.

Croke passed through the gates, and, after looking up and down, walked quickly in the direction of Rylcombe.

He had not gone more than fifty yards when a figure came out from the side of the road, and joined him.

It was Racke of the Shell!

"Come on, you fellows!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Collar the cad, and yank him up to the pump!"

"Yaa, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I shall certainly lend a hand in dwaggin' Wacke towards the pump!"

"Get a move on, then!"

The juniors broke away from their place of hiding, and belted down the road for all they were worth.

Racke heard the sound of running feet, and looked round.

Then the cad of the Shell took to his heels. But he was too late.

The juniors were well into their stride, and it did not take them long to catch up with Racke, who was but a poor runner.

Tom Merry was the first to come up, and, clutching Racke by the arm, pulled him up short.

"Got you!" he exclaimed.

"What are you after?" cried Racke, in feigned surprise. "I'm in a hurry. I've got an appointment, and—"

"It'll have to wait, at any rate for an hour or so!" said Tom Merry resolutely.

"Buzz off, Croke! We shan't want you!"

"Confounded nerve you chaps have got!" said Croke. "What do you want with Racke?"

"We're going to duck him underneath the pump, and you, too, if you don't clear!" said Jack Blake emphatically.

Racke was now a prisoner, and, though he struggled fiercely, escape was impossible.

"But I say," said Croke falteringly. "I don't see—"

"You'll see stars in a minute," said Monty Lowther. "if you don't hop it! Clear, while you're safe!"

Croke cleared. He had never been

accused of being a hero, and the war-like looks on the juniors' faces warned him that trouble was ahead.

"Now then, you fellows!" said Tom Merry. "Get him along to the pump!"

"Right-ho!"

Racke struggled.

"It's no good your kicking like that, Racke, you rotter!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"Let me go!" shouted Racke.

"Not until you've been punished for trying to get old Talbot into trouble!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"But—"

"It's no good arguing! We've heard all about your little scheme for getting Talbot accused of theft, and I'm jolly glad you've been bowled out!"

"So am I, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wealdy think that it would be bettah if I gave the boundah a thorough thwashin', don't you?"

"No jolly fear!" said Jack Blake. "The pump's the thing, and it's the pump he's going to— Ow! Stop kicking, Racke, can't you? I'll dot you one on the nose in a minute, you rotten cad!"

"Here we are!" sang out Monty Lowther.

The juniors drew up to the pump with their captive.

"Who's going to work the handle?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, I'll attend to that!" said Monty Lowther.

"Good! Everytime we swing him underneath the nozzle, you work the handle."

"Right-ho!"

"Now then, are you ready, Blake?"

"Yes."

"Then, go!"

Blake and Digby were holding Racke's feet, whilst Tom Merry and Manners had his arms tightly gripped.

They swung the cad right under the nozzle, and Lowther worked the handle of the pump.

"Ow! Yow! Yarooooogh!" yelled Racke, as the rush of water splashed full into his displeasing countenance.

"That's one for pinching my watch!" said Tom Merry. "Swing him!"

Racke was swung outwards and backwards once again, and he spluttered furiously as the water splashed over his face.

"That's for boning Manners' knife!"

"Yarooooogh! Grooooooh! Lemme go!" howled Racke.

But Racke was not to go just yet. Six times more he was swung backwards and forwards, and each time the water swished and swashed upon his helpless form.

He struggled and pleaded, but all in vain. The juniors were incensed at the cad's treatment of Talbot, and they did not intend to let him off lightly.

At last, however, Tom Merry and his chums desisted, and then Racke, in a dripping, drenching state, was dropped on to his feet.

"Now you can hop it!" said Blake. "And remember, if you ever try to get Talbot into trouble again, we'll give you something worse than this!"

"Groogh! You just wait!" mumbled Racke, shaking himself like a dog. "I'll go straight to Mr. Railton, and—"

"Cut along!" said Blake. "In fact, we'll go with you, if you like. Railton might like to hear that there's a fellow in the school who needs sacking!"

"Hang you!" exclaimed Racke. "I sha'n't forget this!"

"I bet you won't!" laughed Monty Lowther. "And you won't forget the hiding Talbot gave you yesterday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke gave the laughing juniors an evil glare, and then he slouched towards the gates.

Taggles gasped with amazement as he caught sight of the cad.

"What I ses 'is—" began the school porter.

But Racke did not wait to learn what Taggles wanted to say. He crossed the quad at a quick pace, and, entering the School House, went straight upstairs to the Shell dormitory.

Using language best left unrecorded, and vowing vengeance against the juniors in general, and Talbot in particular, he changed into dry clothes. Truly, the way of the transgressor is hard!

CHAPTER 4.

Crooke's Scheme!

"MY word, Racke, old man, you are a giddy sight!"

Thus spoke Crooke of the Shell, as he sat in his study that afternoon with Racke. Racke had

"Look here," said Crooke. "What's the good of getting waxy with me? Why don't you try and think of some wheeze for paying out that cad Talbot?"

"Haven't I tried?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Crooke. "You made a nasty mess with those watches and chains and things. But why not try and get your own back on the cad yourself?"

"What else can I do?"

"Lots."

"How?"

"What about Lodgey?"

"Lodgey?" exclaimed Racke, in wonder. "What could he do?"

"He could do a good deal, if you care to pay him well," explained Crooke. "He's an artful rotter, but he'd do anything for money."

"I don't catch on," said Racke.

"Lodgey's a pretty hefty chap."

"I know he is."

"Well, supposing he met Talbot out-



Under the Pump.
(See Chapter 3.)

changed into dry clothes, but he still bore many signs of his fight with Talbot.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and most of the juniors were on the playing fields.

Racke and Crooke, however, did not care for football. All sports were boring to them. A game of nap in the dirty bar-parlour of the Green Man in Rylcombe was their idea of enjoyment.

"I know that," said Racke curtly.

"Your right eye's nearly closed."

"Well, don't rub it in!" snapped Racke.

"Sorry, old chap," said Crooke. "But, look here, I wonder you put up with it."

"Put up with it be hanged!" growled Racke. "What can I do? I can't tackle all the cads myself. You finked it when they all collared me."

Crooke adopted an injured air.

"Now, what could I have done?" he said. "I couldn't fight a giddy score of 'em!"

"Oh, rats!"

side the school after lights out," said Crooke. "And supposin' he went for Talbot tooth and nail. Talbot might have a face like yours then!"

"You leave my face alone!" snapped Racke indignantly.

"Well, you see what I mean," said Crooke. "Lodgey would probably want a fiver for the job, but it would be worth it from your point of view."

"H'm! It isn't half a bad notion."

"Shall we go down to the Green Man now? Lodgey's bound to be there, and we can fix up everything with him, and get him to carry out the job to-night."

"But how are we to get Talbot out of the school?" questioned Racke.

"Oh, that's easily done," said Crooke.

"I'll arrange that with Lodgey."

"Good!"

The two cads left their study, and were soon in the lane leading to Rylcombe.

The shouts of the juniors on the footer field could be plainly heard, but Crooke and Racke took no notice. They could never understand how any fellow could wax enthusiastic over a game of football.

Soon the shouts were lost in the distance, and then the two cads were nearing the disreputable public-house in Rylcombe, known as the Green Man.

The door opened just as they were entering by the little side gate, and out walked the very man of whom they were in search.

Mr. Lodgery slouched towards the juniors.

"Werry pleased to see yer, young gents," he said, with coarse affability. "Come to 'ave a little game o' nap?"

"No," said Crooke; "we've come to see you."

"Werry good," said Mr. Lodgery. "An' what can I do for yer?"

"Come over here," said Crooke, turning away from the Green Man. "We don't want anybody to hear what we're talking about."

"Oh, it's like that, is it?" said Mr. Lodgery artfully.

"It wouldn't matter very much if anybody did hear," said Crooke, quite unconcernedly. "But, look here, can you do with a fiver?"

"Can a duck swim?" asked Mr. Lodgery, winking his bleary eyes.

"Would you care to earn it?"

"Wotter!"

Crooke drew nearer to the burly rascal, and lowered his voice.

"You've got pretty hefty fists, haven't you?" he asked.

Mr. Lodgery caressed his bristly chin.

"Well, they ain't powder-puffs," he said. "By the way, might I ask what's happened to your face, Mr. Racke? If yer don't mind my saying, it do look a bit dammaged like."

"That's just why we've come to see you," explained Crooke quickly. "A rotten brute at the school did it, and we want him barged about a bit for it. D'you see?"

"I see, young gents. You don't feel as though you could manage it yourselves, so—"

"Nothing of the kind!" interrupted Racke. "I'd give the cad a blessed good hiding to-morrow, but I don't want to soil my hands on him."

Mr. Lodgery winked knowingly.

"All right, young gents," he said. "I understand. You want me to bash him a bit, so that he looks a bit gone ter seed about the face—eh?"

"That's it."

"Werry well. Who's the young gent?"

"Chap named Talbot," explained Racke.

"Talbot!" ejaculated Mr. Lodgery. "That guy!" He pursed his coarse lips. "H'm! He's a pretty hefty feller, ain't he? I remember 'e an' me 'ad a bit o' a tussle once before. 'E's 'ot stuff, 'o is?"

"Well, don't you fancy the job?"

"Oh, I fancy it all right," said the rascal. "But it's going to be a stiff job."

"Can't you get a pal to help you?" asked Crooke.

"Oh, yes, I'll manage it. You don't mind springin' another quid?"

"Not a bit."

"Werry well, I'll get old Biff Hoggins to 'elp. Biff's got some fists, I can tell yer. Now, what about gettin' young Talbot out o' the school?"

"That's easily done!" said Crooke promptly. "You send him a note saying that you want to see him most particularly to-night, because you know that John Rivers—I dare say you remember Rivers—has deserted from the Army. Of

course, you can tell him that Rivers couldn't write for fear of his letter being opened."

"I see."

"You might spin some yarn about Rivers having been suspected of some crime, and that he deserted to get longer time to clear his name."

"Werry well," Mr. Crooke, said Mr. Lodgery eagerly. "I can manage that all right. You trust me! I'll send young Talbot a note that'll bring 'im out all right; then me an' Biff'll give 'im socks! What about the quidlets?"

"We'll bring you them to-morrow," said Crooke.

"You wouldn't like to give a poor chap a quid in advance, I suppose?" said Mr. Lodgery whiningly.

Racke handed the rascal a pound note.

"Here you are!" he said. "Now, mind you make a good job of it!"

Mr. Lodgery laughed coarsely.

"I'll do it right enough," he replied. "You young gents comin' inside for a game o' nap?"

"Not just now," replied Crooke.

"We'll promise you a game to-morrow!"

"Werry good!"

The two cads turned on their heels, and started towards St. Jim's. Their faces were wreathed in smiles. They already saw their foul scheme meeting with success.

But they little realised what startling events this scheme of theirs for getting their own back on Talbot was to lead to.

CHAPTER 5.

A Note for Talbot.

"**T**ALBOT!"

"Hallo! Who's wanting me?"

Talbot was returning, tired and ruddy, from the footer-field with Tom Merry & Co., and Jack Blake & Co.

"Kid here with a note for you," said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Note for me?"

"Yes."

"Hand it over, then!"

A youngster from the village stepped forward, and handed a rather dirty note to Talbot.

Talbot took the note in surprise, and opened it. Next moment he started backwards, and his face, which a moment before had been flushed and hot, turned pale.

"Good heavens!" he gasped.

"Bad news?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"No—yes—that is— Oh, hang it! The juniors gathered round Talbot, all vaguely sharing his evident concern.

"Any answer, sir?" asked the lad.

"No!" said Talbot. And, turning on his heel, he walked straight into the School House, and went upstairs.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally think Talbot must have weceived vewy bad news!"

"Same here," said Blake. "I've never seen a chap's face change so quickly!"

"Neither have I," agreed Tom Merry. "It must be pretty bad, whatever it is. I wish he'd told us what was the matter."

"So do I," said Blake. "But he's gone now. We might have been able to help him if he'd confided in us."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "I should be only too willing to give him some fathahly advice if he was in need of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! I weally think I had better go and see Talbot. He might be in a deocid hole, you know, and a little

tact and judgment will pwoably get him out of it."

"Don't be a chump, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake, you don't undahstand," said D'Arcy, commencing to quicken his strides.

"Stay where you are, you chump!" commanded Blake.

"I shall do nothin' of the kind, deah boy! I am goin' to see Talbot."

And before Blake could restrain him the swell of St. Jim's had dashed up the stairs towards the Shell passage.

The door of Talbot's study was shut.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped on the door.

Tap!

No answer.

D'Arcy tapped again, but still there was no reply.

The swell of St. Jim's turned the handle, and pushed the door slowly open.

He pulled up short at the sight of Talbot, sitting in the armchair, his face buried deep in his hands.

"Talbot, deah boy—"

Talbot sat bolt upright, and stared at Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy!" he murmured. "I didn't know you were here!"

"Weally, deah boy?" said D'Arcy. "I knocked twice on your door, and as you didn't answah, I walked straight in. I hope I'm not intwudin'?"

"Not at all," said Talbot quietly.

"Take a seat!"

"No, deah boy, I won't sit down, thanks all the same," said D'Arcy. "I have merely come to offer you my help."

"Oh!"

"I have no desiah whatevah to pwy into your pwivate affahs," said Arthur Augustus. "All the same, I am suah you have weceived bad news."

"It's nothing, Gussy, old son," said Talbot.

"Weally, Talbot, if I can be of any assistance you have only to say so, and —"

"Thanks very much, Gussy; but really you can't help."

"If it's a case where tact and judgment is weally necessary—"

"It isn't," said Talbot.

"You are not in need of advice?"

"Not a bit."

"Are you suah?"

"Positive!"

"Vewy well. That's an end of the mattah," said Arthur Augustus.

"I hope, Talbot, deah boy, you are not offended at my makin' the offer? I was weally positive you had weceived wotten news."

"I'm not offended, Gussy, old son," said Talbot, with a faint smile. "You're a good sort, and if ever I'm in need of your advice I shall be only too pleased to come to you."

"Oh, good! You can wely upon me, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus left the study.

As soon as he had gone, Talbot drew from his pocket the dirty missive which had been handed to him at the entrance to the School House.

Talbot read the ill-spelt communication again and again, and his face gradually assumed a drawn, worried expression.

For this was how the letter ran:

"Dere Mister Talbot,—Exkuse mo ritin to you, but i am doin so by request of mister Rivers, who you no. mister Rivers is in trouble. I saw im only yesterday, and he looks very bad. he was accused of pinchin moneey from his pals, so he run away from his regiment. course, i know as well as you do that he aint guilty; but, all the same, he's under suspishun like. he's hidin near rylcombe, hopin that the rele culprit will be caught and he will be able to go back to his regiment. e thinks you might help him in

this, so if you care to meet me in the rylcombe rode tonight at eleven I will take you to him. e would ave sitted to you inself but he's afraid somebody mite open the letter—see? opin to meet you tonight, i remain

"Yours respectfully,

"JOE LODGEY."

Talbot folded the note up, and slipped it in his pocket.

John Rivers was in trouble!

He was hiding from the police—hiding, perhaps, within a few miles of St. Jim's.

At first Talbot was inclined to doubt the genuineness of the note. He thought it very strange that John Rivers should make a confidant of Lodgey, whom he must have known in the past as a scoundrel.

Maybe, however, Rivers had been unable to get in touch with anybody else, and had made use of Lodgey as a last resource.

And who could blame him? thought Talbot.

The hours would not pass quickly enough for Talbot. He waited eagerly for the time to go to bed to arrive.

Talbot was the most loyal of friends, and John Rivers meant much to him. There was Marie, too, the friend of his old days as "the Toff." It would almost break her heart if her father were arrested as a deserter!

Talbot was sitting in the Common-room reading, when Kildare came in.

"Bed-time, you kids!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Right-ho, Kildare!" sang out Monty Lowther, who was engaged in a game of chess with Tom Merry. "One minute!" "That's about all you'll get," said Kildare.

The two chess enthusiasts went on with their game; but Talbot, his face still white and careworn, went up to the dormitory.

Racke and Crooke watched him go.

"He's bitten!" said Crooke, with a malicious grin.

"Yes," said Racke bitterly. "He's bitten all right, and all I hope is that Lodgey lets himself go all out. What a time we'll have when Talbot shows himself in class to-morrow morning!"

"Well," said Crooke, "I shall be jolly glad to see him a bit damaged!"

"And you can bet I shall!" said Racke. "I've been longing to get my own back on that rotter, and I'm going to do it now with a vengeance!"

"Hear, hear!"

Still discussing their cunning scheme, the two cads wended their way to the Shell dormitory. When they arrived, Talbot was in bed, apparently dozing off.

But Talbot was awake—very much awake!

CHAPTER 6.

After Lights Out!

BOOM!

Eleven o'clock rang out from the old clock-tower at St. Jim's. Talbot raised himself on his elbow, and peered up and down the dormitory.

"Anybody awake?" he asked.

There was no reply.

"You fellows awake?"

Still no answer.

Next instant Talbot was out of bed, and quietly slipping on his clothes.

At last he was fully dressed. He had put on a pair of canvas shoes in order that his movements should be quiet.

He tiptoed towards the door of the dormitory, and very quietly slipped out into the passage.

No sooner had the door shut behind Talbot than a soft chuckle came from one of the beds. Racke was in the seventh heaven of delight. He had watched

Talbot leave the dormitory, and he meant to lie awake until the breaker of bounds returned.

The anticipation of seeing Talbot return from his nocturnal adventure, bruised and damaged, was hugely satisfactory to the cad of the Shell.

Talbot wended his way downstairs. Then he made tracks for the window, which looked out across the quad. It was easy to slip back the latch, and in a moment Talbot was out in the dark and deserted quad.

He left the window open behind him, and ran towards a side wall.

It did not take him long to scale the wall. Then he dropped quietly into the road, and walked at a steady pace in the direction of Rylcombe.

The moon shone brightly, and Talbot could see some distance ahead.

Suddenly a figure was discernible in front of him, and Talbot judged it to belong to Lodgey, the man whom he was to meet.

Talbot slackened his pace, and waited for the man to draw up to him.

"Well, ere yer are," said Mr. Lodgey affably. "I'm werry pleased to see yer. We ain't exactly been on the best o' terms in the past, 'ave we?"

"Well, not exactly," said Talbot slowly.

"That can't be 'elped," said Mr. Lodgey. "I don't bear no malice. I'm a really decent sort of chap to them that treat me properly, but once I'm riled I'm riled. D'yer understand?"

The rascal reeled towards Talbot, and the latter stepped backwards as the scent of whisky assailed his nostrils.

Evidently Mr. Lodgey had been having a good time with Racke's pound note.

"I understand," replied Talbot abruptly. "You wrote to me."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Mr. Lodgey, staggering slightly. "I sent you a note about Mister Chivers—"

"Rivers," corrected Talbot quickly.

"That's right, Rivers. Jolly nice chap, ain't 'e?"

"Y-y-yes."

"One o' the werry best, 'e is," said Mr. Lodgey. "I allus did like Mister Rivers. A jolly good fellow, and—"

"Enough of that!" interrupted Talbot angrily. "Why the dickens don't you come to the point? Where is Rivers?"

"Ah, where is 'e?"

"Tell me at once!" exclaimed Talbot hotly.

Mr. Lodgey extended a grimy hand, and pushed Talbot away. Mr. Lodgey's mind was in a jumbled state, but he was recovering his reasoning faculties, and remembered his job.

"Don't be in sich a bloomin' hurry!" he said. "You want to see Mister Rivers, don't you?"

"That's what I've come for," said Talbot. "Hurry up and tell me where I can find him!"

"You 'old 'ard a bit, young shaver! I've come out 'ere at this time o' night for your special benefit, and I ain't going to be hurried. D'yer see?"

Mr. Lodgey gave another lurch.

"Mr. Rivers is in a bad way, 'e is," went on Mr. Lodgey. "They've chucked 'im out o' 'is regiment and—"

"Chucked him out?" ejaculated Talbot.

"That's what I said."

"But in the note you sent me you said he had deserted."

"Well, ain't that the same thing?" exclaimed Mr. Lodgey.

"Not exactly. Deserted means—"

Mr. Lodgey waved a menacing fist in front of Talbot's face, and the junior backed away.

"If you're goin' to argue, I'm done!" growled the ruffian.

"Oh, get on with your yarn, do!" said

Talbot impatiently. "Why can't you tell me where Rivers is, and have done with it?"

"I'll tell you all in a minute, young shaver."

"I wish you'd buck up!"

"Mister Rivers is in a nasty mess," continued Mr. Lodgey. "Having been accused of bribery—"

"You said 'theft' in your note," corrected Talbot.

"Well, theft, then. Same thing, ain't it? 'E ran away from his regiment, and hid—hid, in case the police should nab 'im. See?"

"Yes."

"Well, now 'e's in want. 'E wants money badly. 'E came up to me yesterday, 'e did, and begged me to write to you for money. I didn't much care about that, so I sent you that note."

"Well?"

Mr. Lodgey held out his hand.

"'Ave yer got it?" he asked.

"Got what?"

"The chink, in course!" snarled Lodgey. "D'yer mean to say you haven't brought it?"

"I—I didn't—"

"You young fool! What d'yer mean by playin' with me like this? What do you think Mister Rivers is goin' to do without money?"

"Take me to him!" urged Talbot.

"Let me see him, for goodness' sake! Then I can arrange with him about money. Where is he hiding?"

"Look 'ere, you can't go over to Abbotsford this time o' night. Give me the money, and I'll hand it to Mister Rivers when I see 'im to-morrow!"

"Abbotsford!" ejaculated Talbot, in amazement. "But you said he was hiding near Rylcombe, and that you would take me to him to-night!"

"Oh, did I?" said Mr. Lodgey.

"When did I say that?"

"In the note you sent me."

"Blow the note!" snapped Mr. Lodgey, as he lurched against the St. Jim's junior. "That ain't got nothink to do with it."

"But—"

Talbot's mind was in a maze. Suddenly a suspicion flashed through his mind—a suspicion that the rascal was boasting him, and that John Rivers was not in need after all!

It might be only a ruse on the part of Mr. Lodgey to extort money from him!

Mr. Lodgey clutched him by the arm.

"Are you goin' to pony up, or ain't yer?" he mumbled.

"Let me go!" exclaimed Talbot hotly.

"I believe you've been lying to me, you scoundrel!"

"I ain't going to let you go just yet!" growled Mr. Lodgey.

The rascal had meant to let Racke's scheme fall through, and to try a dodge of his own to get money out of Talbot.

But Lodgey's own scheme had fallen flat. Now the only thought in his mind was to make a success of Racke's scheme.

Talbot struggled to free himself, but the rascal held him in a grip of iron.

"It ain't no good your strugglin'!" muttered Mr. Lodgey. "I'm goin' to give you a good hidin', and—"

Smack!

Out flashed Talbot's fist. It landed full between the scoundrel's eyes, and releasing his hold on the St. Jim's junior, he staggered, and almost lost his footing.

"Young varmint!" said Mr. Lodgey.

"I'll—Ow! Yow!"

Once again Talbot sent his fist into Mr. Lodgey's face. This time the rogue crashed to the ground.

"Serve you jolly well right!" exclaimed Talbot indignantly. "Next time you try to get money out of me, I'll hand you over to the police!"

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Mr. Lodgey rose slowly to his feet, and by the time he had recovered his equilibrium, Talbot had disappeared.

Muttering oaths, the rascal turned in the direction of Rylcombe.

Talbot was well out of sight. He had taken to his heels, and was fast approaching St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

The Alarm.

RACKE did not sleep.

He remained awake, waiting eagerly for Talbot to return, damaged and bruised, to the Shell dormitory.

Racke felt that his hour of triumph was at hand. His revenge on Talbot would be complete. Talbot was to be made to suffer for having crossed Racke's path.

But why should he not be made to suffer still more? thought Racke.

Why shouldn't he be compelled to remain out in the cold, deserted quad until early morning?

Racke did not debate that question long. He decided at once.

He jumped out of bed, and put on his coat and a pair of slippers. Then he left the dormitory.

He passed quickly along the passage, and in a few moments he was standing in front of the window through which Talbot had passed.

He closed the window noiselessly, and laughed to himself as he slipped back the catch, thus barring Talbot's return to the dormitory.

It was cold and bleak out in the passage, and Racke did not stay there long. His cunning task finished, he turned to make his way back the way he had come.

But suddenly the cad of the Shell pulled up short.

"Good heavens!" he murmured affrightedly. "What's that?"

Racke listened.

A mysterious sound had fallen upon his ears, a sound as of diamond cutting glass. Somebody was breaking into the school!

Could it be Talbot? No, Racke dismissed that possibility from his mind at once.

"Burglars!" muttered Racke.

He listened again. Once more the sound was repeated, and as far as Racke could make out it came from the direction of the Head's quarters.

Racke's teeth chattered with cold and fright. What should he do? He could not tackle the midnight visitor alone. If he went back to the dormitory and awakened the juniors, they would want to know what he was doing out of bed.

And then a thought, cunning and desperate in nature, occurred to the crafty Racke. Why shouldn't his scheme for getting his revenge on Talbot be carried farther?

Racke did not waste any further time in idle thought. He ran back to the dormitory at top speed, and flung the door wide open.

"Wake up, you chaps!" he exclaimed excitedly.

"Wharrer-marrer?" came a sleepy voice from one of the beds.

"Wake up, for goodness' sake!" cried Racke.

Tom Merry sat up in bed, just at the moment Racke lighted a candle on one of the washstands.

"What's up?"

"Talbot's up to his old games!"

"Talbot?"

"Yes," Racke pointed to Talbot's empty bed. "He's gone downstairs, and he's breaking into the Head's study."

"Rot!"

By this time most of the fellows in the Shell dormitory were wide awake.

"You've had a nightmare, Racke,"

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said Monty Lowther. "Since Talbot gave you a good hiding, you've——"

"I tell you he's burgling the Head's study!"

"Piffle!"

"Well, where is he, then?" asked Racke, with an air of conviction.

The juniors gazed vacantly at Talbot's empty bed.

"Well, he's not here," said Lowther carelessly.

"Of course he isn't," said Racke. "I tell you he's up to his old games! I followed him downstairs, and saw him enter the Head's study."

"You followed him?"

"Why didn't you stop him?"

"I—I—— Because he'd got a blessed crowbar, or something, in his hand," said Racke. "I wasn't going to run the risk of getting a crack over the head."

"Doubtless you thought it was sufficiently cracked already," remarked Monty Lowther humorously.

"Look here," said Racke impatiently, "are you coming downstairs or aren't you?"

"Oh, we'll come," said Tom Merry willingly. "But, I say, I wonder where old Talbot's got to?"

~~~~~

*Eat less  
Bread*

~~~~~

"Haven't I told you he's burgling the Head's study?" snapped Racke.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Talbot's certainly not here, but it's jolly certain he's not doing that!"

"All right, then," said Racke, with an air of finality. "You come downstairs and see."

"Come on, you fellows!" said Tom Merry. "I expect we shall find it's a mare's nest after all!"

The juniors slipped on coats, trousers, and shoes, and left the dormitory.

Downstairs they went, and at length they emerged into the passage in which the Head's study was situated.

"Quiet!" said Tom Merry, leading the way.

He approached the Head's study on tiptoe, and putting his ear to the key-hole, listened.

A faint sound was audible—the sound of somebody moving quickly about the room.

Racke was right after all! Somebody was in the act of burgling the Head's study.

"Can you hear anything?" asked Lowther, in a whisper.

"Yes, there's somebody moving about inside!"

"By Jove!"

Tom Merry bent towards his chums.

"I'm going in!" he said resolutely.

"You chaps follow me! We'll all make a rush for the chap, and nobble him before he can hit out!"

"Right!"

Tom Merry turned the handle of the door and dashed into the study.

door quietly, and at a bound the juniors

The dim light of the moon shone into the study, and Tom Merry's gaze lighted on a crouching figure by the window.

The man there was holding a sack in his hands, but at the sight of the juniors he dropped it like a red-hot coal, and dashed through the broken window. There was a sound of breaking glass as he did so.

"After him!" shouted Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell darted through the window quickly.

The other juniors followed at his heels.

"There he goes!" shouted Tom Merry, pointing ahead. "He's making for the gates!"

The figure was only just discernible, running hard some distance ahead.

"Look! He's climbing the gates!" exclaimed Manners.

"After him!"

The juniors were hot on the scoundrel's heels, and no sooner had the latter dropped on the other side of the gates than Tom Merry's head rose above them.

Tom landed on the other side, and peered ahead.

The man was still running.

Tom Merry and his chums pelted in pursuit.

"He's fallen!" exclaimed Noble suddenly.

"Now we'll get him!"

It was true. The scoundrel had evidently tripped and crashed to the ground.

The juniors increased their speed, Tom Merry still in the lead.

The figure was just rising, but before he could get to his feet Tom Merry had leaped forward.

He threw himself upon the figure.

"Got you, you villain!" he exclaimed, holding on tightly to his captive.

"Here, leggo! What's the game?"

Tom Merry started. The voice sounded familiar to him.

"You beastly burglar!" he cried hotly.

"Burglar!" ejaculated the other.

"You're mad! I'm Talbot!"

Tom Merry gasped.

"Talbot!"

CHAPTER 8.

Accused!

TALBOT!

The juniors gathered round Tom Merry and his captive in a state of dismay.

"What on earth are you chaps doing out of bed at this time of night?" exclaimed Talbot, in surprise.

"We're chasing a burglar!"

"Well, you've jolly well lost him!"

"Rot!" exclaimed Racke gloatingly.

"We've got him!"

"Where is he?" asked Talbot.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Racke. "I like that! I suppose you'll say next that you haven't burgled the Head's study?"

"He burgled the Head's study?"

"Yes, you, you blackguard!"

Talbot struggled to his feet, and stared incredulously at the amazed juniors.

"I don't understand!" he said.

"Piffle!" exclaimed Racke. "You don't want to understand! You've been trying to pinch the Head's silver, and——"

"You're mad, Racke!"

"Oh, am I?" said Racke. "Well, if that's the case, perhaps you'll tell us what you've been doing out of the dormitory?"

"I—I——" Talbot turned to Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom, what's this silly ass talking about?"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was too amazed to say anything.

When Racke had rushed into the dormitory with the startling news that Talbot was burgling the Head's study, he had thought it sheer imagination on the cad's part.

But now he did not know what to think. He had certainly seen somebody in the act of rushing off from the Head's quarters. He had given chase, and had run the fellow to earth.

And that fellow had proved to be Talbot! What else could Tom Merry believe but that the burglar was his chum?

"Great Scott!"

Tom Merry turned round as Racke made a startled ejaculation.

"What's the matter?"

"Look here!" cried Racke. "If this isn't sufficient proof, I should like to know what is!"

The cad of the Shell picked something up from off the ground, and held it out at arm's length. It was a silver ash-tray!

"By Jove!"

The juniors gasped.

"Where did it come from?"

"Better ask Talbot!" said Racke, with a sneer.

"Ask me!" ejaculated Talbot, dumbfounded. "What have I to do with it?"

"You've burgled the Head's study!"

"You cad! I've done nothing of the kind!"

"Well, how did this thing get here?"

Talbot made a hopeless gesture.

"How should I know?" he said.

"Unless—unless it was dropped by the silly ass who barged into me, and sent me flying. I thought it was one of you kids at first, but—"

"A likely story!" sneered Racke.

"You can't cover up your guilt in that way!"

"No jolly fear!" remarked Crooke, with gloating satisfaction.

"You're nothing more or less than a beastly burglar," snapped Racke, "and I hope you're jolly well sacked for this!"

"Oh, shut up, Racke!" said Tom Merry. "There must have been some mistake, and—"

"Mistake," be hanged! Talbot's burgled—"

"You're lying!" cried Talbot indignantly.

"Well, where have you been?"

"I—I— What's that to do with you?"

Racke laughed scornfully.

"That's sufficient for me!" he said, with a sniff. "If you can't explain where you've been, there's no doubt in my mind as to who has burgled the Head's study."

"Nor mine," added Crooke.

"Let's get back—" began Tom Merry. And he broke off abruptly as two dim figures were discernible in the distance.

"Nice goin's on, I must say!"

It was the voice of Taggles, the school porter.

The juniors stared at the approaching figures, and started back as they recognised one of them as their Housemaster.

"Mr. Railton!" gasped Manners.

"Yes, it is I!" replied Mr. Railton.

"What are all you juniors doing out of your dormitory?"

"There's been a burglary!" explained Racke eagerly.

"Burglary!" ejaculated Mr. Railton, in surprise.

"Yes, sir! The Head's study has been broken into, and—"

"Good heavens! Has the scoundrel escaped?"

"No—that is—er—er—"

Racke broke off abruptly.

The other juniors did not speak.

"Come, come!" said Mr. Railton impatiently. "Tell me what has happened! You, Merry, give me an explanation at once!"

"We thought we heard burglars, sir," said Tom Merry slowly, "and—"

"Go on!"



"Look!" gasped Talbot, pointing his searchlight ahead. "It's Lodgey!"

(See Chapter 11.)

"We came downstairs, sir, and— and entered Dr. Holmes' study, and found a man just making off with a lot of silver and stuff. We followed him, and— and—"

"Please continue, Merry!"

Tom Merry hung his head.

"What happened after that, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton. "Did you catch the burglar?"

"Er—er—no, sir!"

"He's escaped?" Mr. Railton's electric torch shone upon Talbot's hand, which was covered with blood. "Good Heavens! You have hurt yourself, Talbot?"

Talbot looked at his right hand, which was bleeding profusely.

"I hadn't noticed it before, sir," he said. "It's nothing much."

"How did you do it?"

Talbot did not reply.

"The window of Dr. Holmes' study was broken, sir," volunteered Racke.

"H'm! I presume you injured your hand in jumping through the window?" said Mr. Railton.

"I don't think so, sir," said Talbot uneasily.

"Well, bind it up with your handkerchief," said Mr. Railton. "And remember to have it attended to in the morning." He turned to the other juniors. "It is very wrong of you boys to break bounds at this time of night, but, all the same, I appreciate your good intentions. It is unfortunate that the burglar has escaped, but we must trust he has been defeated in his evil designs upon Dr. Holmes' property."

"We hope so, sir," said Tom Merry.

"You may go back to your dormitory now," said Mr. Railton. "I will report the matter to Dr. Holmes, and no doubt he will want to see you all in the morning."

The juniors trooped back through the gates into the quad. Mr. Railton opened the door of the School House, and the juniors passed through.

In another five minutes they were

back in their dormitory again, and diving between the sheets.

"Sack for somebody in the morning!" said Racke. "I—Ow! Yow!"

A boot, deftly aimed by Monty Lowther, caught the cad of the Shell on the head.

Racke subsided, and lay back in his bed.

He was anxiously looking forward to the morrow—to the moment he would be able to give his evidence before Dr. Holmes, and secure the expulsion of Talbot.

Things were working out very well indeed from Racke's point of view!

CHAPTER 9.

The Head's Sentence.

"TALBOT!"

"Burgled the Head's study!"

"Who'd have thought it?"

Rumour was rife at St. Jim's the next morning. Racke had played his cards cunningly.

The cad of the Shell had gone out of his way to spread the yarn that Talbot had been guilty of burglary.

Figgins & Co. of the New House heard it, and were amazed. The yarn got to Blake & Co., and they were literally dumbfounded.

"You've been dreaming, Racke!" said Jack Blake. "Talbot's true blue, and —"

"Oh, is he?" said Racke. "You wait and see. Talbot's hours at St. Jim's are numbered. He'll be sacked before the day's out, you take my word!"

"Bosh!"

"All right, then! Wait and see! I'm just going along to the Head's study to explain a few things to him. I expect you'll all be summoned in Hall soon."

Racke grinned evilly, and marched off to the Head's study.

Tap!

"Come in!" sang out the Head, in response to Racke's knock.

Racke entered.

Dr. Holmes was sitting at his desk, with Mr. Railton at his side.

"Oh, Racke," began Dr. Holmes quietly. "I have sent for you because I understand you were the first to give the alarm last night."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me how it all happened."

"Somehow I couldn't sleep last night, sir," explained Racke. "I lay awake, and it must have been about eleven o'clock when I saw somebody get out of bed and leave the dormitory."

The Head looked up quickly.

"Are you referring to a boy in your own dormitory?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Who was he?"

Racke did not reply.

"Please continue, Racke," said the Head coldly. "Who was the boy who left the Shell dormitory?"

"I could not see, sir," said Racke hesitatingly. "It was rather dark. I thought it best to follow the fellow, in case he intended to break bounds. I made up my mind to bring him back."

"Quite so," said Dr. Holmes. "An excellent motive. Did you overtake him?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"What happened then?"

"I lost sight of Ta—— I mean I couldn't see the fellow in the darkness," faltered Racke uneasily. "I got downstairs, and then I heard somebody trying to break into your study."

"What did you do then?"

"I rushed back to the dormitory, and woke the other fellows up," explained Racke. "We then——"

"Surely you noticed then whether anybody was missing?" asked the Head.

"Yes, we—er—did, sir," stammered Racke.

"Who was he?"

Racke did not reply.

"Come, come!" said the Head impatiently. "I quite understand your motive for trying to hide the name of the boy, but I insist that you shall supply it."

"It was Talbot, sir," said Racke at last.

"Talbot?"

"Yes."

The Head rested his elbows on his desk, and entwined his fingers.

"I presume that you do not mean to suggest that Talbot is in any way connected with the burglary?" he said, in measured tones.

"No—er—that is——"

"Pray don't beat about the bush!" said Dr. Holmes sternly. "I can plainly see that you are keeping something back. Tell me everything at once!"

Racke looked at the carpet without speaking.

"Come!" said Dr. Holmes. "Why do you remain silent?"

"I hope you'll excuse me, sir," faltered Racke. "But I'd rather not say anything more. You see, Talbot and I, I am sorry to say, are not very friendly, and if I say anything against him the fellows will think it's spite on my part!"

The Head looked inquiringly at Mr. Railton. The Housemaster nodded.

"Very well," said Dr. Holmes. "I will send for Merry, and question him." The Head rang the bell, and a minute later Toby, the page, entered the study.

"Toby," said the Head, "tell Master Merry I wish to see him at once!"

"Yessir!" said Toby.

The door closed after him.

A few moments later it opened, and in walked Tom Merry.

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"You sent for me, sir," said the captain of the Shell.

"Yes, Merry. I want you to give me an account of what happened last night. I understand that Racke informed you that somebody was burgling my study."

"That's right, sir."

"What did you do then?"

"We all went downstairs, sir," explained Tom Merry. "We heard somebody moving about in your study, so we rushed in and tried to collar the chap."

"You did not succeed?"

"No, sir; the chap was just a bit too quick for us. He jumped through the window, and we followed him."

"H'm!"

The Head tapped his desk with a pen. He looked up suddenly, and stared straight at Tom Merry.

"Now, Merry," he said sternly. "I am given to understand that before this alarm was given, a certain junior had left the Shell dormitory. Is that correct?"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed, and he looked at Racke.

"I asked you a question, Merry," said the Head. "Pray be good enough to answer it! When you were awakened, did you discover that a junior was missing from your dormitory?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry slowly.

"Tell me his name."

Tom Merry did not answer.

"Merry!" rapped out the Head. "I command you to tell me the junior's name."

Still there was no reply.

"Dear me!" muttered Dr. Holmes. "I cannot understand your reason for trying to hide this junior's name. Now, tell me, was it not Talbot?"

Tom Merry started back in astonishment.

Dr. Holmes noticed the movement, and he tapped anxiously on his desk with his pen.

The answer to the question was plainly written on Tom Merry's face.

"We will resume," said the Head.

"Now, Merry, has it occurred to you that Talbot might in any way be connected with this mysterious burglary?"

Tom Merry clenched his fists tightly, and turned to Racke.

"You rotter!" he exclaimed hotly.

"Have you——" "Silence!" commanded the Head severely. "How dare you behave in such a manner in my presence?"

"I am sorry, sir," said the captain of the Shell, "but Talbot is absolutely innocent, I would stake my life on that!"

"I am very glad you hold such a high opinion of your schoolfellow," said the Head kindly. "At the same time, you must learn to restrain yourself in my presence."

Dr. Holmes turned to the Housemaster.

"Will you please fetch Talbot, Railton?" he said. "I can see no other way of getting to the bottom of this matter but questioning him."

"Certainly, sir," said Mr. Railton. And he went in search of Talbot.

The Housemaster returned in less than five minutes. Talbot followed him into the Head's study, his face pale and anxious.

"Talbot," said the Head. "I have learned with much regret that you broke bounds last night."

"Yes, sir," replied Talbot straightforwardly.

"Why did you do so?"

"I received a note stating that a friend of mine was in trouble, and particularly wanted to see me, sir," explained Talbot.

"Who was the friend?"

"John Rivers."

"Did you see him?"

"No, sir," said Talbot. "It was a hoax. The note was sent by a rascal

named Lodgey, for the purpose of extorting money from me."

"Dear me," said Dr. Holmes, in surprise. "What a desperate villain!"

"He is, sir."

"What happened when you left the man?" asked the Head.

"I came straight back to St. Jim's," said Talbot, "and met the fellows chasing the burglar."

"You didn't take part in the chase from my study, then?"

"No, sir."

"Then how came you to cut your hand?" said Dr. Holmes deliberately.

"I really don't know, sir," said Talbot calmly, "unless I fell on a piece of broken glass when the burglar rushed into me."

"The burglar rushed into you?"

"I presume he was the burglar, sir. I couldn't see his face in the darkness."

The Head did not speak for a few moments. He was thinking deeply. The rumour that Talbot was guilty of the burglary had reached his ears. He had heard that Talbot had cut himself in dashing out of his study, and Talbot's indefinite answer on this matter puzzled him considerably.

Was Talbot telling the truth? The Head could not make up his mind on this question.

Dr. Holmes glanced at first one junior and then another. At length his gaze became fixed on Racke's hand, which was fumbling in his pocket.

Racke drew out his hand, and tried to place it behind his back. But he was not quick enough. The Head had caught sight of the article which Racke was holding in his hand.

"Racke! What have you there?"

"It's n-n-nothing, sir," said Racke uneasily.

"Nonsense, boy!" exclaimed the Head. "It belongs to me. It is one of my silver cigarette ash-trays."

"Oh!"

Tom Merry and Talbot gasped.

"How did this come into your possession?" asked the Head.

"I found it," said Racke, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Where did you find it?"

Racke made no answer.

"Come, come," said the Head, losing his patience. "What motive can you have for not wishing to tell me where you found the article?"

"I'd rather not, sir."

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, sir, it—it might throw suspicion on an innocent person."

"Nonsense, boy! It might help us to discover the perpetrator of the crime. I command you to tell me! Where did you find this ash-tray?"

"By Talbot's side as he lay in the road, sir!"

It was out at last! Tom Merry looked daggers at the cad of the Shell. Talbot hung his head.

The Head nodded his head sorrowfully.

"Talbot," he said at length, "can you prove to me that you went to see this man Lodgey?"

"Yes, sir, I will show you the note I had from him."

Talbot felt in his pockets for the note. He went through his trousers' pockets, and then those of his waistcoat. But the note was not there. It had disappeared.

"I am waiting," said the Head coldly.

"I cannot find it, sir," said Talbot slowly. "I must have lost it!"

"Lost it?" said the Head deliberately.

"Did you ever have it?"

"Yes, sir," said Talbot, his eyes flashing. "I——"

"I am sorry to doubt your word, Talbot," said the Head austere, "but, on the evidence, I am forced to do so.

Your breaking bounds, the cut on your wrist, the finding of my ash-tray, all point to one fact. You have been tempted, and have fallen. You deliberately broke into my study for the purpose of robbery!"

"No, sir, I—"

The Head put up his hand for silence. "Argument will not help your case," he said. "I am surprised—amazed! Before finally deciding upon your expulsion, I will send for the man Lodgey, and question him. For the time being you will remain in the punishment-room. I will send for you later. Perhaps, Railton, you will attend to this wretched boy."

"Certainly, sir," said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Racke and Merry, you may go!"

Tom Merry followed Racke out of Dr. Holmes' study. Neither spoke. Tom Merry's mind was crowded with conflicting thoughts. His faith in Talbot was unshaken, but the mystery was too deep for him.

Racke dashed off to his own study. The cad of the Shell knew he had to move quickly if his cunning schemes were not to fall like a pack of cards at the eleventh hour.

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Lodgey Does as He's Told.

RACKE rushed into his study. Crooke looked up in surprise. "Hallo!" exclaimed Crooke. "What's up?"

"Everything!" replied Racke comprehensively. "Talbot's booked for the sack if only we can square Lodgey?"

"Square Lodgey?" exclaimed Crooke. "What do you mean?"

"Why," explained Racke quickly, "the old boy's practically convinced that Talbot was the burglar, and he's only waiting to find out whether Lodgey sent that note before he gives the cad the order of the boot."

Crooke's face suddenly went pale.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "Supposing Lodgey swears we put him up—"

"You fool!" cried Racke. "We're going to square Lodgey to swear that he never saw Talbot last night, and that he knows nothing about the note."

"Oh, I see!"

Racke picked up his cap, and darted out of the study.

He went downstairs, and made straight for the bicycle-shed. In another moment he had his bicycle out, and was pedalling down the road to Rylcombe as fast as he could go.

Racke knew where to find Mr. Lodgey.

He jumped off his bicycle at the Green Man, and, passing through the back gate, entered the dingy bar-parlour.

Mr. Lodgey was there, and he jumped quickly to his feet as Racke entered.

"Allo, Master Racke!" he said. "Wot—"

Racke beckoned the man outside.

Mr. Lodgey stepped forward, and closed the door of the bar-parlour after him.

"Look here!" said Racke firmly. "Why didn't you do what you were told last night?"

"Sorry, sir!" said Mr. Lodgey regretfully. "I did try, but that young feller Talbot twisted the game. 'E's a spiteful young brute, 'e is, and 'e landed me such a one that—"

"Well, never mind what happened!" said Racke impatiently. "You didn't do what you were told, so you won't get the money! All the same, you can have a fiver if you care to earn it."

Mr. Lodgey's bleary eyes gleamed greedily.

"That's werry kind o' you, Master Racke. What is it you want me to do?"

"Verry little," said Racke craftily. "A

chap from St. Jim's is coming down here to fetch you to the school."

"Fetch me? Whaffor?"

"Oh, nothing much!" said Racke. "There's nothing for you to be alarmed about. The old boy at the school wants to find out whether you sent a note to Talbot."

"Oh, I see!"

"Now, this is where you can earn the fiver. Swear that you never sent the note, and that you never met Talbot last night, and the money's yours."

"That's werry good o' you—"

"Will you do it?"

"Course I will!" said Mr. Lodgey. "I'd do anything for a gentleman like you, Master Racke!"

"Well, here's a couple of quid," said Racke, handing the rogue a couple of notes. "You shall have the other three when the job's finished."

"I'm enter it!"

"I must be going now," Racke said, mounting his machine. "Mind, whatever you do, that you don't let on that I've been down here this morning!"

"You can trust me, Master Racke," said Mr. Lodgey.

And he went back to the bar-parlour, where Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, found him half an hour later.

Kildare explained to the rogue that the Head particularly wanted to see him, and requested him to go along to St. Jim's immediately.

Mr. Lodgey went, and entered the gates of St. Jim's with Kildare.

The juniors stared at Mr. Lodgey as he crossed the quad, but their stares were lost upon Mr. Lodgey. He walked along, with his discoloured nose high in the air. Mr. Lodgey felt very lofty and superior at that moment.

The man was shown into the Head's study, where Dr. Holmes was seated, talking to Mr. Railton.

Mr. Lodgey took off his hat, and stood facing the Head in a deferential manner. "Good-morning, guv'nor!" said Mr. Lodgey, endeavouring to be polite.

"Werry pleased to meet yer!"

"Ahem!" The Head coughed. "You are the man Lodgey, I presume?"

"That is my name, guv'nor."

"Verry good!" said Dr. Holmes quietly. "I have sent for you because I want to ask you one or two questions. Do you happen to know a boy in this school named Talbot?"

"Talbot?" said Mr. Lodgey.

"Yes."

Mr. Lodgey scratched his head, pretending to think hard.

"No; I can't say as I know 'im, guv'nor," he said at length. "You have never written to a boy named Talbot?"

"Me, guv'nor?"

"Yes."

"Good-evenings, no!" said Mr. Lodgey flatly. "I wouldn't think o' writing letters to boys! Why—"

"You didn't write a letter to Talbot yesterday?"

"That's a fact I didn't!" declared the rogue unflinchingly.

The Head pursed his lips.

"I suppose you didn't happen to meet a St. Jim's boy in the road last night?" asked the Head.

"Wot time, guv'nor?"

"H'm!" muttered the Head. "I suppose it would have been between ten and twelve o'clock."

Mr. Lodgey shook his head.

"That would 'ave been impossible, guv'nor," he said, "seeing as 'ow I went to bed early 'cause I 'ad an attack of rheumatics. I was in bed long afore ten o'clock!"

"Then—then—"

Dr. Holmes was about to address Mr.

Railton, but he broke off, and faced Mr. Lodgey.

"I am obliged to you for coming here," he said. "I trust I have not wasted too much of your time."

"Not at all, guv'nor," said Mr. Lodgey. "If there's anything else you want to know, you've only—"

"No, no!" said Dr. Holmes. "I have heard quite enough!"

The Head rang for Toby, and a moment later the pageboy put in an appearance.

"Toby," said Dr. Holmes, "show this gentleman downstairs, please!"

Mr. Lodgey bowed before the Head, and took his departure. The door closed behind the scoundrel, and Dr. Holmes faced the Housemaster.

"What do you think, Railton?" he asked slowly.

Mr. Railton shook his head sadly.

"I am sorry—very sorry," he said; "but there seems no doubt that Talbot is guilty. It's a pity—a great pity!"

"I am in agreement with you there, Railton," said Dr. Holmes. "I had come to look upon Talbot as an honourable, upright lad. I could have sworn that he would never have taken the downward path again; but now—now I have only one course before me—to expel him from the school."

"You do not think a flogging—"

"Certainly not!" said the Head firmly.

"I can quite appreciate your sympathetic motives, Railton, but a flogging will certainly not meet the case. The boy is proved a hardened criminal, and, as such, I cannot allow him to contaminate his schoolfellows. He must be expelled—and at once, too! Please be good enough to bring Talbot to me."

Mr. Railton left the study, and a few moments later returned with Talbot.

The Head gave the junior a severe glance.

"Talbot," he said firmly, "in spite of your protestations of innocence, I have, I am sorry to say, received proof conclusive that you lied to me this morning. I had sincerely hoped that a conversation with the man Lodgey—the man you were supposed to have met last night—would have borne out your story, but such is not the case. He flatly denies having sent you a note, or having met you at all. Therefore—"

"The man's a liar!" exclaimed Talbot.

"He—"

"Silence!" rapped out the Head angrily. "Your guilt has been proved conclusively. You have been found guilty of having attempted to steal my property; you have stooped again to crime. I have, therefore, no course left to me but to expel you from St. Jim's. Imprisonment would be your just punishment, but I refrain from handing you over to the police, hoping that your expulsion will be a lesson to you, and that in future you will strive to lead a just and honourable life. You will remain in the punishment-room until arrangements have been made for your departure from this school—for ever!"

The Head glanced at Mr. Railton meaningly.

The Housemaster took Talbot by the arm, and led him out of the study.

Talbot's cup of sorrow was full to overflowing. A cunning web of intrigue had been woven around him—a web from which he saw no escape.

He was to be expelled from St. Jim's!

NEXT WEEK!

St. Jim's boys figure in the Double-length Complete Story in the

"MAGNET" CHRISTMAS NO.

CHAPTER 11.

The Last Hope.

"TALBOT'S sacked!"

The news rang through the length and breadth of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. heard it and gasped.

"Can't be true!" said Tom. "There's been some mistake somewhere."

"Well, Talbot's locked up in the detention-room," said Manners. "Kildare told me so just now. He's booked for the sack in the morning!"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry staunchly. "Talbot's as innocent as you or I."

"The Head doesn't seem to think so," said Manners.

"Blow the Head!"

"But——"

"Everybody makes mistakes sometimes, and the Head's made one now with a vengeance!"

The door of the study opened, and George Gore walked in.

"You've heard the news, then," he said, noticing the glum looks on the juniors' faces.

"About Talbot?"

"Yes."

"We've heard it all serene," said Tom Merry. "It's rotten—beastly rotten! I guess the Head must be off his chump to think old Talbot could be such a rotter."

"Same here," said Gore. "I'd bet anything that Talbot's innocent. There's some mysterious hand at work, and I wish we could get to the bottom of the affair."

"So do I," said Tom Merry anxiously. "But what can we do?"

Gore shook his head regretfully.

"Nothing that I know of," he said.

"But I'm going along to speak to Talbot. Maybe he'll be able to suggest something."

"Right-ho!"

It was plain that Gore felt keenly the sacking of Talbot. The Terrible Three were rather surprised. Talbot had done much for Gore; but Gore had not hitherto shown a great amount of gratitude. During the last term or two, however, he had become in every way a far more decent fellow. And now he was to show that there was more loyalty in him than anyone had guessed.

Gore left the study, and walked along to the detention-room. He put his mouth to the keyhole.

"Talbot!" he breathed.

"Hallo! That you, Gore, old chap?" said Talbot. "I take it you've heard that I'm booked for the sack?"

"Yes, worse luck," said Gore. "Of course, it's all rot. We know you're innocent——"

"The Head doesn't think so," said Talbot.

"Hang the Head!" exclaimed Gore.

"He's gone off his dot. Silly ass to think that you'd pinch his tosh!"

"But the facts were against me, old son."

"Blow the facts!" snapped Gore. "We know you're innocent, and that's an end of it. Now, look here, haven't you any idea who's been working this business against you?"

"None at all."

"Well, I have. I've got my reasons. Can't you suggest anything that could be done to clear you?"

"Nothing. By Jove! I wonder——"

Gore put his ear closer to the keyhole. "Thought of anything?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," replied Talbot. "It might help if—— I say, Gore, old scout, would you care to run the risk of breaking bounds to-night?"

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"Do anything if it will help to clear you," said Gore loyally.

"Right-ho! I'll meet you out in the quad at eleven o'clock," said Talbot. "I'll climb out of the window, and get down by the ivy."

"I'll be there!"

"By the way, if you can possibly manage it, bring an electric torch with you," said Talbot. "We shall want it."

"All right," said Gore.

He came across Racke and Crooke a little later.

"Best bit of work the Head's done for a long time," said Racke, grinning evilly.

"Eh, what's that?" asked Gore.

"Talbot's sacked," said Racke.

"Haven't you heard? We ought to be all jolly thankful to the Head for——"

Smack!

Out flashed Gore's fist, and smote Racke on the nose. The cad of the Shell staggered backwards.

"You can be thankful for that!" said Gore grimly. "If you say anything more about Talbot, I'll knock your silly head off your shoulders!"

He passed on, leaving the cad of the Shell rubbing his nose ruefully. Racke had not expected so determined a faith in Talbot from George Gore.

Bed-time came at last, and Gore went up to the Shell dormitory, but he did not sleep.

He waited until about a quarter to eleven, and then he got out of bed. The

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rest of the juniors were fast asleep, and they did not hear Gore get up and leave the dormitory.

Gore left the school by the same way by which Talbot had passed the previous night.

He crossed the quad quietly, and met Talbot beneath the window of the punishment-room.

The two juniors climbed the wall, and were soon standing in the road leading to Rylcombe.

"Got the torchlight?" asked Talbot.

"Yes."

"Good! Hand it over!"

Gore passed the torchlight to his chum, and Talbot shone the light on the quiet, deserted road.

"Now, look here," said Talbot, "you remember I had a note from that beast Lodgey the other day, asking me to meet him after lights out, because he wanted to tell me something about John Rivers?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was a rotten trick! The scoundrel only sent the note to try and get money out of me."

"Great Scott!"

"It would have been all right if the rascal had admitted to the Head that he sent the note, but he didn't. He denied flatly ever having seen or written to me."

"The rotter!" exclaimed Gore. "But—but surely you showed the note to the Head?"

"I would have done if I'd had it," said Talbot. "But I lost it. It must have fallen out of my pocket when I was struggling with Lodgey, or when I barged into that burglar Johnny."

"By Jove!"

"My only chance now is to find the note," said Talbot. "It may have been

blown away by the wind, or it may still be lying in the road. That's why I brought you out to-night."

"Oh, good! Let's get along!"

The two chums trod slowly along the road leading to Rylcombe, Talbot shining the torchlight from side to side and up and down.

They walked slowly, yard by yard, examining every inch of the ground.

They progressed at a snail's pace, and at length had covered quite fifty yards without meeting with success.

"I guess it must have got caught in the wind," said Talbot, "and——"

"Keep on," replied Gore. "We haven't half searched yet."

"Look!" gasped Talbot, pointing his searchlight ahead, so that it shone some distance up the road.

"By Jove! There's somebody lying in the road!" exclaimed Gore.

"Come on!" said Talbot, and he dashed ahead.

Talbot shone his torchlight on the prostrate man.

"He's been run over!" he said.

"Yes," said Gore. "And—look! He's in a pretty bad way. His face is bleeding, and——"

"It's Lodgey!"

"So it is," said Gore, in surprise. "I wonder how he got here. I suppose he's been knocked down by a motor-car."

"Looks like it!"

"What had we better do?"

"Carry him to St. Jim's," said Talbot quickly. "He wants looking after at once. He's unconscious and——"

"But the note——" protested Gore.

"Oh, hang the note!" said Talbot.

"That can wait. This chap may peg out if he's not attended to soon. Come on, Gore, old chap, give a hand with him!"

Gore took hold of the man's feet, whilst Talbot grasped his arms, and the two started back for St. Jim's.

They arrived at the gates, and rang the bell loudly.

Taggles came out, and glared through the bars of the gate.

"What I see is——" began the old porter, but Talbot cut him short.

"Buck up and fetch Mr. Railton!" he said commandingly.

"But——"

"Hurry up, I tell you, unless you want this chap here to die!"

"Good evings!" gasped Taggles, and he tore off in quest of Mr. Railton.

A few minutes later, the gates of the school were opened, and Mr. Railton, looking stern and startled, stood before the juniors.

"What is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Mr. Railton severely.

"We've got a chap here who's in a pretty bad way, sir," explained Talbot. "He's been run over I think, and he's unconscious."

Mr. Railton did not wait to ask the juniors why they had broken bounds.

"Bring him along to the sanatorium," he said. "I will see that he is attended to immediately."

Talbot and Gore carried their charge to the sanatorium, where they laid him carefully upon a bed.

At the same moment, Lodgey's eyes began to quiver, and he began to mutter inaudibly.

His words at first were undistinguishable, but gradually they became clearer.

"It ain't no good, Mr. Racke!" murmured Mr. Lodgey. "You promised to pay and you ain't."

Mr. Railton looked at the man in surprise.

"It's all right for you, Mr. Racke," continued the man, in low tones. "But it ain't no good for me. I sent that note to young Talbot, although I told

your Head I didn't. It was all through you—and—Oh, dear!"

The man's head sank back on to the pillow, and the two juniors and Mr. Railton gazed at one another in dismay. "Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Did you hear what he was saying?"

"Yes, sir," said Talbot. "Something about the note he sent me."

"Yes, I wonder—"

Mr. Railton stopped speaking as Lodgey commenced to mutter again.

"Pay up, Mr. Racke!" he murmured. "I'll go straight to your 'eadmaster if you don't, and I'll tell 'im that you paid me to write to young Talbot and—Oh-h-h-h!"

With a long drawn out moan, the injured man subsided.

"Amazing!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Then—then it appears that you were speaking the truth, Talbot."

"My hat!" cried Gore thankfully. "That's sufficient to prove Talbot's innocence, sir!"

"H'm!" muttered Mr. Railton. "It is all very strange. It is clear there has been a mistake somewhere. I shall have to go into this matter in the morning. You boys had better return to your sleeping quarters. I will attend to this man."

"Very well, sir," said the juniors, and they left the sanatorium.

"By Jove!" said Gore, when they were alone. "I'll give Racke the hiding of his life for this!"

"Racke?" questioned Talbot.

"Yes; Racke!" said Gore. "Can't you see that he's the cause of all the trouble? He's been scheming to get you sacked. But, of course, you don't know the truth about the thefts in the dorm the other night! Racke tried to plant the stuff on you! Everything's worked out very well for him in this last bizney, but he's going to get a nasty surprise in the morning."

And Racke did!

"Talbot's cleared!"

Gore rushed into the study shared by Tom Merry & Co. the next morning with the news.

"Really?"

"Yes," said Gore, and he explained to the Terrible Three of his adventure of the previous night.

"Lodgey's recovered consciousness," he concluded, "and he's told the Head all about the note he sent to Talbot. Racke paid him to do it, the scheming rotter!"

"Racke?" cried the Terrible Three, in chorus.

"Yes," said Gore. "He's been working to get old Talbot kicked out of St. Jim's, and he would have succeeded if

we hadn't picked up Lodgey on the road."

"The rotten outsider!" exclaimed Tom Merry heatedly. "He ought to be expelled!"

"Well, something's going to happen," said Gore. "He's just gone along to see the Head. I'm going to wait and see him come out."

"Oh, good! We'll come as well!" The Terrible Three followed Levison out of the study and they made their way to the Head's study.

A few moments the cad of the Shell made his appearance. His hands were tucked under his arms, and he was shouting and groaning as though in bitter anguish.

The Head had decided not to expel the cad, but had given him a severe thrashing.

The juniors who saw him emerge had no sympathy whatever for him. But for George Gore, who had stood so loyally by Talbot, they had a new feeling of respect and liking.

Gore had played up like a man, and Talbot was not the fellow to forget it. Nor would others forget!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"TOM MERRY'S BRAG!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"TOM MERRY'S BRAG!"

By Martin Clifford.

Bragging is not much in Tom's line, as you all know.

But when a fellow gets into a heated argument he is apt to say more than he means, as I do not doubt some of you have found out before this. One wonders how one could have been such an ass as to say it; but the fact remains—it has been said, and one must either climb down or do one's best to make good the vain vaunt.

What did Tom Merry say?

He said that School House, with Trumble in goal and Grundy in the half-back line, could beat New House!

It does not sound likely, does it? Baggy as goalkeeper! Practically an open goal for sharpshooters like Figgis and Redfern and the rest. Grundy in the ranks of the halves! It would not matter so much if he would only stay there. But you know how willing old Grundy is; he wants to help everyone, and tries his best—which his comrades are apt to call his worst—to do it.

And what was the result?

That you will learn next week!

THE "MAGNET."

Next week's issue of our companion paper is the

GREAT EXTRA SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

You cannot afford to miss this. You could not afford to do so if it cost quite a lot. But it only costs

TWOPENCE!

Here is a list of its contents:

"THE GREYFRIARS CHRISTMAS PARTY!"—by Frank Richards. Some of the St. Jim's fellows—Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, Kouni Rao, and Buck Finn—appear in this story, which is an additional reason why you should all read it.

"THE MAGNET WHO'S WHO?"—similar to the GEM "Who's Who?", which you had a fortnight ago.

"THE GHOST OF WHARTON LODGE!"—by Frank Richards.

"TAKING COVER!"—by Sidney Drew.

"HELPING BLINKERS!"—a story told by Squiff, and lifted from the "Greyfriars Herald."

A BIT MORE OF "GEM" HISTORY.

The last instalment of this rather novel serial carried us to where Tom Merry and his chums went to America. We had then in succession "Tom Merry in New York," "Tom Merry in Chicago," "Tom Merry in the Rockies," and "Tom Merry & Co. Out West." They returned, bringing Buck Finn with them, and the next story was "The Ragging of Buck Finn."

In No. 57, New Series, St. Jim's welcomed Clifton Dane, but Gore and Mellish didn't, and behaved very unpleasantly to the Canadian junior. In No. 58 Skimpole won a scholarship which enabled him to stay on at St. Jim's when otherwise he must have left. The next story was "The Rival Editors"—Skimpy and Tom Merry. Then there was the yarn in which Digby got a twenty-pound note and an invitation to take a select party to Liverpool, both coming from an uncle. Soon after came "Tom Merry, Scout-Master." "The St. Jim's Terriers" followed. "The St. Jim's Inventor" introduced Bernard Dane. Then Dane discovered that he possessed hypnotic powers—not the Grundy kind, you know—real ones. And in "The Form-master's Secret" Mr. Ratcliff fell in love with Edith Glyn. Then there was the first visit of a party of fellows from the school, including the Terrible Three, the chums of No. 6, and Figgis & Co., as well as Jameson and Curly Gibson, who were Wally's guests.

More next week!

NOTICES.

Correspondence Wanted.

By R. Moyle, 49, Peel Street, West Melbourne, Australia—with readers anywhere.

By S. R. Mapplebeck, 22, Melville Place, Woodhouse Ridge, Leeds—with readers anywhere.

By Leslie Wordsworth, 28, Rulross Road, Brixton, S.W. 9—with boys of 14 anywhere in British Isles.

By Harold J. Goldstone, 54, Blucher Street, Holloway Road, Birmingham—with boy readers.

By Geo. Dougherty, 51, Little King Street, Hockley, Birmingham—with boy readers in Australia; especially Melbourne.

By Walter E. Cooper, 27, North Street, Maldon, Essex—with readers about 15 in England and Canada interested in natural history, birds especially.

By A. Thatcher, 5/26, Wansbeck Road, Vic-

toria Park, London, E. 9—with readers interested in stamp collecting.

By John Cotter, 10, Rippelson Road, Plumstead, S.E. 18—with boy readers about 14 in United States or China.

By I. Nathan, 115, Sir Lowry Road, Cape Town, South Africa—with boy readers anywhere; would also like to join correspondence club near Cape Town.

By Stephen Dillon, 9, Coigne Terrace, Barry Dock, Glam—with boy reader, 17-18, in Colonies.

By Miss Ethel Boardman, 83, McTier Street, Belfast—with girl readers, 16-18.

R. W. Lock, 3, Apsley Terrace, Water-moor, Cirencester, asks Frank and Fred Coolican, who left the town in 1914, to communicate with old chums.

By Miss May Shelley, 46, Jersey Street, Brighton—with girl readers in London.

By Arthur Rhodes, 98, Killingham Road, Bradford—with boy readers of 16 in the United Kingdom.

By Harry Dyson, 14, Calverley Lane, Rodley—with English reader in Canada.

By G. Caldwell, 56, Boswell Street, Bootle, Liverpool—with reader anywhere abroad.

By L. W. Frost, The Nora, 47, Market Street, Milton, Staffs—with readers anywhere.

By G. Slocombe, 21, Platinum Street, Roath, Cardiff—with boy readers, 15-16.

By Miss Ethel Broadley, 5, Garden Terrace, Heaton, Bradford—with girl readers, 16-21, in New Zealand.

By S. G. Aylard, 83, Acton Lane, Chiswick, London, W. 4—with boy reader, 14-16, in Tasmania or New Zealand who would exchange stamps.

By Miss Mabel Atkinson, Room 75, C.P.A., Ltd., St. James's Buildings, Oxford Street, Manchester—with girl reader in Africa.

By A. W. Lloyd, 6, Grenfell Road, Hereford—with readers interested in photography.

By Miss Agnes Hewing, 26, of 23, Crown Gardens, Crown Road, Sutton, Surrey; Miss Lucy Brown, 19, of 46, William Road, Sutton, Surrey; and Miss Beatrice Dowsing, 19, of 3, Palmerston Road, Sutton, Surrey—with girl readers.

Your Editor



THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA

Our Great New Serial Story.

THE CHIEF CHARACTERS OF THE STORY.

PHILIP DERWENT	..	..	The twins from Tasmania—Philip (Flip) at Highcliffe, Philippa (Flap) at Cliff House.
PHILIPPA DERWENT	..	..	
PONSONBY	..	..	The leader of the Highcliffe nuts.
GADSBY	..	..	One of the nuts, and Flip's enemy.
VAVASOUR	..	..	Another of them—an empty-headed swell—hand in glove with Gadsby.
MONSON MINOR	..	..	Yet another—sulky—disposed to the Gadsby faction.
MERTON	..	..	Two more of the nuts—chums of Flip's—they share No. 6 Study with him.
TUNSTALL	..	..	
FRANK COURTENAY	..	..	Captain of the Fourth at Highcliffe—a fine fellow.
RUPERT DE COURCY	..	..	His chum, known as the Caterpillar.
THE GREYFRIARS FELLOWS	..	..	For further information see the "Magnet."
MARJORIE HAZELDENE	..	..	
CLARA TREVELYN	..	..	Cliff House girls and friends of Flap.
PHYLLIS HOWELL	..	..	
MOLLY GRAY	..	..	A little red-headed Cliff House junior—knows Merton at home.

Gadsby, Vavasour, and Hazeldene, of Greyfriars, have abducted Flip's cockatoo, and the search for the bird delays the five-a-side fight between Greyfriars and Highcliffe, which ends in a draw. Flip plays his first game of nap, and is wrongly accused by Mr. Mobbs of smoking. He turns out for the Form team, and he, Courtenay, and the Caterpillar all suffer from the brutal tactics of a member of the opposing side, named Chiker. Gadsby, accompanied by Vavasour, who does not like it, however, makes friends with this man, in the hope of using him against Flip.

(Now read on.)

A Deep Dodge.
ARE you going to ask me to tea, Flippy, by gad?" said Ponsonby. "You're rather askin' yourself, aren't you?" returned Flip, laughing. "But you know you're welcome any time."

"Might extend the invitation, eh?" Pon nudged Flip as he spoke. "Will you fellows come?" Flip said. "I shall be no end pleased, and I'm sure Tunstall and Merton will, too. And we happen to be able to give you a bit of a spread without hurting the feelings of the Foo Controller. Merton's had a special hamper, and what's his is Tun's and mine, of course." "I accept, with pleasure, I assure you, Derwent," drawled the Caterpillar. "An' I'll see that Franky comes. It's war-bread an' no dashed sugar in our joint establishment, an' we can do with a change."

"I'll come all serene," said Courtenay. "Thanks, Derwent!" Flip felt very bucked. He did not know Cecil Ponsonby yet, though, of course, he thought he did. That wily youth had engineered his plan with his usual craft.

It would hardly have done to ask Courtenay and the Caterpillar to his own study. But he had practically invited them to Flip's, which served his purpose even better, and did not arouse suspicion—as he thought.

But the Caterpillar suspected. Rupert De Courcy had come to believe that Pon did nothing from straightforward motives. He was not far wrong.

Merton and Tunstall arrived before Frank and the Caterpillar had come back from their bath and change. But Flip had hurried, and was already at work getting the tea-table ready. Pon had gone to his own study.

"Settin' for six, Flippy? How's that?" asked Tunstall.

"Pon and Courtenay and De Courcy are coming. I knew you chaps wouldn't mind."

"Aren't you gettin' mixed, dear boy? You must mean Pon an' Gaddy an' Vav," said Merton. "Or Courtenay an' His Grace the Caterpillar an' Yates or Smithson. You can't mean what you say!"

"I generally do," replied Flip. "I haven't got into your way of talking out of my hat. And I'm not mixed now. It's as I tell you."

"By Jupiter! You must have had a good nerve to ask those three together!"

"Pon suggested it."

"Whew! What game is he up to now?"

"I don't think he's up to any game," Flip answered. "Isn't it reasonable enough to suppose that he's got sick of all this silly jangling?"

"It's reasonable enough, but it don't sound a dashed bit like Pon. There was Saul of Tarsus, of course—his conversion was middlin' sudden. But Pon don't remind me a lot of him. What do you think, Tun?"

"I don't think, I'll do like another historical character—I'll wait an' see, by Jupiter!"

"Deep—deep—deep!" crooned Cocky.

"He's talkin' about—"

Merton cut off his sentence very sharply, for Pon came in just then, and it was Pon's name he had been going to mention.

"How's your poor face?" inquired Cocky, in quite a sympathetic tone.

"By gad, that bird's a dashed knock-out!" said Pon. "He means my frontpiece, of course. Thank you, old boy, it's very well, all things considered."

Up in the bath-room the Caterpillar was saying to Courtenay:

"Ware traps, Franky, my bonny boy! Not for nothin' is our dear young friend Pon showin' such sudden aimability."

"Aren't you too suspicious, Rupert?"

"It is possible, old scout. I'm inclined that way, indeed, but I don't think we can be too suspicious of Pon."

"I shouldn't have accepted if—"

"That's where you're wrong. Why don't you go in for entomology, like me?"

"Entomology? What on earth—"

"Studyin' the habit of insects, Franky. Pon's the insect in this case; an', even as Solomon studied the ant an' Lord Avebury the bee, so do I study Pon!"

"You're too absurd, Rupert!"

But the Caterpillar shook a wise head.

"No, Franky—no! There's no absurdity in thinkin' that what has happened before may happen again. Didn't some brainy chap say that history kept happening over an' over again?"

"Well, you wouldn't call this—"

"But I should, dear boy! Everythin's history—Alfred burnin' the mutton chops—Pon plottin' plots, like Lobster Bolo—King

John flickin' ink on Simon De Montfort's collar after he had signed Magna Charta—"

"Now you're getting mixed!"

"Well, it may have been Oliver Cromwell who flicked, but I'm pretty sure it was Simon's collar. I've often wondered how he looked in armour an' a white collar. Somethin' like a chap in brown boots, a frock-coat, an' a straw hat, I should say, or even more so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Courtenay was still smiling at his chum's wild talk when he came into No. 6. He had a very winning smile, and Flip wondered how Pon could have gone on disliking him so long. But it seemed as if it was going to be all right now.

Tea was quite a jolly meal. No one said anything that jarred, and Pon was as friendly in manner to all as a fellow could well be. They talked of the fight on the sea-shore, which Courtenay and the Caterpillar had missed, of course, and of the match that afternoon. Merton's hamper provided a goodly store of non-rationed foods, expensive things such as the great majority cannot afford to buy; and they made a very pleasant change, though at Highcliffe rationing was by no means so strictly enforced as at Greyfriars.

Frank Courtenay began to feel sure the Caterpillar must be wrong. He was only too ready to hold out the right hand of friendship to his cousin if there were any chance of its being taken by Pon. But he had been tricked too often to be in too big a hurry.

Of one thing he was quite sure—if Pon had plotted anything, Flip and Merton and Tunstall were not in league with him. Their laughter rang too true, their hospitality was too plainly genuine for that.

The meal over, Pon thrust his hand into his breast-pocket and half drew out a cigarette. But he pushed it back again.

"Sorry, Derwent! he said. "Mustn't get you into a dashed row with Mobby again!"

"Well, I'd rather you didn't," replied Flip. "You cleared me that time, but I do rather bar having to explain things to Mobby."

"Wasn't aware that you did explain, dear boy. Thought that was part of Mobby's grievance, confound the snobbish little worm!"

"I couldn't exactly tell him it was you."

I told him it wasn't me. It isn't worth talking about, Pon."

"Since when has the dear Mobbs put his exceedingly flat foot down upon smokin', Pon?" asked the Caterpillar blandly.

"Ask me another! Depends upon who smokes, y'know. It's all right for me or you or Algy or Tun here—or for Gaddy or Vav or Monson. I'm not sure that Courtenay couldn't carry it off—he's a bit afraid of Courtenay in the scrimpy little heart of him."

"I'm not going to test him," remarked Frank, smiling.

"Oh, I didn't suppose you were! But let Smithson, say, try it on. Mobby would turn hangin' judge then!"

As he spoke Ponsonby, in the coolest possible manner, opened a drawer in the table, and pulled out a couple of packs of cards.

There was a curious gleam in the Caterpillar's eyes as he saw

Frank Courtenay frowned. Pon was now, in the cloven hoof at last.

With all his heart Frank hated gambling. He had seen its disastrous effects in more than one case; and he believed that it had largely gone to the making of Pon the rotter he was.

He rose.

"Won't you have a game—just this once, Courtenay?" asked Pon airily. "We won't plunge, by gad—Flippy here bars high stakes, though he's as smart a hand at nap as any of us."

"No, thanks!" said Frank, with more than a touch of snap in his voice. "You know I never play. And I wasn't aware that Derwent did—though that is hardly my bizney, of course."

Flip looked troubled. He could not say that he never played. He had played—once. He saw no great harm in it as yet, and perhaps he thought Courtenay inclined to be too Puritanical. But he felt that Pon had made a false step—had spoiled the harmony of the tea-party by his action.

Very much the same felt Tunstall and Merton. But they were not so free from suspicion that Pon had acted guilefully as Flip was. They knew Pon better.

As for the Caterpillar, there was no doubt in his mind. This had been Pon's game all along—to thrust in a wedge between Derwent and Courtenay, lest the evident liking they felt for one another should grow.

"You'll take a hand, De Courcy, by gad?" asked Pon.

Straight in the eyes De Courcy looked him, and his tone was cold as he answered:

"Thank you for nothin', Pon! I will not. I'm not ashamed to tell you an' the rest here that I've made a promise to Courtenay that I mean to keep. If I reminded you of certain things you would tumble to it that you're about the last chap I'd break it for. But I'm not chuckin' good advice about—not my dashed line. Ta-ta!"

They went. The eyes of three of the four left behind were turned upon Pon, and there was anger in them all.

"Here's a dashed storm in a dashed teacup!" said Pon. "Well, I suppose you fellows aren't on for a game after that exhibition of virtue? Sorry I made such a bloomer. I'll depart!"

And he went.

"Deep—deep—oh, dee-vilish deep!" crooned Cocky.

"You're right, by Jupiter!" said Merton.

"Confound the chap!" snapped Tunstall. He did not mean Frank Courtenay or the Caterpillar.

Flip said nothing.

Not Welcome at Cliff House.

QUESTION is whether Pon's a truly nice quiet boy," said Tunstall.

"An' the answer is—not much!" chuckled Merton.

"Don't be dashed idiots!" snapped Pon.

Flip Derwent had been invited by Miss Primrose, the principal of Cliff House, to come to tea, and bring one or two of his friends with him. Miss Primrose had stipulated that they should be nice, quiet boys. She was evidently prepared to take Flip on trust as being so.

Tunstall and Merton were sure that they were "nice, quiet boys"—"within the meanin' of the Act," as Merton said—no one knowing exactly what Merton's meaning was. And Flip knew that the girls would be glad to see those two.

But Pon had put in a strong claim to be included. He intended to go even if it meant that one of the others had to stay away. Flip saw no reason why either of

them should. He was satisfied to shoulder the responsibility of taking three along. But he was not keen on taking Pon.

His sister, Philippa, whom Cliff House called by her home nickname of Flap, did not like Pon. Marjorie Hazeldene and Phyllis Howell and Clara Trevlyn did not like him. Flip failed to understand why; but he knew the feeling was there, and that Pon would not be a welcome guest. No fellow who has not the hide of a rhinoceros likes to take along another whom he knows to be unwelcome. But it seemed impossible to Flip to explain to Pon.

The marks of the fight had vanished now. They were not likely to shock Miss Primrose's feelings by their bruises.

"Have it your own way, Pon," said Flip at last. "I shouldn't have thought it was much in your line, that's all. They don't play nap at Cliff House, you know."

Oh, but Pon's quite a ladies' man!" said Merton.

Pon scowled at him. Merton and Tunstall had developed a new way of chipping Pon. They evidently regarded him as a person of importance than they had done of old. Pon did not like it a bit.

"I'll drop the old lady a line and say—Oh, no, I won't, though! It ought to be good enough if I write and tell my sister, and it won't look as if we thought our coming to tea was anything for Miss Primrose to get excited about," said Flip.

He sat down at once, and scribbled:

"Dear Flap,—If it's convenient to you and the people at your show, I will bring three of our chaps along to-morrow afternoon to tea. Miss P. asked me, you know. She said one or two, I think, but I don't suppose she will kick at three—if we bring our own sugar."

"Yours ever, Flip."

"P.S.—Algy and Tun, of course, and the other chaps is Ponsonby."

"I'll take that along if you like, Flippy," said Merton.

"An' I'll go with Algy, to keep the boulder in order," volunteered Tunstall.

"Oh, I've got a penny stamp, thanks!" replied Flip.

"But that won't give time for an answer," objected Merton.

"Any excuse for trottin' along an' makin' love to the girls!" sneered Pon.

Merton turned upon him a face scarlet with anger.

"At least, we're welcome there!" he snapped. "As for makin' love, it's all rot; they haven't any use for that sort of thing, an' we don't try it on."

"Do you mean that I'm not welcome?" snarled Ponsonby.

"Ask yourself! By Jupiter, you might see that! There isn't one of our friends there who don't bar you, Pon, if you want it plain an' straight!"

"Oh, dry up, Algy, do!" said Flip.

"It's a dashed lie!" muttered Pon thickly, and his hands clenched and unclenched themselves nervously.

It was as much as he could do to keep them off Merton.

"Ask Tun. He knows whether it's a lie or not. No good askin' Flip; he hasn't seen as much of them as we have."

"Not by long chalks!" came Pon's sneering reply. "Derwent isn't dashed soft enough to be hangin' about day after day round Cliff House!"

Now Tunstall was roused, too.

"I don't know that I'm any softer than you are, Ponsonby," he said. "But, anyway, there's this to be said for Merton an' me—the girls don't bar us as rotters! We're welcome there."

"You mean that they bar me? An' how do you know that, by gad? Dashed fine friends you are, to be talkin' about a chap behind his back!"

"We haven't done anythin' of the sort!" cried Merton angrily. "An' if we had—well, I should say you're about the last chap I know who has a right to complain, Pon! You've a poisonous tongue, an' you don't spare the chaps you call pals if it suits you to backbite them!"

"Here's a jolly row!" observed Cocky.

"If you fellows don't chuck it, I'll tear this blessed note up, an' I'm blessed if I'll go near Cliff House with any of the three of you!" said Flip decisively. "What on earth you're getting at one another for beats me!"

"Pon wanted me to stay away to make room for him, an' I'm dashed if I'll do anythin' of the sort!" said Merton crossly.

"Or me, either!" chimed in Tunstall.

"But you ain't asked to, you potty donkeys! We're all going, ain't we?"

"Oh, I suppose so! But I hope Pon's comin' along won't spoil the whole bizney, by Jupiter!"

"If I stay here, Merton, there's danger that I shall knock you down!" roared Pon.

"Well, I'm no hero boy, but I think I can face that peril without gettin' my wool off about it," replied Merton. "If you fellows see me beginnin' to wamble at the knees you might let me know!"

"Come away from the silly chumps, Pon," said Flip, and he managed to get the wrathful leader of the nuts safely out.

It was a Highcliffe fax who took the note, after all. The fags liked Flip Derwent, and were always ready to run his errands.

Young Wadsworth did not see any of the girls. He handed the note to a maid, and it did not occur to him to wait for an answer.

But Flap and Clara, Phyllis and Marjorie, in council together, decided that the note needed an answer.

Miss Primrose had expressed herself graciously pleased to receive the four; but that was not the real point. They had not doubted that.

"We don't want Ponsonby," said Phyllis, knitting her fair brows. "It's a pity you haven't made Flip understand that we don't like him, Flap!"

"I have tried," said Flap, with a sigh. "But if Flip were your brother, my dear, you'd know that it didn't answer to rub things in with him."

"Tell you what, Flap—tell him to leave Pon at home and bring Cocky instead!" Clara said. "Now that's quite a brilliant idea, isn't it, girls?"

They didn't seem to consider it so. Of course, Flip might bring the bird if he cared to; but the substitution suggestion seemed hardly the thing.

"I don't see how we can tell Flip that we bar one of his chums," said Marjorie, looking troubled. "He would think it very nasty of us."

"There's just one chance," said Phyllis. "He may not have said anything to Ponsonby yet, and if he hasn't he might leave him out, or bring someone else instead."

"Yes—anyone else!" chimed in Clara.

"Oh, I don't know! I like Ponsonby least of them all; but I think I could bear his company for an hour or two better than Vavasour's or Gadsby's or Monson's," Marjorie confessed.

"Well, there isn't the least danger that Flip will bring any one of those three; and if Gadsby came I should refuse to speak to him, for one," answered Flap. "You girls seem to think it's quite an easy thing for me to say to my brother."

"I'd say anything I liked to my brothers if I had any," said Clara.

"There's a jolly lot of difference between a brother like Flip and one that you haven't got, old girl! Flip thinks Ponsonby's his friend; and I suppose he is, in a way. But he's not ours, and—"

"Look here, Flap, I'll write!" volunteered Miss Clara.

"Oh, really, Clara!" protested Marjorie.

"Dreadful notion, isn't it?" mocked Miss Trevlyn.

"Taking my pen in my hand to write to old Flap's brother, and telling him that I hope he is quite well, as this leaves me at present, and please we don't like Pon—any of us—and will he bring Cocky—or even Drury—along instead? With a few crosses underneath, that would do nicely!"

"Crosses, indeed!" laughed Phyllis.

"Just for the sake of picturesqueness, you know," replied Clara, unabashed. "And to shock Marjorie—that's all. Shall I write, Flap? I assure you I'm quite capable of telling Flip what I think without trembling in my boots."

"So am I, you goose!"

"Well, then, cut indoors, and see if you can put a 'Bo' on paper for Ponsonby's benefit, instead of being severe to me!"

Gadsby Puts His Oar In.

FLAP ran indoors, and the other three waited in the big garden, where the trees were a glory of scarlet and gold, and dead leaves rustled down on their heads now and then. Clara chattered away; but the other two were very thoughtful. This hint to be given to Flip seemed to them a more difficult and delicate matter than it seemed to Miss Clara, who was always inclined to plain speaking.

"It's taking her a long time," said Clara, after about five minutes had passed.

"Perhaps you'd like to go in and hurry her up?" suggested Phyllis sarcastically.

"Good idea! I will."

"No, you won't!" snapped Phyllis, and she caught Clara in a strong grip.

"Phyllis!"

"Yes, Clara!"

"If it is necessary to put Pon—or anyone else—in his place, I shall call upon you for the job! You're as strong as a man. You ought to be one of the new policemen!"

"You ought to be smacked, Miss Impudence, and I've a great mind to smack you!"

"What for? I haven't wriggled a single wriggle. No lamb could submit more meekly than I have!"

"But your tongue—"

"My dear child! Haven't you found out yet that I haven't the least control over that?"

"It doesn't seem a very good reason for taking any notice of your arguments," said Phyllis.

"But no one ever does take any notice of them," pouted Clara.

"Flap's coming," said Marjorie.

Flap had the letter in her hand as she came towards them over the crisp, rustling leaves, with her thick brown hair stirred by the breeze.

"I say, doesn't she look nice!" cried Clara. "She knocks spots out of any of the rest of us—easily."

Flap caught that.

"Oh, rats!" she said. "I'm a moderate fourth among you. Look here, will this do?"

"Read it out," said Phyllis.

And Flap read:

"Dear Flip,—Glad you are coming. Miss P. says it's all right. You must be particularly nice to her, you know, for she's really an old dear, and she has taken quite a fancy to you. Bring Cocky; the girls all want to see him."

"Yours ever, FLAP."

"You little spoofer! There isn't a word about the dreadful Pon!" cried Clara.

"That's in the postscript. 'P.S.—If you don't mind, the girls say they would much rather you brought Drury than Ponsonby. Some of them don't like Ponsonby very much—P.D.'"

"H'm! That's putting it mildly; but it will do," said Phyllis.

"I think perhaps Flip will take more notice of it like that than if I said I didn't like him. I said so once, and he wouldn't even answer."

"Here's Molly Gray, all dressed up to go somewhere," said Clara. "She might take it along. No good wasting time."

"But do you think Miss Prim—"

"That's Marjorie, isn't it? Quite a good name for her!"

"Oh, really, Clara, you are too bad!"

"I was going to say do you think Miss Primrose would like the bid to take a note to Highcliffe?" said Flap. "We know she doesn't mean it. Marjorie! Nobody thinks more of you than Clara does—except Phyllis and me, of course!"

"Except your grandmother!" snapped Clara. "You two don't begin to admire Marjorie as I do—I jolly well know that! Why should Miss Primrose object? Molly's about six and a half, isn't she?"

"Yes—twice, or very nearly," replied Phyllis.

"Anyway, she's below the flirting age, and she needn't march right into the quad at Highcliffe. She can give the note to any of the boys she happens to see. Your brother sent a small kid with his, Flap. I don't see why boys should do these things to save themselves trouble, and we shouldn't."

"How fahst you do talk, Clara!" remarked red-headed little Molly Gray, coming up to them. "Don't you ever get fahst the teeny-weenie bit out of breath?"

"Where are you going, small child?"

"That's not your buchneth, it it?"

"Don't be rude! Flap wants you to take a note for her."

"Oh, if it's for Flap, that's a very different thing! Where to, Flap?"

"Which way are you going, kiddie?"

"To Courtfield, with Althea Sherwell. We're going to tea at her aunt's there."

"Then you'll pass close by Highcliffe."

"Yeth. Oh, it's a note to your brother—I thee! Thall I take it up to hith thndy?"

"Good gracious, no, Molly! Why, Mr. Mobbs might catch you and eat you! Give it to one of the other boys to give to him."

"I'm not thure they're all to be thutted, Flap."

"Well, you won't be giving it to all of them, I suppose; and I presume you know which are the ones who can be trusted."

"Oh, yeth, I know, Flap! Here cometh Althea."

The two youngsters set out, chattering as they went. Not far from Highcliffe they saw two Third-Formers whom they knew.

"I thay, young Wilson, will you take thith note to Derwent?" asked Molly importantly.

"Yeth, old Miss Gray, if you like," replied "young Wilson," who was at least a year the small girl's senior.

"But you're beginning that sort of thing early, aren't you? If I might give you a little fatherly advice—"

"No good," said his companion, Rigby. "It's my experience, Wilson, old scout, that the ginger-headed ones can't be advised or held in."

"You're very rude, both of you, and nextth time I meet you I won't thpeak to you at all!" said Molly. "But at: we're in a hurry now I'll let you take the note."

Wilson took it, and the two small girls passed on. Before them was tea, and afterwards they would be driven back to Cliff House in a dogcart. They had no time to waste upon Wilson and Rigby.

"May as well take it along now. Might forget it," said Wilson.

"Derwent's out," Rigby answered. "I saw him go. But you can leave it on his study table."

Wilson ran up. He met Gadsby on the way.

"Note for me, kid?" asked Gadsby.

"No—it's for Derwent. From his sister—one of the Cliff House juniors brought it along," said the fag.

"Ah! You'd better put it in his study. He isn't in, I know," said Gadsby.

Wilson passed on to No. 6, put the note on the table, and came out again. Scarcely had he disappeared downstairs when Gadsby popped into the study he had left, and appropriated the note.

There was no one else on the study floor—not even Vavasour, who had gone out with Pon, Monson, and Drury. But Gadsby did not risk opening the note in No. 6, or in the study which he shared with Pon and Vavasour. He coolly walked into that which belonged to Courtenay and De Courcy. They were safe not to be in for at least a couple of hours, as they had gone over to Greyfriars.

The envelope had not been stuck down very hard. Gadsby got it open without tearing or cutting.

He read what was inside, and a malicious grin came over his face.

There was nothing Gadsby wanted much more just now than to embroider Flap with Pon. They were getting on together much too well for Gadsby's liking. Pon would play nap for halfpenny points to get Flap into the game; and Flap could say to Pon things that he would have resented hotly had Gadsby said them.

How best to use this note for the purpose? That was what Gadsby was puzzling out.

He knew that Pon still had the torn letter in which Flap had warned Flap against him. Flap might have forgotten that. Pon had not.

Yet it had made no difference. Pon was still determined to make friends with Flap, as he had made friends with her brother. Her dislike and suspicion only seemed to make her more attractive in his eyes.

"If I show it to him there'll be words. He'll cut up dashed rough, an' he may let on to Derwent!" muttered Gadsby. "But if I put it here where he can see it, he'll fancy Derwent was tippin' him the wink to keep out of the dashed tea-party, by gad! Is Pon goin' to stand that? Not likely! But will he go to Derwent at once? That's the question. If he does, there may be explanations. Even so, it won't be easy for anyone to spot my hand in it. I'll go out an' prove an alibi, if necessary. Oh, hang it, young Wilson spoils that! I shall have to do some more thinkin'!"

He looked at the note again. The postscript was written on the second half of the sheet, the earlier part of the letter being entirely on the first page.

Gadsby found the Caterpillar's nail-scissors, and very carefully and neatly cut away the back leaf of the sheet.

"He'll think it's war-time economy, if he thinks about it at all," he said to himself.

He put the page with the letter upon it back into the envelope, and re-gummed the flap. Then he took the P.S. to his own study, where he stuck it up on the mantelshelf, so that Pon could not fail to see it when he came in. Vavasour should not come in with him—Gadsby would see to that.

"It may not come to anythin', but I rather fancy I'm on a winner this time," muttered

Gadsby. "Pon ain't exactly a forgivin' sort of chap, an' he ain't nice when he's ruffled. He may say a word or two too much before Derwent has a chance to twig what he's drivin' at, an' then the giddy daff will be in the giddy fire! Pon spoiled him with Courtenay an' the Caterpillar the other day—a deuced deep dodge, that! I shouldn't have thought of it, an' it took a chap with a nerve like Pon's to carry it out. Now those two think the dear Flippy's a wicked young gambler, an' they don't love him any more. Must say the Caterpillar was off his form a bit to have dust thrown in his eyes so easily!"

But Gadsby had not the penetration to read a mind like Rupert De Courcy's. The Caterpillar had seen through Pon's dodge. He did not know all; but he was quite sure that, whatever the extent of Flap's gambling may have been, it was no mere accident that the fact of it had come out at a moment when it was evident to Pon that Derwent and Courtenay were drawing closer together.

Gadsby went with the envelope containing the shortened letter to No. 6. He had come to the conclusion that no purpose would be served by suppressing it altogether. If the Cliff House girls made Pon feel uncomfortable, so much the better, from Gadsby's point of view. But he did not think they would get the chance. Pon would not go.

He laid the letter on the table, glanced out of the window at the deserted quad, and turned to go.

"Stop, thief!" croaked Cocky, and Gadsby swore at him as he slunk out.

(To be continued next week.)

NOTICES.

Football—Matches Wanted by :

ANERLEY EXCELSIOR.—A. Woodfield, 12, Palace Square, Upper Norwood, S.E. 19.

DUNMOW VOLUNTEERS.—16—9 mile radius.—Walter D. Hughes, P.O., Dunmow, Essex.

MIDLAND RAILWAY JUNIORS.—16—10 mile radius.—J. Coppell, 46, Wigston Road, Plaistow, E. 13.

WANDSWORTH ROVERS.—17—8 mile radius.—A. Brown, 351, York Road, Battersea, S.W. 11.

STEPNEY INVICTA.—16—4 mile radius.—C. D. Morris, 34, Carr Street, Stepney, E. 14.

BROCK VILLA.—16—4 mile radius.—H. Baynes, 20, Fontbill Road, Kirkdale, Liverpool.

A Limehouse Team.—6 mile radius.—A. E. Hutton, 26, Streetfield Street, Burdett Road, Limehouse, E. 14.

ASTON UNITED.—16—6 mile radius.—A. Lawless, 60, Repton Street, Stepney, E. 14.

BARKING CADET CORPS.—15—5 mile radius.—E. A. Wood, 56, King's Road, Barking.

RANGERS.—13—4 mile radius.—P. Smith, 22, Norland Gardens, Notting Hill, W. 11.

ST. BARNABAS ATHLETIC.—4 mile radius.—ground, Figgs' Marsh.—H. Chelmsom, 11, Bruce Road, Mitcham.

FAIRFIELD JUNIORS.—15—4 mile radius.—B. Cadwallader, Swan View, Fairfield, Liverpool.

ROVERS.—B. Goaling, 4, Nutfield Road, East Dulwich, S.E. 22.

ST. MARY'S.—15—5 mile radius.—J. W. Hurrell, 22, Globe St., Chiswick, W. 4.

Other Footer Notices.

Alex. Coburn, 45, Carrick Street, Anderston, Glasgow, would be glad to act as hon. sec. and treasurer for footer or athletic club, 15-16, 4 mile radius of Glasgow.

A Walthamstow team would be glad of a few players—any positions.—F. Mitchell, 19, Storey Road, High Street, Walthamstow.

A Prestatyn team wants players up to 15.—D. H. Fraser, Roxton, Seven Sisters Road, Prestatyn.

D. McCree, 18, St. John's Mansions, St. John Street, E.C. 1, wants to join club in his district.—14—goalkeeper.

A Chelmsford club wants players.—16-17.—Frank Woods, 28, Gainsford Crescent, Springfield, Chelmsford.

Leagues, Amateur Magazines, etc.

S. W. Bastick, c/o Messrs. Pudan & Burridge, Ltd., Wellington Street, Leicester, is willing to type magazines for a small fee.

Readers wanted for amateur magazine, 25d. by post. Small advertisements under 30 words received. Charge 2d.—Cecil J. Price, 2, Delaval Road, Whitley Bay, Northumberland.

M. Wilkinson, 60, Bedford Road, West Ealing, wants partners in correspondence club.